

1.0 SITE DESCRIPTION/AREA CONTEXT

- 1.1 The red line boundary of the application site covers an area to the north and south of the Level Crossing on Meldreth Road in Shepreth. It includes land within the ownership of the applicant, Network Rail, and adjacent land under separate ownership. Certificate B has been signed.
- 1.2 The site is bound to the north west, north east and south east by residential properties and associated gardens. The site includes part of an agricultural field to the south west of the Level Crossing. Pedestrian and vehicular access to the site is directly from Meldreth Road.
- 1.3 The site is outside the Shepreth Village Development Framework. It is not within the Green Belt. The south western part of the site includes land that is currently in agricultural use.
- 1.4 The site is not in a Conservation Area. The closest Listed Building (Barns at Number 19 Rose Cottage Grade II) is located approx. 400m to the north-east. The moated site 170m south west of Tyrell's Hall which is a Scheduled Monument is located approx. 500m to the south-east of the level crossing.
- 1.5 The site is located within Flood Zone 1. The closest biodiversity-related sensitive area to the level crossing is the nationally designated L-Moor, Shepreth SSSI which is located 200m south of the level crossing. There are no Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) on or adjacent to the site.

2.0 THE PROPOSAL

- 2.1 The proposal is for change of use to Operational Railway Land, plus installation of new level crossing barriers, Smart IO Housing equipment, road traffic lighting signals, and associated parking, lighting, landscaping and fencing. The works form part of the Network Rail's wider Cambridge Re-signalling, Re-lock and Re-control project (C3R). The purpose of this wider project is to upgrade signalling systems to improve efficiency and reliability on the rail network, and to replace aging assets with future-proofed systems.
- 2.2 The proposed works are to replace the existing Automatic Half Barrier (AHB) level crossing, and it be renewed as a Manually Controlled Barrier crossing Supervised by Circuit Controlled Television (MCB-CCTV). This includes installation of new modular Relocatable Equipment Building (REB). All fencing and equipment around the level crossing will be renewed.
- 2.3 New Road Traffic Light Signals (RTLS) will be provided in each corner of the level crossing facing along the road approach with 'keep crossing clear' signage attached to the same post. Audible warning devices are to be affixed to each

RTLS to provide audible warning to pedestrians. CCTV will be mounted to posts and two folding lighting columns are proposed.

- 2.4 Equipment will be provided inside the railway fence line in the southwest corner for the operator to locally control the level crossing. Railway and level crossing control equipment will be housed in a new Smart IO (SMIO) housing building in the southwest corner. The building will sit on a concrete pad and be painted green. Parking for on-site attendance for railway staff will be provided to the rear of the equipment building and will be accessed from the public highway via a recessed gate.
- 2.5 Rubber pyramid type trespass guards will be provided across the railway between the barriers for a minimum distance of 2.6m from the crossing surface as a deterrent against trespass. The carriageway will be approximately 5.7m wide to match the carriageway on the immediate approaches. Road markings commensurate with the road and level crossing type will be marked over the railway and on each immediate approach. Footways of 1.5m in width are to extend for the length of the crossing area on both sides of the road and are to adjoin the existing approach footways where present.
- 2.6 Fencing at the site will consist of a mix of 1.4m high post and rail, post and wire, and weldmesh fencing.
- 2.7 The station access in the northwest corner will be diverted and remodelled with accessible ramps within the railway boundary which will require removal of trees in that area.

3.0 SITE HISTORY

- 3.1 There is no relevant planning history for the site.

4.0 PUBLICITY

- 4.1. Advertisement: Yes
- 4.2. Adjoining Owners: Yes
- 4.3. Site Notice Displayed: Yes

5.0 POLICY

5.1 Central Government Advice

National Planning Policy Framework 2021

National Planning Practice Guidance

National Design Guide 2021

Circular 11/95 – The Use of Conditions in Planning Permissions (Annex A)

Planning Policy Statement – Green Belt protection and intentional unauthorised development August 2015

Technical housing standards – nationally described space standard – published by Department of Communities and Local Government March 2015 (material consideration)

