

SLC Property
FAO Allen Creedy
72 B.Box Studios
Stoddart Street
Newcastle Upon Tyne
NE2 1AN

Application No: 20/01022/SCREIA

Your Ref:

Date: 19 November 2020

This matter is being dealt with by:
Jackie Palmer
Direct Line: 0191 643 6336

Dear Sir

**Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017
Request for a screening opinion under regulation 6 as to whether an
Environmental Impact Assessment is required**

North Tyneside Council as Local Planning Authority has determined under the provisions of regulation 6 of the above regulations that **development**
for: Provision of six new train stations, associated upgrading and refurbishment of existing rail infrastructure and engineering works and the reintroduction of passenger train services
at: Locations Including Land Adjacent To Northumberland Park Metro Station Station Road Backworth NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

is not development requiring an environmental impact assessment
in accordance with the letter, information and plans received by the Council on 31 July 2020 and numbered 20/01022/SCREIA.

Attached for your information is a copy of the case officers report.

Yours faithfully



RECOMMENDATION REPORT

Application No: 20/01022/SCREIA

Printed: 19 November 2020 Date Authorised to proceed: 19 November 2020

Author: Aidan Dobinson Booth ☎: 0191 643 6333
Date valid: 31 July 2020 Decision Delegated Decision
Type:
Target decision date: 21 August 2020 Ward: Valley
Date of Site Visit:

Application type: EIA Screening Opinion Reg. 5

Location: Locations Including Land Adjacent To Northumberland Park Metro Station
Station Road Backworth NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

Proposal: Provision of six new train stations, associated upgrading and refurbishment of existing rail infrastructure and engineering works and the reintroduction of passenger train services

Applicant: SLC Property, FAO Allen Creedy 72 B.Box Studios Stoddart Street
Newcastle Upon Tyne NE2 1AN

RECOMMENDATION: No environment assessment required

INFORMATION

Description of the Site and Proposal

This is a request to provide a screening opinion on the need for an Environmental Impact Assessment for the re-introduction of passenger train services on the Northumberland Line as described above. The request has been accompanied by the following document and plans.

- SLC Property. Request for a Screening Opinion (RfSO) – Resubmission. July 2020
- Plans of the various development proposals

The scheme relates to the Northumberland Main Line as it passes through the administrative areas of Northumberland County Council through North Tyneside and into Newcastle City Council, comprising some 22.4km of existing rail track. It is a resubmission of a request as some aspects of the project have changed as scheme design work has progressed.

The proposal comprises the re-introduction of passenger trains onto the existing track, which is predominantly freight line but includes approximately 6.5km of the existing East Coast main line. It also includes the provision of new train stations and associated works including car parking and access arrangements at five locations within Northumberland - Ashington, Bedlington, Blyth Bebside, Newsham and Seaton Delaval and one location at Northumberland Park within North Tyneside. Specifically the works at Northumberland Park will entail the construction of a new platform, retaining structures, lifts, footways, shelters, and signs with associated modifications to the adjacent and nearby adopted highways.

The proposal also comprises the provision of rail infrastructure, the refurbishment and upgrading of existing rail related infrastructure, engineering works and the possible provision of light maintenance depot. There are over 20 level crossings along the length of the line and the scheme includes proposals affecting a number of these crossings due to the increased speed and frequency of train services. There are level crossings in North Tyneside which will be affected by the scheme. The scheme also includes the temporary use of land for the duration of the construction period.

As noted above, the proposal has been the subject of a previous screening request but some changes have been made to the scheme since 2019. These changes do extend the land take up associated with the scheme but most elements remain the same or very similar to those previously screened. Changes predominantly relate to works in Northumberland (including the reservation of additional land for future car parking at some stations in Northumberland; the closure of a number of level crossings and their replacement with either pedestrian footbridges or underpasses (but at Newsham with a diversion of Laverock Hall Road via a new bridge) and an amended location for Bebside station). This request does however now also provide refined details as to the land which may be required for temporary laydown areas, access routes and compounds to be used during construction over the full length of the rail corridor.

Finally, the potential need for a Light Maintenance Depot to provide for the stabling and maintenance of rolling stock and welfare facilities for staff has been identified (again the location is likely to be in Northumberland).

The submitted documents include an initial evaluation of the environmental constraints affecting the site and identifies sensitive receptors. The applicant's view remains that, notwithstanding these changes, the scheme does not constitute EIA development.

