Intermodal Logistics Park North Ltd

# INTERMODAL LOGISTICS PARK NORTH (ILPN)

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## Intermodal Logistics Park North (ILPN) Strategic Rail Freight Interchange (SRFI)

**Project reference TR510001**

## Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR)

## Chapter 04: Site selection, alternatives and scheme evolution

**October 2025**

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**Planning Act 2008**

**The Infrastructure Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017**

## This document forms a part of a Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR) for the Intermodal Logistics Park North (ILPN) project.

A PEIR presents environmental information to assist consultees to form an informed view of the likely significant environmental effects of a proposed development and provide feedback.

This PEIR has been prepared by the project promoter, Intermodal Logistics Park North Ltd. The Proposed Development is described in Chapter 3 of the PEIR and is the subject of a public consultation.

## Details of how to respond to the public consultation are provided at the end of Chapter 1 of the PEIR and on the project website:

## https://www.tritaxbigbox.co.uk/our-spaces/intermodal-logistics-park-north/

This feedback will be taken into account by Intermodal Logistics Park North Ltd in the preparation of its application for a Development Consent Order for the project.

# Chapter 4 ◆ Site selection, alternatives and scheme evolution

## INTRODUCTION

4.1 The Infrastructure Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 ('the EIA Regulations') state that the ES shall include:

'*a description of the reasonable alternatives studied by the applicant, which are relevant to the proposed development and its specific characteristics, and an indication of the main reasons for the option chosen, taking into account the effects of the development on the environment'.*

4.2 This chapter explains how the Applicant identified a Site for a Strategic Rail Freight Interchange (SRFI). It begins by looking at the regional context and need for an SRFI. It then describes the chosen Site and provides a comparison to alternative sites. It then outlines the consideration that the Applicant is giving, guided by the EIA process, to the design, size and scale of the development. The chapter concludes with a summary of the options that are being considered for remote highway enhancements.

## CONTEXT

### National Policy Context

4.3 Chapter 3 of this PEIR describes the purpose of a strategic rail freight interchange (SRFI) and explains how the Proposed Development would operate.

4.4 According to paragraph 2.15 of the government's National Policy Statement for National Networks (NPSNN):

*'For many freight movements, rail is unable to undertake a full end-to-end journey for the goods concerned. The aim of a strategic rail freight interchange (SRFI) is to optimise the use of rail in the freight journey by maximising the long-haul primary trunk journey by rail and minimising some elements of the secondary distribution (final delivery) leg by road, through co-location of other distribution and freight activities. SRFIs need to be supported at both ends by connections to rail infrastructure and logistics terminals. SRFIs are also typically associated with intermodal traffic. A fully effective network of SRFIs, supported by smaller-scale rail freight interchanges, will help to enable the sector to reach its full potential.'*

4.5 The NPSNN at Chapter 3 identifies the *'drivers of need'* for SRFIs and particularly user (operator) needs, detailing that (in summary):

- Para. 3.85 - the logistics industry is currently a predominantly road-based industry and that in order to reduce carbon emissions, operators are increasingly looking to modal shift to rail for the middle journey of goods from ports to warehouses and distribution centres. Consequently, the logistics industry requires new facilities to be developed that are located alongside the major rail routes, close to major trunk roads as well as near to the conurbations.

- Para. 3.86 - SRFIs are recognised as a key part of the logistics industry infrastructure in providing both storage processing facilities and onward connectivity to support the cross-modal transfer of goods.

- Para. 3.87 - SRFIs are a key element in aiding the transfer of freight from road to rail, supporting distribution and rail freight growth and meeting the changing needs of the logistics industry, especially the ports and retail sector. Such facilities can play an important role in reducing freight movements ('trip mileage') on road networks.

4.6 In addition to supporting connectivity and economic growth, the NPSNN details (para. 3.94) that the Government will support the effective development of SRFIs in the right locations with a critical element being the ability to realise the full range of environmental benefits that rail freight can offer. The policy acknowledges (para. 3.97) that SRFI developments will need to be sensitive to, respond to, and contribute to their environmental context.

4.7 Within this overarching context, the Government's policy for addressing need for SRFIs acknowledges that:

- Para. 3.100 - to facilitate modal shift, a network of SRFIs is needed across a broad range of regions, to serve regional, sub-regional and cross-regional markets. In all cases, it is essential that facilities have good connectivity with both the road and particularly the strategic rail freight network.

- Para. 3.101 - to meet Government's ambitions for rail freight growth, there remains a need for appropriately located SRFI facilities across all regions where there is demand or potential demand, to enable further *'unlocking'* of benefits.

- Para. 3.102/103 - having regard to alternative options, such as relying on existing rail freight interchanges to manage demand, reliance on road-based logistics or reliance on a larger number of smaller rail freight interchanges, the Government concludes that there is a compelling need for an expanded network of SRFIs throughout the country.

- Para. 3.103 (cont.) - it is important that SRFIs are located near the markets they will serve, such as major urban centres/groups of centres, and are linked to key supply chain routes.

- Para. 3.103 (cont.) - given the locational requirements and the need for effective connections for both rail and road, the number of locations suitable for SRFIs will be limited, which restrict the scope to identify viable alternative sites.

- Para. 3.105 - SRFI capacity needs to be provided at a wide range of locations, both in regions where they are currently located, and more broadly, to provide the flexibility

needed to match the changing demands of the market, possibly with traffic moving from existing rail freight interchanges to new larger facilities.

