

ALDENHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Council Document To discuss the impact of the Strategic Rail Terminal at Park Street	AGENDA item 8 Full Council Meeting 15th December 2020
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Background

In 2014, Helioslough were given permission to build a Strategic Rail Terminal on the former Radlett Aerodrome. This site is within the demise of St Albans District Council (SADC), and is therefore included in all there planning decisions. As a local consultee Aldenham Parish Council (APC) are asked to comment on any plans as well as HertsmereBC. Objections were received by SADC from APC, HertsmereBC as well as several groups and the local MP's, leading to them refusing planning permission.

Helioslough appealed to the Secretary of State who granted permission in 2014, citing that such terminals were in the national interest. Helioslough started some preliminary work in 2019, but nothing substantial.

The proposal is for the development of an international rail freight exchange. This development is to comprise 5 huge warehouses, each served by a railway siding such that goods can be moved from railway freight wagons into storage in the warehouses and ultimately onto HGVs

The site is entirely within the Green Belt comprising over 300 acres of flat land that has been used for gravel extraction. There is currently in existence a natural area on the north side of the A414. The developers Helioslough are suggesting that they will convert this to a "man-made" country park.

The site has 4 railway tracks running through (north/south) operated by Thameslink/Govia. There are two fast tracks and two slow tracks all used by commuter trains. All freight has to operate on the slow tracks. These are to the east side of the site. The proposal is to build a spur off the east track, under the other three tracks and into the site, thereby offering railway access and relevant sidings to the warehouses.

The concern from APC is that the freight traffic will travel through Radlett to get from and to the site, ass an alternative to get onto M25 and M1. There is also a comment with regarding to where those working at the site will travel from.

HertsCC, owners of part of the site, did put forward an alternative plan to SADC, to use the site for housing which was then included in the provisional SADC Local Plan.

SADC Local Plan

When asked to comment on the SADC proposed Local Plan, APC were in favour of the plan, providing there was a link from the site to the M25 and welcomed the additional railway station in the plan which could take some of the traffic from the development at Harperbury Hospital. It did also ask that within the infrastructure plan, that widening of the bridge over the railway on Harper Lane was included.

The SADC Local Plan has currently been withdrawn, partly because, although it included the housing plan within its submission, it did not provide an alternative site for the Strategic Rail Freight Terminal within the St Albans district or anywhere nearby. It may well be that when the new plan is tabled by SADC it will include the Strategic Rail Freight Terminal.

Local MP's

The MP for St Albans D Cooper has recently tabled a motion in the House of Commons asking the Government to reconsider the 2014 decision as time has moved on and she made the following points;

1. The Green Belt - The MP argues that firstly the Government says that it wants to protect the green belt. Then the Government says that St Albans District Council needs to build more than 14,000 additional homes in the next 16 years. However, as the district is predominately 'Green Belt' which now needs to accommodate almost 15,000 homes as well as a massive interchange, the size of 490 football pitches. She concludes that it is not possible to meet the Government's housing targets, accept a freight interchange and protect the green belt.
2. SADC Local Plan process -- The MP questioned why the Government felt it unacceptable that under the current planning regime the planning inspector can, and indeed may have no other choice but to, threaten to take away a local council's powers to determine where housing should be built unless it stops fighting a Government-imposed freight terminal in one spot?
3. Changes since the 2014 decision - On this the MP referred to the Government's announcement of the location of up to 10 post-Brexit freeports by the end of this year so that they can begin operating in 2021. She asked 'in the light of the Government's plan for freeports, do the previous freight distribution routes still apply, or will the proposed freeports make the rail-freight interchange redundant?

There was also the London Gateway container terminal that has opened on the Thames since the strategic rail freight interchange was first proposed. It will have altered freight-distribution networks in the south-east. Has it changed the need for a terminal in St Albans? Indeed, the plans for Howbury Park have been dropped because of it.

These comments were also supported by the other local MP's, and the Minister for Housing in reply confirmed he would look into the points raised, although Helioslough confirm that they do have planning permission and have commenced work.

APC discussions

1. Does APC write to support the stance taken by the member for St Albans
2. Speak to O Dowden MP to ask for his latest stance and actions on this motion and call for a review of the 2014 decision.
3. That APC look at all the impact on the parish if the Strategic Rail Terminal is built what mitigating actions can be implemented.

Members are asked to consider this report.

Peter Evans
Parish Council Manager