This screening opinion takes into account the information supplied in the above documents and plans. Whilst this opinion relates to the whole scheme, it relates primarily to the proposed development in North Tyneside. Where appropriate the opinion refers to those elements of the scheme that are proposed to be located within the administrative areas of Northumberland and Newcastle upon Tyne.

Relevant Planning History

19/00879/SCREIA – EIA screening opinion for Northumberland Line project – no EIA required (6 September 2019)

Screening Opinion from Northumberland County Council – no EIA required (9/8/19)

Government Policy

Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017
Development Plan

Development Plan

North Tyneside Local Plan (2017)

Northumberland:

Blyth Valley LDF Core Strategy and Development Control Policies (2007)

Blyth Valley Local Plan (1999) - saved policies

Wansbeck Local Plan ((2007) – saved policies

Northumberland Local Plan (2019) (Submission Draft)

Newcastle upon Tyne:

Planning for the Future – Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan for Gateshead and Newcastle upon Tyne 2010 -2030 (2015).

Newcastle upon Tyne Development and Allocations Plan 2015 – 2030 (202).

Consultations/representations

Consultations/representations

Landscape Architect

As part of the screening opinion a document titled 'Temporary Land Requirements' has been submitted. This document assesses the potential temporary land requirements for the construction of the Northumberland Line, and aims to highlight the area's best suited for site compounds, material lay down areas and haul road access and sets out a description of the proposed development and the constraints for each site. Each site is assessed individually against the planning policies to see if a significant effect on the environment is likely.

The majority of the sites described within North Tyneside are located within Local wildlife corridors (as defined by the Local Plan), designated local wildlife sites and some areas of green belt. Collectively, across most of the sites, there will be large areas of dense woodland planting removed (no quantities provided) which has good connectivity with the wider landscape and provides foraging and habitat for bats and nesting birds. Tree loss will have adverse impacts on residential amenity and in some cases 'land take' requirements will be within Eccles Colliery Local Wildlife Site that will result in a

reduction of habitat area, disturbance to key species and habitat or species fragmentation.

The structural tree cover, hedgerows and local wildlife sites are notable features in the landscape and are important existing landscape assets as they complement and support the bio-diversity of the immediate and wider area as well as helping to screen the area from internal and external lateral views within the context of associated land uses in and around the application area. The proposal should seek to provide a high level of protection of the environment and to integrate considerations of the environment into the preparation of plans with a view to promoting sustainable development. Whilst there may not be protection of the trees by a TPO (although this must be checked), some areas may be classified as priority woodland, however the retention of trees on a development site is a Council Local Plan priority and the following policies apply:

- Policy S5.1 Strategic Green Infrastructure
- Policy S5.4 Biodiversity and Geodiversity
- Policy DM5.5 Managing Effects on Biodiversity and Geodiversity
- Policy DM5.7 Wildlife Corridors states:
- Policy DM 5.9 Trees, woodland and hedgerow

Given the nature of the development by virtue its nature, size and location within the urban area, and with no mitigation offered, it is considered that the impacts are to be likely to have significant effects on the environment with direct impacts on designated sites.

Consideration needs to be given to the mitigation hierarchy with alternative location(s) or layouts found for certain locations. Mitigation measures need to be identified with an explanation of their likely success and opportunities identified for ecological enhancement and net gain of biodiversity. Any planning application submissions for the above scheme will need to be supported by appropriate surveys including a tree survey that includes approximate quantities of tree loss to ensure adequate mitigation is achieved.

Highways Network Manager

The following is required to be taken into account as part of an environmental impact assessment:

Construction routes (including heavy construction vehicles)
Construction access
Construction plant
Construction signage
Siting of compounds during construction
Storage of materials during construction
Staff numbers during construction
Staff parking during construction
Impact of mud and dust during construction
Impact on adjacent adopted highways

Impact on lighting
Impact on drainage (including highway gullies)
Car parking
Cycle parking
Cycle routes
Public Rights of Way
SUDS
Signage associated with completion of scheme
Transport Assessment
Travel Plan
Signage associated with completion of scheme
Highways Agency Trunk Road network
Local highway Network
Nexus public transport network
Network Rail
Impact on Public Access, Footpaths, Rights of Way and Bridleways

Contaminated Land Officer

Has reviewed the information submitted and considers an environmental impact assessment is not required.

PLANNING OFFICERS REPORT

Main Issues

This application is made under Part 2 (6) of the 2017 Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations for an opinion from the local planning authority as to whether the proposed development requires Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

The fundamental test to be applied in this case is whether the particular type of development and its specific location will result in significant effects on the environment.