4.8 Consequently, the NPSNN details (para. 3.106) that:

*'Consideration should be given to ensuring existing SRFI locations are taken into account when making an application, to ensure that SRFIs are strategically located and thus enable a more extensive cross-country network which unlocks the full range of benefits that an expanded network of SRFIs can provide. Whilst there is likely to be a natural clustering of SRFI proposals in the distribution heartland of the nation (and further SRFI proposals in this area will continue to be important), consideration should be given to proposals for SRFIs in areas where there is currently lesser provision'.*

4.9 The consideration of alternatives is set out in paragraphs 4.20 – 4.22 of the NPSNN. In paragraph 4.22 the following advice is provided:

*"In those exceptional circumstances where alternatives might be relevant, consideration of them should be proportionate. Where alternative schemes proposed are vague or inchoate, or have no real possibility of coming about, they are either irrelevant, or where relevant, will be given little or no weight, and the extent to which they are considered should be determined accordingly."*

4.10 The NPSNN references that s104(2) of the Planning Act 2008 outlines matters the Secretary of State must consider when deciding on an application for a Development Consent Order (DCO) for a NSIP. This includes any other important and relevant matters the Secretary of State deems relevant.

4.11 In the latter context and in considering alternatives, the Applicant considers the adoption of the St Helens Local Plan in July 2022 and the initial draft for the Wigan Borough Local Plan (as at June 2025 when consultation concluded) are both important and relevant matters the Secretary of State will need to take into account when considering the choice of site by the Applicant.

## SITE ALLOCATION

4.12 The underlying reason for the Applicant's choice of location for the development of ILPN RFI is the fact that a substantial part of the Main Site is allocated as an SRFI in a statutorily adopted St Helens Local Plan - as explained below. As the Applicant has considered both opportunities and constraints for the development of an SRFI, including geometric constraints for the rail connections, the land required for ILPN SRFI has extended beyond the original allocation site boundary into adjoining administrative areas.

4.13 The DCO Site is located within the St Helens, Wigan and Warrington local authority areas as set out below. A summary of the planning policy position for each authority area is provided below.

## St Helens

4.14 The majority of the DCO Site lies within the administrative area of St Helens and is allocated for an SRFI in the adopted St Helens Local Plan (2022). The relevant site-specific allocations and designations are summarised overleaf and illustrated in Figure 4.1.

### *Parkside East Allocation*

4.15 The land east of the M6 (and the spur that extends to the west which the Western Rail Chord broadly follows) identified in hatched purple colour is subject to Local Plan Policy LPA09, which confirms that the Main Site (identified as Site 7EA in Policy LPA03) is suitable for development as an SRFI; the primary purpose of which is to facilitate the movement of freight by rail, its on-site storage and transfer between rail and other transport modes. As set out within Policy LPA09, the site is considered suitable in principle for other forms of B2 and B8 employment use provided that they would: a) bring significant inward investment, local employment, and training benefits for the local community; and b) be rail served (i.e., requiring on-site access to a railway); or be of a layout and scale that would not prejudice the ability to develop an effectively laid out SRFI or other rail served employment development (including any necessary rail and road infrastructure, buildings, and landscaping), on at least 60ha of the site, at any time in the future.

4.16 A range of studies have been undertaken at the regional and local level as part of the evidence base for the St Helens Local Plan. This evidence was a crucial component in demonstrating that 'exceptional circumstances' existed to remove land from the Green Belt and allocate it for an SRFI and commercial development within the St Helens Local Plan. Some of the evidence also relates to the Liverpool City Region Spatial Development Strategy and therefore supports the approach taken in that document. The underlying justification has been evidence of need in the Region. Such need is consistent with Liverpool City Region Growth Plan and Strategic Economic Plan 2016.

These Local Level Studies include:

- Parkside Logistics and Rail Freight Interchange Study 2016.
- Parkside logistics and Rail Freight Study Addendum 2017.
- Transport for the North Freight and Logistics Report 2016.
- Liverpool City Region Assessment of the Supply of large scale B8 sites 2018

4.17 Subsequent to the adoption of the St Helens Local Plan, the strategic need for a SRFI at the DCO Site has been emphasised in more recent Liverpool City Region based reports, namely:

- Liverpool City Region Plan for Property - setting out a long-term vision to 2035.
- Liverpool City Region Corporate Plan 2024 -28.
- Liverpool City Region Spatial Development Strategy (up to 2040) (draft).

### *The Inspector's Report, 18 May 2022*

4.18 The Inspectors' report into the St Helens local plan sets out very clearly the basis on which a SRFI needs to be considered to be deliverable, and that exceptional circumstances must be demonstrated in order to support the release of land required in the Green Belt.

4.19 244 "*In summary, the provision of a SRFI requires a critical mass to justify the capital cost investment in infrastructure and this is informed by the scale of the proposal which in turn affects its viability. On the basis that the development of an SRFI at Parkside is supported, then a large-scale facility is therefore justified, otherwise the full economic, social, and environmental benefits would not be realised as a smaller scheme would be unviable. Although it is acknowledged that significant harm to the Green Belt would occur as a consequence of developing Site 7EA in particular, exceptional circumstances have been successfully demonstrated to support the release of both 7EA and 8EA from the Green Belt. These exceptional circumstances are summarised in MM007 which is necessary so that the Plan is positively prepared, justified, and consistent with national policy. We have added some additional wording following MM consultation to include reference to warehousing and industrial development linked to the SRFI*".