Advice on these issues is set out on the legislation and associated planning guidance:

Schedule 1 – types of development for which EIA is mandatory

Although the construction of lines for long-distance railway traffic falls within Schedule 1, this proposal will utilise existing rail lines and as such, it is not considered the proposed development falls under Schedule 1 of the regulations.

Schedule 2 – types of development for which EIA might be required

This proposal falls under parts 10 (Infrastructure Projects) and of Schedule 2 of the 2017 Regulations.

Part 10 (b) of the schedule refers to 'Urban Development Projects' and sets the indicative thresholds of 'i) The development includes more than 1 hectare of urban

development which is not dwellinghouse development; or (ii) the development includes more than 150 dwellings; or (iii) the overall area of the development exceeds 5 hectares.'

Part 10 (d) of the schedule refers to 'construction of railways (unless included in Schedule 1)' and sets an indicative threshold of 'works exceeding 1 hectare'.

If a proposed project is listed in Schedule 2 of the 2017 Regulations and exceeds the relevant thresholds or criteria set out in the second column (sometimes referred to as 'exclusion thresholds and criteria') the proposal needs to be screened by the local planning authority to determine whether significant effects on the environment are likely and hence whether an EIA is required. Projects listed in Schedule 2 which are located in, or partly in, a sensitive area also need to be screened, even if they are below the thresholds or do not meet the criteria.

Only a very small proportion of Schedule 2 development will require an EIA. To aid LPA's to determine whether a project is likely to have significant environmental effects, a set of indicative thresholds criteria have been produced. With regard to the proposed development, it is considered that it exceeds the Schedule 2 criteria and thresholds as the area of works exceed 1 hectare.

The key issues to consider are the physical scale of such development and the potential increase in traffic, emissions and noise and the potential impact on biodiversity.

In such circumstances, EIA is only required where the proposed development is likely to give rise to significant environmental effects, i.e. those which are of more than local magnitude/importance.

Schedule 3 – Selection criteria for screening Schedule 2 development

The Regulations set out the selection criteria which must be taken into account in determining whether a development is likely to have significant effects on the environment.

Three broad criteria are identified which should be considered:

- The characteristics of the development (e.g. its size, culmination with other development; use of natural resources, quantities of pollution and waste generated);
- The environmental sensitivity of the location;
- The characteristics of the potential impact of the development (e.g. its magnitude and duration, nature of the impact).

The submitted documents consider the likely environmental impacts of the scheme having assessed resources and sensitive receptors comprising human health, economic and other assets and natural resources. Focussing on the works which fall within North Tyneside, receptors include historic landfills, underground aquifers, schools and residential properties, public rights of way and cycleways.

The following environmental effects have been considered:

- Traffic and transport

- Noise and vibration
- Water resources
- Air quality
- Ground conditions
- Ecology
- Archaeology
- Heritage
- Landscape and visual
- Socio economics
- Recreation and tourism
- Health and wellbeing
- Climate change

The characteristics of the development

The proposed development is a rail improvement scheme relating to some 22.4km of track in Northumberland, North Tyneside and Newcastle, with associated stations and wider rail corridor works. Since the tracks are existing, the focus of works will be on the construction of new stations to service the new passenger train service to be introduced. Detailed scheme design continues but the screening request is accompanied by a range of information which indicates proposals and alternatives where relevant and options around the extent of land required for these developments, including temporary construction site compounds and site access points.

In North Tyneside, the new station would comprise a new platform adjacent to the Northumberland Park Metro Station and there would be retaining structures, lifts and footways. In addition, potential sites for use as site compounds for the duration of the works have been identified and, at this stage, assessed in terms of the constraints affecting their use. It is not considered that the size of the proposal is so significant as to require EIA.

In terms of the cumulative impact of this scheme combined with the impact of other schemes taking place in the same period of time. This project is expected to be delivered in four phases with a total project duration of 30-40 months. It is not yet known which works will fall within each of the four phases. In North Tyneside, the area around the new Northumberland Park station site is subject of on-going construction to complete new housing developments which already have planning permission. In addition, land further to the south-west of the station, adjacent to the rail corridor is allocated for housing development in the adopted Local Plan such that further housing development may commence in the next few years. In the absence of detail it is difficult to identify the extent of any likely cumulative impacts but given that station construction work will be contained in a small area adjacent to existing housing, to the North West, and commercial developments to the South East, impacts are expected to be localised. EIA is not considered to be required on this basis. This is expected to be similar along the length of the route.

Across the scheme, the majority of the land subject to the proposal remains within the operation land of the existing railway and sidings. The construction of new stations and the use of additional land, albeit some for a temporary period, will require some vegetation clearance works. Whilst not detailed, the proposal would produce construction waste during the proposed works. This will need to be managed. There will be some impacts on water resources, soil, land, ecology and air, but, even with the scheme changes, as previously, it remains the view that the scale of the works would have such a significant impact on soil, land or biodiversity or natural resources as to require EIA. Impact on flood risk is considered later. Supporting information to address these issues and identify appropriate mitigation and compensation measures will of course be expected to be submitted with the planning application.

The proposal would not lead to an increased risk of natural disasters or risks to human health given the existing rail line. While the introduction of passenger trains to rail line would increase the frequency of trains, the proposed crossing improvements would seek to ensure the proposals would not result in an increase in major accidents.

Location of the Development

The main existing land use of the proposed development is operational railways including track and embankments. Within North Tyneside, the development site is not in a 'sensitive area' as defined by regulation 2(1) of the 2017 Regulations. Where works are proposed at Northumberland Park, there are no statutory designations of national or international importance within which this area would fall. The route of the existing railway does pass through land designated as Green Belt and as a wildlife corridor, the eastern edge of the Backworth Conservation area and a local wildlife site. There are no development works in these areas other than works associated with the level crossings. These would not impact on its openness.

In terms of the wider scheme, some of the temporary construction areas will fall into designated areas, notably local wildlife sites and the Green Belt. Recognising that site compounds will be temporary, it would nevertheless be desirable to avoid Green Belt locations and wildlife sites. It is however also recognised that there are practical issues to consider given the route of the line is fixed and there are constraints to accessing the route in the less urban locations. These matters can be further considered as scheme design is progressed and options for the temporary compounds are further refined. It will be desirable to retain existing tree coverage and other landscaping features and habitats wherever possible.

Across the scheme, there will be a variety of implications for land use and natural resources throughout the area during the construction and operational stages of the development but, on balance, it is not considered that these will be such as to be significant in EIA terms.

Characteristics of Potential Impacts

The proposal will result in noise and air pollution during operation and construction. During construction there will be additional traffic movements, noise

and dust. However impacts would be a temporary in duration and localised and can be managed through the imposition of appropriate controls.

Operationally, impacts will be associated with the intensification of the use of the railway mainly from noise associated with more frequent train services and the movement of passengers at the new stations. It is recognised that sensitive receptors are already accustomed to noise. The proposal would see an increase in the frequency of diesel trains which would contribute to localised noise pollution and air pollution. While this is a concern, particularly where the tracks run close to existing dwellings, it is acknowledged that the proposal would encourage a shift in transport modes away from private car reducing the noise and air pollution on the existing roads. The existing rail line is already used by diesel trains albeit not as frequent as is proposed.

There is scope to mitigate operational impacts through station design and layout. In terms of noise and air quality there are expected to be wider benefits in terms of noise reduction and air quality improvements associated with modal switch from car to rail travel. In this context, and noting changes made to the scheme as a whole, since the previous screening opinion was given, it remains the view that the effects of the scheme would be so significant as to require EIA.

The proposal would improve rail service from Northumberland, through North Tyneside and into Newcastle, providing an alternative mode of travel to journeys by private car in line with the promotion of sustainable transport. In terms of traffic and transport, the proposal would result in construction traffic throughout the duration of the works including station construction and improvements to the rail line and crossing points. These impacts would be temporary. In general, as noted above, the scheme is designed to encourage a modal shift from car to rail travel. This would bring positive benefits to reducing road traffic. Highways England previously advised that the proposal would support changes in transport modes, potential leading to a reduction in congestion on the Strategic Road Network, particularly the A19. Operational impacts are again likely to be localised and associated with the movement of passengers for and from the new stations. Scheme changes since the last screening opinion was provided include additional car parking at some stations in Northumberland. No additional parking is proposed at Northumberland Park.

There are 22 level crossings along the route. Proposed works to the existing crossing points would increase the safety of the existing crossings, which would be required to safely accommodate the increase in frequency. The crossing improvements would not lead to an increase in congestion following their completion.

The traffic and transport impacts of the development are still considered not to be so significant as to require an EIA.

The route of the scheme includes land impacted by both historic coal mining activities and land fill. The location for the new station at Northumberland Park is known to be above the site of shallow coal workings and in the zone of influence from coal seams last worked in 1961. Detailed site investigation works will be required at this, and other,

locations. These will inform detailed construction methods for each part of the development. The impacts are limited to during the construction phase of development.