### *Parkside West Allocation*

4.20 The land to the west of the M6 is subject to Local Plan Policy LPA10, which details that the Site shall be considered suitable for Class B2 and B8 employment uses. The policy sets out a range of requirements, including that part of the Site is safeguarded from all forms of development, unless it can be shown that such development within it will not prejudice, or may provide, effective and deliverable future siding facilities in connection with the development of an SRFI or other rail-enabled development on the Parkside East Site (land to the east of the M6).

### *Other Designations*

4.21 The DCO Site extends beyond the Policy LPA09 and LPA10 allocations and includes an area of land that is Green Belt (Policy LPA 01 (5) - green crosshatch in the plan above to the north and north-east of the Main Site) and a Nature Improvement Area (Policies LPC06 and LPC08 - yellow dashed line above to the north-east of the Main Site).

4.22 The DCO application will address Green Belt policy, including the consideration of 'grey belt', and whether ILPN comprises 'inappropriate development' in the Green Belt. 'Very special circumstances' (VSCs) are to be demonstrated to justify inappropriate development in the Green Belt in accordance with the paragraph 153 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (December 2024, as amended February 2025). The DCO application will set out the considerations which comprise the VSCs and justify the granting of the DCO. For the purposes of this PEIR, the need for the Proposed Development at this Site is explained within 'The Choice of Site' section of this chapter.

4.23 The policies on Nature Improvement Areas require development to take a sequential approach to avoid harm, provide appropriate mitigation, replacement or other compensatory provision. These policy requirements have informed the design of the Proposed

Development.

### Wigan Local Plan Core Strategy

**4.24** As explained below in the 'Choice of Site' section, the area required for the development of an SRFI at the designated Parkside East site extends beyond the area allocated, into Wigan and Warrington. The part of the DCO Site within Wigan is currently designated as Green Belt, as illustrated in Figure 4.2. The Core Strategy policy on Green Belt has been superseded by Places for Everyone Policy JP-G9 which repeat the purpose of the Green Belt set out in national policy and supports the beneficial use of the Green Belt including improved public access, habitat restoration and delivering environmental and social benefits.

4.25 The Highfield Moss Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) site is situated immediately adjacent to the northern boundary of the Main Site. The SSSI is identified in Places for Everyone (PfE) as a Site of Biological Importance (SBI) and located within a 'Mosslands and Lowland Farmland' landscape character type/area. PfE Policy JP-G4 identifies that such areas will be protected, enhanced and restored with a strong emphasis on reconnecting local communities to the natural and historic environments. The Applicant is in active discussions with Natural England and Lancashire Wildlife Trust regarding the management of effects on Highfield Moss SSSI.

### *Wigan Borough Local Plan: Initial Draft for Consultation*

4.26 A new Local Plan is being prepared by Wigan Council. The initial draft of the Wigan Borough Local Plan was consulted upon between 30th April – 24th June 2025. As part of this emerging plan, the part of the Main Site within Wigan borough is proposed to be allocated for a substantial high quality employment development as *'an enlargement of the proposed cross-boundary Parkside East strategic rail freight interchange and logistics site'* (Policy J6: Land west of Winwick Lane, Lowton). An extract of the policy map with the DCO Site boundary is shown in Figure 4.3.

4.27 A range of studies have been undertaken at the regional and local level as part of the evidence base for the initial draft Wigan Borough Local Plan and justification to remove land from the Green Belt and allocate it as employment land. These studies include:

- Draft Infrastructure Delivery Plan; and
- Site selection assessment of sites promoted for employment uses in the Green Belt, which makes the case for Green Belt release at these sites.

### Warrington

4.28 A smaller part of the DCO Site is within Warrington and is Green Belt (Policy GB1), as shown on Figure 4.4. The extent of works include alterations to existing agricultural accesses along Winwick Lane. Land to the east of Winwick Lane is proposed for the re-use of top soil arising from the earthworks on the Main Site (referred to as the Soil Reuse Area) and for landscaping. Finally, as part of the potential options that are being considered to inform a package of potential highways mitigation, land for remote highway works are included within Warrington. As explained within Chapter 3 of this PEIR, the need for these highways options

will be determined through further assessment and so will be evaluated and refined, leading to the development of a highways mitigation package to be submitted as part of the DCO application.

## DRIVERS OF DEMAND AND NEED

4.29 This section sets out the need and demand for the provision of an SRFI at a national level, having regard to relevant policy and evidence as well as market drivers.

4.30 There is a growing network of SRFIs across the UK, as illustrated in Figure 4.5, though there are none in the North of England (there are rail-freight interchanges (RFIs) such as iPort in Doncaster, which do not have the same capabilities as SRFIs, as discussed in the 'Alternatives' section of this chapter).

4.31 As shown in Figure 4.5, the Proposed Development (labelled as no.16 Parkside East SRFI on the map) is exceptionally well placed to support the key ports in the north of England and Scotland and operate as a vital component of the network of regional SRFIs due to its ability to provide access to the North-South routes via the West Coast Main Line; and East-West via Chat Moss and Trans Pennine Lines.

4.32 The North-West is a large market for Intermodal Rail because of its distance from key ports for deep sea international trade; and short sea European trade. For trade via Liverpool, most of the region's import and export container freight will travel via East Coast or Southern ports. This is due to the global circle routes used by the largest container ships and shipping lines, usually with just one UK port stop; and closer proximity to the main European ports.