A range of surveys have been undertaken to establish the presence of wildlife species along and near the route of the scheme so as to establish the likely impact of the works. There will be vegetation clearance works along the route to facilitate the construction of the development and its operation. This will impact on habitats and existing species including protected species. Mitigation will be required. Natural England had previously advised that they did not consider the proposal to constitute EIA development.

The additional information on temporary land requirements has been assessed by the landscape advisor. It is noted that sites in North Tyneside are located within Local wildlife corridors, including Eccles Colliery Local Wildlife Site and there is likely to be a requirement to remove large areas of dense woodland planting removed. This is woodland which offers good connectivity with the wider landscape and provides foraging and habitat for bats and nesting birds. This may include areas of priority woodland. Tree loss will have adverse impacts on residential amenity and on habitats and may result in disturbance to key species and habitat or species fragmentation. A high level of protection of the environment will be required and the scheme will need to integrate considerations of the environment into the preparation of plans with a view to promoting sustainable development.

The applicant notes that the removal of vegetation to facilitate construction works will have long term effects and that there is limited scope for mitigation within the rail corridor, but is including additional land for this purpose. Details will be informed by survey work and on-going discussions with the relevant LA's. The landscape advisors comment that the impacts are to be likely to have significant effects on the environment, it was not previously considered that the impacts were of such significance to require EIA. It is essential that survey work continues so as to identify appropriate mitigation and, in relation to the temporary working areas, all alternative locations fully explored alongside opportunities identified for ecological enhancement and net gain of biodiversity being identified. In this context and having considered changes to the scheme, it remains the case that any future application would require substantial supporting information relating to tree works, landscaping plans and biodiversity however, due the location of the works within the existing rail line and sidings, the ecological impacts of the proposal are not considered to be so significant as to require EIA.

Landscape and Visual Impact

The scheme primarily comprises works within an existing rail corridor and benefit from existing screening from the topography and established landscaping. Within North Tyneside, the majority of the proposed works would fall within the route of the existing rail-line and its associated operational land which sits below nearby residential and commercial properties. There will be temporary construction impacts as well as permanent impacts. The new station at Northumberland Park will benefit from the recessed embankments screening the existing metro station. The proposed works

compound area would have a visual presence. However the works compound areas have limited views from the public realm. It remains the case that these impacts are not considered to be so significant as to require an EIA.

The application site falls predominantly within Flood Zone 1 along the length of its route, however, within North Tyneside, it does come in close proximity to a narrow area of Flood Zone 2&3 in North Croft and Granville Drive, to the east on Benton Metro Station and the north of the railway line. The proximity to the Flood Zones as described above are acknowledged, however the nature of the rail line improvements and new station at Northumberland Park is unlikely to result in any significant individual or cumulative impact on flooding due to the nature of the development in this section of the proposal. As such the proposal would not have such a significant impact as to warrant an Environmental Impact Assessment.

In terms of archaeology and heritage, no significant impacts were identified in the previous screening opinion and it is the applicant's view that there will be no significant adverse effects. This view is accepted.

The applicant has also considered socio economic impact and impacts on recreation and tourism. It is agreed that the impacts of the scheme are not so significant as to require EIA. In terms of health and wellbeing residents living close to and travelling past the development will be impacted during construction works including road and footpath closures and diversions at the various locations along the route, construction noise and dust and visual impacts as discussed above. Once operational however, there are expected to be positive benefits associated with improved access to employment and leisure opportunities and the reduction in car travel and congestion as discussed above. Similarly, the impacts on climate change have also been considered but are not likely to be significant. It is not considered that an EIA is required in this context.

In conclusion, the impacts of the scheme have been considered in the context of the EIA Regulations 2017. Regard has been had to the previous opinion and to the changes to the scheme since that opinion was given. The proposal would lead to an increase in train journeys with associated increases in noise and air pollution. However, the train services provided would encourage commuters to switch from private car to the more sustainable travel by train reducing congestion and pollution on the existing road network. The proposal would require ground clearance and tree works, and would result in additional infrastructure which would have a greater visual impact. However, the visual impact would not be significant in EIA terms. The proposal does not pose a significant risk or vulnerability to flooding or ground stability issues. Impacts are likely to be localised. As such, the LPA remains of the view that the proposed development is not likely to have significant effects on the environment and as such is not considered to be EIA development

RECOMMENDATION: No environment assessment required

Conditions/Reasons:

1. The proposal is within Schedule 2 and would not result in significant effects upon any sensitive area or the environment due to the nature, timing and specific location of the works. Therefore, an EIA is not required.

Statement under Article 35 of the Town & Country (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015):