4.33 The distances involved from the North-West's major conurbations to Felixstowe, London Gateway and Southampton are over 220 miles and as such, intermodal rail should be highly competitive. This will become more so as the UK logistics market moves to NetZero. Rail is 76% more carbon efficient per freight tonne km compared to road freight[1]. As such, the demand and need for increased intermodal capacity in the North-West has been embedded in policy, not least with St Helens and the Liverpool City Region.

4.34 There is an emerging growth in short-sea unaccompanied unitised traffic movements, to circumvent delays through roll on roll off ferries, for UK – EU trade. Landed at ports with suitable rail facilities, these can and are being converted to rail movements within the UK: Teesport and Tilbury being two examples of where this is happening. Rail should therefore provide the best import-export route to serve the North West market, providing that it has sufficient facilities.

4.35 ILPN SRFI is well located for logistics operators to serve both the Liverpool City Region and the Greater Manchester conurbation, as well as Warrington and North Cheshire. These are all within the approximately 20 miles radius which terminal operators consider to be optimal. That is because the long-haul can be undertaken by rail and the local delivery by HGV, using local drivers who do not have to be away from home. The emerging use of electric HGVs works

[1] Department for Transport (DfT) 'Future of Freight – A long term plan', June 2022

particularly well in this environment, as they are never far from base and can do a number of drops on a single charge.

## HISTORY OF THE SITE

4.36 The location has been the subject of proposals for development of a strategic rail terminal and associated logistics buildings since 1992, with the closure of Parkside Colliery, at a time when there was considerable interest in rail for both deep-sea container movement and the potential for Channel Tunnel through freight.

4.37 The very significant importance of the former rail connections to the site onto the Chat Moss line for east west movements, as well as the onward connections thereby to the West Coast Main Line (WCML) for north south movements, made it and still make it, an exceptional site in terms of strategic rail freight connectivity, which cannot easily be provided elsewhere in the North West.

4.38 Initial consideration led to the acquisition of the former Parkside colliery site by Railtrack, the privatised national rail infrastructure owner, predecessor to Network Rail Infrastructure Ltd ('NR'). The site was sold after Railtrack entered Railway Administration. Astral Developments Ltd ('Astral') acquired the site and in seeking to develop a viable scheme, identified that one could not be brought forward on the colliery site alone (now referred to as Parkside West). Astral proposed to also include an area of land to the east of the M6 motorway, required in part to deliver the necessary reception sidings for trains from the south and the east, critical given the weight of traffic from southern deep-sea ports.

4.39 Astral's scheme was being promoted prior to the Planning Act 2008 and the National Networks Policy Statement 2014 (NNNPS 2014), which meant that it was being promoted without clear national guidance and without compulsory purchase powers to ensure deliverability. Astral was acquired by Prologis in 2008, which concluded it could not deliver the scheme and withdrew Astral's planning application and subsequently sold its interests in 2014, to a joint venture between St Helens Borough Council and Langtree Property to create Parkside Regeneration LLP as Parkside West.

4.40 With the NNNPS 2014 in place, St Helens, with the support of the Liverpool City Region, went on to develop its planning policy for the area to recommend allocating for Parkside West (Policy LPA10) as well as Parkside East (Policy LPA09), the subject site, now known as Intermodal Logistics Park North ('ILPN'). This has culminated in both sites being allocated in the St Helen's Local Plan (adopted in July 2022).

4.41 This policy was supported by the Parkside Logistics and Rail Freight Interchange Study published in August 2016, undertaken by Aecom and Cushman & Wakefield, which considered alternatives. This in turn was developed from background papers prepared in 2010 by Scott Wilson (subsequently acquired by Aecom) to support the identification of the site as a strategic location for a SRFI in the St Helens Core Strategy (2012).

## ALTERNATIVE SITES

### Site selection criteria

4.42 The NPSNN details (para. 4.80) that rail freight interchanges are not only locations for freight access to the railway, but also locations for businesses, capable now or in the future, of supporting their commercial activities by rail.

4.43 Therefore, from the outset, the key criteria which informs a proportionate assessment of alternative locations, includes:

- Para. 4.80 (cont.) - the ability of a facility to be planned and developed in a form that can accommodate both rail and non-rail activities.
- Para. 4.81 - that new/extended SRFIs are appropriately located relative to the markets they will serve, which will focus largely on major urban centres/groups of centres and key supply chain routes.
- Para. 4.81 (cont.) - as most freight movements by rail will end with transport by road to the final destination, proposed SRFI facilities should have good road access and provide appropriate parking and associated facilities for those using the interchange in order to effectively compete with, and work alongside, road freight to achieve a modal shift to rail. The NPSNN therefore acknowledges that, due to these requirements, it may be that countryside locations are required for SRFIs.
- Para. 4.82 - adequate links to the rail and road networks are essential. Rail access will vary between rail lines, both in the number of services that can be accommodated, and the physical characteristics such as the train length and, for intermodal services, the size of intermodal units that can be carried (the 'loading gauge').
- Para. 4.83 - SRFIs tend to be large scale commercial operations, which are most likely to need continuous working arrangements (up to 24 hours). Additionally, given, by necessity, that such facilities involve large structures, buildings and the operation of heavy machinery, typically located away from residential areas and environmentally sensitive areas (though this does not preclude SRFIs from having such receptors in the vicinity as appropriate mitigation measures may be available to limit the impacts of visual intrusion, noise and light).
- Para. 4.84 - SRFIs and the on-site functions of major distribution operations are relatively labour intensive and therefore the existence of an available and economic local workforce is an important consideration.

4.44 Accordingly, these acknowledged locational characteristics and principles form the basis for the 'proportionate' consideration of alternatives exercise. Noting that a network of SRFIs is considered necessary in the NPS, the assessment also follows the NPSNN guidance (para. 4.22) which details that where alternative schemes proposed are vague or have no real possibility of coming about, they are either irrelevant, or where relevant, should be given little or no weight.

4.45 With regard to the NPSNN and commercial requirements, the following criteria and principles have been employed when considering the deliverability and long-term viability of alternative sites for an SRFI:

Rail

- Rail access to strategic rail freight routes and ability to readily connect to the major deep-sea ports of London Gateway, Felixstowe, Southampton and Liverpool, maximising opportunities for modal shift from road to rail.
- Ability to receive 775m long freight trains.
- Ability for trains to connect to the SRFI site from more than one direction.
- Availability of train paths that avoid conflicts with passenger services, with capacity for handling at least four freight trains per day.

Road

- Access to the national motorway network.
- Access to other routes in the strategic highway network.
- Access routes which would not cause unacceptable disturbance to neighbouring and nearby land uses.

Amenity and environmental

- Adequate avoidance of existing residential properties and neighbourhoods and sites allocated for housing in local plans (if required).
- Avoidance of areas likely to flood (flood zones 2 and 3) where possible.
- Avoidance of very substantial harm to protected environmental assets including sites and features of high landscape, ecological and cultural heritage significance.
- Avoiding significant policy conflict.

Commercial and economic

- A broadly level topography that minimises the need for excessive groundworks.
- A tract of land largely free of built development, extending to a minimum of 60 hectares and capable of accommodating large scale warehouse development.
- Compatibility with the objectives of regional and sub-regional plans and strategies and Local Plans.
- Compatibility with existing infrastructure.

- Avoidance of competition or physical conflicts with existing rail terminals.
- The demand profile for users and occupiers.
- Proximity to a labour force.
- Potential availability of land.

### Assessment of alternative sites

4.46 There are currently no SRFIs in the North West. All existing rail terminals are based on historic provision and do not have adjoining land available to meet the demand for rail served buildings of the size and scale now being demanded by modern logistics businesses.

4.47 The existing intermodal RFIs comprise the following:

- Liverpool Garston
- Ditton / Widness
- Trafford Park (DB Cargo / Maritime)
- Trafford Park (Freightliner)
- Knowsley
- Port of Liverpool (Seaforth)

4.48 There are previous industrial sites which have historically been rail connected but which are now part of mixed-use regeneration schemes which are now incompatible with the requirements of a SRFI. These are:

- St Helens – formally Pilkington
- Carrington – formerly Shell
- Fiddlers Ferry – formerly Scottish & Southern Electric

4.49 There are schemes which have been based on the concept of occupiers with rail freight and shipping traffic being developed along the Manchester Ship Canal as tri-modal ports (rail, road and ship). These include:

- Ellesmere Port (Port Cheshire)
- Port Warrington
- Port Salford

4.50 Ellsmere Port has an intermodal operation based on existing sidings at Ellesmere Port Rail Sidings and Manisty Wharf Sidings which functions to serve its local market. Its location is not

suitable to serve the area ILPN covers, being the Liverpool City Region, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (as far as Trafford Park) and North Cheshire and Warrington, all within a c20 mile (32km) radius of the site.

4.51 Port Warrington was promoted during the consultation stages of the Warrington Local Plan as a trimodal site, suitable for a specialist individual business but specifically not as a SRFI. It was not included in the Submission Draft of the Local Plan and is unallocated in the adopted Warrington Local Plan.

4.52 Port Salford has planning consent as a trimodal port with a first phase of 150,000 sqm and an extension of 320,000 sqm. This is supported by an allocation in the Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan for the integrated tri-modal facility (Policy JP-Strat4), as well as for the extension (Policy JPA26). The terminal has been specifically designed to serve rail, ship and road together, with a rail link proposed to be made to connect the terminal to the Chat Moss rail line, with a new connection, in a single direction, facing towards the west.

4.53 The west facing connection would enable Port Salford to connect to the Port of Liverpool and the WCML, using the Chat Moss Line, as would ILPN. However, it would not have ready access to the TransPennine line and the North East coast ports and could not be served from the east at times of engineering shutdowns, unlike ILPN.

4.54 Phase 1 of Port Salford is home to two logistics facilities comprising c26,000 sqm and c46,500 sqm. The remainder of the 150,000sqm original outline planning consent and the extension is conditional upon the terminal infrastructure being in place, which in turn is predicated on the commercial viability of the trimodal port, which so far has not been achieved.

4.55 The ILPN Needs Assessment has identified that there is a shortage of major logistics sites in the assessed area (which includes Port Salford) and no SRFIs (or equivalent, Port Salford was consented originally as a smaller scheme under the Town & Country Planning Act). The assessment concludes that both ILPN and Port Salford are ultimately required.

4.56 Port Salford terminal design and the available position on the overall site, provides for a smaller operation than that proposed for ILPN. If and when the market can support the development of its terminal, then this can come forward, but the existence of ILPN will not prevent this from happening – there is enough demand in the North West for both.

4.57 The rail capacity studies that have been undertaken in respect of ILPN SRFI by a prospective rail terminal operator, validated by Network Rail, identified that there is enough capacity during the day time for ILPN traffic (16 trains each way, up to 13 via the WCML south, with the balance from other directions, including via the TransPennine line); and for a smaller level of service to Port Salford.

4.58 Given that Port Salford as proposed has a restricted capability in terms of its proposed rail connection (west facing connection to the WCML and only a protective provision for access to the TransPennine line and East Coast Ports) and particular size and configuration to serve its intended specialist market, it is not seen as an alternative to ILPN.

## THE CHOICE OF SITE

4.59 As explained in Chapter 3, recent extensions to the railway platforms and associated electrical power cabling works at Newton le Willows station mean that a rail connection into the railport has to be located further east than originally anticipated when the allocation of Parkside East as a SRFI was included in the St Helens Local Plan. This, and the geometry of rail connections required to enable a freight train to enter the railport so as to minimise the time trains need to cross the mainline, means that the rail connection and railport itself needs to extend beyond the boundary of the allocation and include additional land within both St Helens and Wigan boroughs.

4.60 The report titled SRFI Needs Assessment establishes the need case for rail served logistics buildings serving a Primary Market Area of some 32km from ILPN. The need for rail served logistics buildings is of such a scale that the allocated land is insufficient to meet this demand. The co-location of suitable land within Wigan Borough to accommodate the railport and logistics buildings, with the allocated land at Parkside East for a SRFI has formed the preferred choice of the Applicant.

4.61 It is acknowledged that the land required for ILPN SRFI beyond the allocated site at Parkside East lies within the Green Belt. The Planning Statement explains the approach taken to Green Belt policy including an assessment of the site as grey belt. The Planning Statement considers whether the proposal amounts to inappropriate development in the Green Belt and the policy implications arising therefrom. An assessment as to whether the Main Site may be categorised as grey belt requires the application of planning judgement and the very special circumstances is considered in the Planning Statement.

4.62 The selection of ILPN as an appropriate site for an SRFI has been predicated on over 30 years of work undertaken by multiple parties and local and regional authorities, who have all understood the unique combination of multi-directional strategic rail access for freight, next to the strategic national and regional highway network.

4.63 In that time, only Port Salford has received consent for development and whilst demand for a SRFI in the North-West has been clear, it has yet to be delivered. Ultimately it is anticipated that Port Salford will come forward, when its particular trimodal market is viable. ILPN will not prevent it from being developed in its own right.

4.64 With the overall demand increasing for intermodal rail freight and the Government's Rail Freight Growth Target of an increase of 75% of net tonnes moved (payload), there have been and still are no alternatives in the North West that have the capacity to come forward as proposed by ILPN, of a size, design and connectivity that is critical to the North West economy.

4.65 This has been examined in the detailed examination of the St Helens Local Plan and is recognised in the PINS Inspectors' Report published in May 2022 and is supported by the SRFI Needs Assessment provided by ILPN.

## MASTER PLANNING OPTIONS FOR THE MAIN ILPN SRFI SITE

4.66 Having identified the preferred location for ILPN as set out above, the Applicant has tested a range of technology, design and layout options for the DCO Site, having regard to the following requirements identified in Chapter 4 of the NPSNN, including:

- criteria for good design for national network infrastructure (NPSNN pp. 45-46);
- climate change adaptation (NPSNN pp. 46-48);
- pollution control and other environmental regulatory regimes (NPSNN pp. 48-50);
- common law nuisance and statutory nuisance (NPSNN p. 50);
- safety (NPSNN pp. 50-52)
- security considerations (NPSNN pp.52-53);
- health (NPSNN p. 53); and
- accessibility (NPSNN p.53-54).

4.67 The National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) have developed four Design Principles, which have been considered when testing the design of the development and to ensure that the proposals meet the criteria for good design. The Design Principles are:

- Climate – mitigate carbon emissions and adapt to climate change. It includes opportunities to enable decarbonisation, incorporates flexibility, and builds resilience to climate change. The functionality of projects, including fitness for purpose, resilience and sustainability, is equally important.
- People – helping to improve the quality of life for local communities. It promotes inclusion, cohesion and increases accessibility. It creates safe spaces with clean air that improve health and wellbeing.
- Places – well designed infrastructure gives places a strong sense of identity, and through that forms part of our national cultural heritage. Creating a sense of place, connecting communities, addressing community severance and integrating into its surroundings. It makes a positive contribution to local landscapes within and beyond the project boundary. Good design enhances local culture and character and supports local ecology, delivering net biodiversity gain, while protecting wildlife corridors and irreplaceable natural assets and habitats.
- Value – adding value by defining issues clearly from the outset. Good design also finds opportunities to add value beyond the main purpose of the infrastructure to consider the wider benefits savings on cost, the environment, materials and space. It is efficient in the use of natural resources, sustainable materials and energy used in construction.

4.68 Paragraph 4.32 of the NPSNN states:

'*Applicants should consider taking independent professional advice on the design aspects of a proposal, from the earliest design stage. A project board level design champion could be appointed, and a representative design panel used to maximise the value provided by the infrastructure. Applicants should also commission an independent design review of their proposal prior to planning*.'

4.69 The ILPN design and layout has been evaluated and challenged via the EIA process and the technical team advising the Applicant, whose recommendations have been incorporated within the design, where appropriate. A design champion has been appointed for the Proposed Development, who has tested how the design performs against the four NIC Design Principles outlined above. The Design Vision and Principles Document details this process.

### The role of master-planning

4.70 As explained in Chapter 1: Introduction of this PEIR, the DCO application will seek consent for development parameters in keeping with the Rochdale Envelope approach, as opposed to detailed building designs and layouts. However, the Applicant has reviewed a series of illustrative master plan layouts to test the commercial potential of the Main Site, its road and rail access arrangements, the likely effects on the local environment and the ability of the DCO Site to accommodate appropriate environmental mitigation.

4.71 An illustrative master plan provides consultees with a representative picture of what is proposed. Once fixed it will inform the definition of physical development parameters – maximum floor areas, building heights, and corridors for roads and landscape works, etc – that will inform the assessment of environmental effects. The final parameters will be set out in the draft DCO.

#### *Constraints and opportunities*

4.72 An early consideration in the master-planning exercise was to understand in detail the constraints and opportunities that the Main Site offers. The findings of the Main Site investigation and appraisal work undertaken to date are described in the baseline conditions sections of the environmental topic-based chapters of this PEIR. Considerations influencing the master-planning of the site include the following:

- Proposed access to the development – particularly rail and road but also alternative modes of transport for employees.
- Terrain – site topography has implications for the development of large B8 buildings, which require level single-height floors; for railway sidings, for which a level surface is desirable to help prevent freight wagons from rolling under the influence of gravity; and for the ability to provide rail-connected buildings immediately adjacent to the railport.
- Existing access and rights of way – Parkside Road and Parkside Link Road offer access to the Proposed Development. Access routes for HGVs also include the M6 via Junction 22, the M62 vis Junction 21A, the A580 via M6 Junction 23 and the A49 via M62 Junction 9. There are several public rights of way (PRoW) that cross the Main Site.

- Residential amenity – taking into account considerations including noise, visual outlook and air quality.

- Ecology and biodiversity – the master-planning of the DCO Site has been informed by extensive ecological surveys, described in Chapter 12: Ecology and biodiversity of this PEIR. Key considerations include protection of the Highfield Moss SSSI and Biodiversity Net Gain.

- Cultural heritage and archaeology – the outcome of site investigation work is described in Chapters 12: Cultural heritage and Chapter 13: Archaeology of this PEIR. Key considerations include offsetting the Proposed Development from heritage assets on Winwick Lane, from the Battle of Winwick (Registered Battlefield) and assets at Newton Park Farm, as well as retaining the Huskisson Memorial (Grade II) in-situ.

- Landscape – including visual impact and good quality design considerations. Viewpoints were identified at an early stage in the planning and assessment process to help the likely landscape and visual effects of the Proposed Development to be understood and reflected in the master-planning process. This work is described in Chapter 10: Landscape and visual effects of this PEIR.

- Drainage, ground conditions and the water environment – the Main Site's ground and water characteristics were established at an early stage to ensure that the master plan took into account drainage, flood risk and land contamination. The masterplan reflects the need to ensure that drainage from rooftops and hard-surfaced areas in the Proposed Development does not cause enhanced flood risk and contamination off site, as explained in Chapters 14: Surface water and flood risk and Chapter 15: Geology, soils and contaminated land.

4.73 A summary of wider identified opportunities and constraints, specific to the DCO Site location, are summarised below. In some cases, identified constraints and opportunities act as both.

4.74 Constraints:

- the existing highway infrastructure of Winwick Lane, Parkside Link Road and Parkside Road;

- the national rail network of the Liverpool – Manchester Transpennine Line;

- Highfield Moss SSSI;

- the existing PROW network; and

- a high voltage overhead electricity line.

4.75 Opportunities:

- connection to M6 Junction 22 (and M62 via M6 Junction 21A, A580 via M6 Junction 23 and A49 via M62 Junction 9);

- the existing highway infrastructure of Winwick Lane, Parkside Link Road and Parkside Road;
- the national rail network, notably the Liverpool – Manchester Transpennine Line and access to the West Coast Mainline;
- access to the existing PROW network;
- ability to create a new employment opportunity alongside both national highways and rail infrastructure;
- scale of the land available for development;
- ability to increase the sustainable and public transport links in the area;
- ability to provide new publicly accessible green infrastructure;
- ability to accommodate a Rail Terminal of an appropriate scale and requisite design; and
- ability to provide both rail connected and rail served development plots.

4.76 Understanding these constraints and opportunities allowed for the development of an illustrative proposal, that both respected the constraints and maximised the opportunities, as, by way of a layering up approach, they informed the setting out of the constituent elements that go to make up an informed Strategic Rail Freight Interchange.

4.77 Paragraph 4.28 of the NPSNN states that '*a good design should meet the principal objectives of the scheme by applying the mitigation hierarchy to avoid, mitigate, or as a last resort compensate for the identified problems and existing adverse impacts, by improving operational conditions, simultaneously minimising adverse impacts and contributing to the conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment. A good design will be one that sustains the improvements to operational efficiency for as many years as it practicable, taking into account economic, social and environmental impacts.*'

4.78 As such, the Applicant is ensuring that there is a close iterative feedback between the environmental analysis and master-planning process for the project to help prevent or avoid impacts by design. The Applicant has reviewed a series of development layouts, the evolution of which is summarised below.

### Master planning options

4.79 Figure 4.6 shows a preliminary version of the master plan for the Proposed Development, produced in 2024. The layout in Figure 4.6 features the following main elements:

- provision of a rail terminal capable of accommodating up to 16 trains per day, including ancillary development such as container storage, cranes for the loading and unloading of shipping containers, Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) parking, rail control building and staff facilities;

- a rail turn-back facility within the Western Rail Chord;
- up to 687,500 square metres ($m^2$) (gross internal area of GIA) of warehousing and ancillary buildings with a total footprint of 555,000$m^2$ and up to 137,500$m^2$ of mezzanine floorspace, comprising a mixture of units with the potential to be rail-connected, rail served and additional units;
- new road infrastructure and works to existing road infrastructure;
- provision of an overnight lorry park for users of the SRFI;
- new energy centre and electricity substations, including central battery storage and potential provision of central Combined Heat and Power (CHP) units to augment the grid supply in the case of demand exceeding instantaneous firm and variable supplies;
- road access directly from M6 Junction 22 and Parkside Link Road;
- illustration of bicycle, motorcycle and EV parking provisions;
- structural landscape works and planting, incorporating attenuation ponds and sustainable drainage features. An amenity area to the north of the railway line is included for the provision of BNG requirements and as a viewing area for the Huskisson memorial including heritage interpretation; and
- environmental migratory corridor (15m) along the northern boundary to increase the protection of the Highfield Moss SSSI.

4.80 Figure 4.7 shows the subsequent iteration of the master plan that was used for an informal first round of public consultation on the Proposed Development in January 2025. The plan shares the same draft Order Limits as those in Figure 4.6, with the following main changes:

- reduction in the width of the landscape buffer alongside Winwick Lane to ensure early iterations of the masterplan test the ability to maximise net development zones;
- increase in width of landscape buffer along northern boundary within railway main line to provide a consistent approach to landscaping along the northern area;
- reduction in the size of the main rail terminal to not create a ringfenced zone that is inefficient in layout;
- addition of a third rail line against the rail served buildings;
- realignment and additional footpath/cycle paths to improve the use and amenity of the Site and improve the connectivity of the scheme to the wider area;
- emergency access points into the rail terminal added to confirm the safe accessibility in the event of an emergency;
- energy centre relocated which better serves the development in future phases; and

- redesigning of B8 units to take into account all other changes.

4.81 The evolution of development layout options continued in February 2025, with minor changes made such as the provision of a new lorry park to serve the Main Site beyond the Rail Terminal and associated reductions in B8 unit (4 and 5) sizes to facilitate this. The Site Hub was also relocated to a more prominent position in the scheme. In March 2025 a new entrance was added to the railport to provide a single, secure point of access. Additional substations were also added to ensure the design allowed for this provision from the outset.

4.82 In April 2025, the western landscape buffer was increased in depth to 50m from the Parkside Link Road roundabout northwards. This change was made to improve the quality of the 'linear park' environment, create better forms for the for the landscape bunding, improve the cycle / footpath corridor environment and deal with the level differences between the plateau levels and Winwick Road. Consequently, new Units 12, 13, 15, 16 and 17 plots were amended to accommodate this increased buffer width. Unit 02 was mirrored to mitigate potential noise impact to the residential properties to the south east. New units 03 and 04 were added in place of the previous larger unit to allow for the service yards to be relocated away from the motorway frontage to mitigate the requirement for acoustic screening and allow for better landscape treatment.

### The current draft master plan

4.83 Figure 3.2 of this PEIR shows the illustrative master plan as presented for the purpose of the current public consultation. The proposals are described in detail in Chapter 3 of this PEIR. In respect of how the master plan has evolved, noteworthy features include the following:

- updated version of the rail bridge crossing before the existing Parkside Road bridge together with a new footpath bridge off line but adjacent to the existing Parkside Road bridge;
- new Public Right of Way (PROW) routing to the north of the railway with a new bridge crossing at the western tip of Highfield Moss SSSI to enable the removal of the existing level crossing;
- the routing of the footpath and its connection to the existing PROW network alongside the railway has been updated to take into account the new levels arrangements for the development;
- Western Rail Chord updated to allow for noise barrier, drainage channel and maintenance track;
- layout of Unit 07 updated to take into account the new earthworks for the permissive route and the rail chords;
- minor changes to the routing of the PROW's north of the railway link in with the new bridge crossing and closure of the level crossing; and
- update to the overall Order Limits to capture all of the offsite works proposed.

4.84 The latest illustrative development layout seeks to make the most efficient use of land inside the draft Order Limits and maximise the potential to deliver rail connected buildings. The illustrative layout has an internal built footprint up to c.767,000 square metres GIA of warehousing and ancillary buildings with a total footprint of up to 590,000 square metres and up to 177,050 square metres of mezzanine floorspace.

## REMOTE HIGHWAYS WORKS

4.85 The extent of remote highways works required will be determined through assessment, review and agreement with Local Highway Authorities and National Highways as the project progresses. The Highways Mitigation Options Report (PEIR Appendix 7.2) outlines the potential options that have been identified following the initial transport modelling that has been undertaken. As modelling progresses and feedback and discussions with the Transport Working Group continue, these options will be reviewed and refined leading to the development of a highways mitigation package to be submitted as part of the DCO application.

## CONCLUSION

4.86 Overall, the Applicant has reviewed a range of site, development, road, environmental effects and mitigation options with a view to arriving at a proposal that fulfils the requirements of the NPSNN, respects neighbouring communities, has regard to and responds to the local environmental context and sensitivities and fulfils the operational requirements of freight and logistics operators.

4.87 Prior to the submission of its DCO application, the Applicant will continue to review the emerging findings of the EIA for the ILPN SRFI and feedback from stakeholder consultations.