5.2 South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018

S/1 Vision
S/2 Objectives of the Local Plan
S/3 Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
S/7 Development Frameworks
S/11 Infill Villages
CC/1 Mitigation and Adaptation to Climate Change
CC/6 Construction Methods
CC/7 Water Quality
CC/8 Sustainable Drainage Systems
CC/9 Managing Flood Risk
HQ/1 Design Principles
NH/2 Protecting and Enhancing Landscape Character
NH/3 Protecting Agricultural Land
NH/4 Biodiversity
NH/6 Green Infrastructure
NH/11 Protected Village Amenity Areas
NH/12 Local Green Space
NH/14 Heritage Assets
SC/9 Lighting Proposals
SC/10 Noise Pollution
SC/11 Contaminated Land
TI/2 Planning for Sustainable Travel
TI/3 Parking Provision

5.3 South Cambridgeshire Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD)

Sustainable Design and Construction (Adopted January 2020)
District Design Guide (Adopted 2010)
Maintenance of Sustainable Drainage Systems (Adopted 2016)
Greater Cambridge Biodiversity (Adopted February 2022)
Cambridge Water and Flood SPD (Adopted November 2018)
Development Affecting Conservation Areas SPD (Adopted January 2009)
Health Impact Assessment SPD (Adopted March 2011)
Landscape in New Developments SPD (Adopted March 2010)
Listed Buildings SPD (Adopted July 2009)
Public Art SPD (Adopted January 2009)
Trees and Development Sites SPD (Adopted January 2009)

5.4 Area Guidelines

Little Shelford Village Design Guide SPD (adopted January 2022)

6.0 Consultees

Shepreth Parish Council - Objection

Comment on amendments:

- Object on the grounds that the biodiversity net gain is an inadequate argument for why this development should go ahead.
- The proposal is a huge infrastructure project in a setting that is a sensitive visual environment.
- Concerns regarding potential traffic impact on the village and parking problems.
- Do not understand the rationale for the planning application as there is already a facility for Network Rail in the village and nearby Foxton.

Initial comment:

- Object to the proposed change of use. The justification for a full barrier solution is flawed and inadequate. In the absence of a relevant TWAO from the Secretary of State for Transport, the application is premature.
- Object to the proposed works. The scale and nature of the works will be highly intrusive both from a visual and an environmental perspective. The detrimental impact this will have on the character of the rural area and on residents living nearby far outweighs any benefits arising from the installation of a full barrier.
- The scale of the proposed containers/equipment stores (up to 10 metres long and 3 metres high), and the accompanying infrastructure (including the erection of large amounts of new fencing, the introduction of a considerable amount of hard standing, and the erection of a camera pole 6 metres high and two 9 metre lighting columns), is inappropriate and out of proportion with what is a distinctly rural setting, backing on to open farmland and countryside.
- A significant increase in work-related activity around the site risks disturbing an adjacent ecologically sensitive area (L-Moor), which is a much-valued nature reserve, and local wildlife.
- Considerable concerns at the impact of the lighting columns, particularly on night-time invertebrates and mammals.
- No justification for the scale of these accompanying works when there is an existing Network Rail depot (with parking and storage facilities) just a few metres away at Shepreth Rail Station. The existing site should be utilised for the storage of any equipment and any other materials
- Surprised to see the planning application submitted ahead of the public inquiry.
- Object on the grounds of the ecology report and that a case has not been made for the conversion.
- Comment that large generators are already running night long from the Shepreth Station depot and these are a disturbance and a nuisance to residents and wildlife.

Meldreth Planning Committee - Objection

- The applicants have failed to provide accurate information on the effect of the changes on the local community. Should the application go ahead, it requires measured changes to the local on-street parking to prevent the blocking back seen at Shepreth Station.
- Likelihood of extended delays at the new level crossing and traffic jams observed when the Shepreth Station crossing was similarly changed in 2018.
- Understand from the public inquiry that the Network Rail modelling work is deeply flawed and unreliable. The change will cost lives if time-critical emergency services are caught in delays.
- Lessons should be learned from Shepreth in 2018 to include a plan to change the street parking arrangements in the vicinity of the crossing.

Cambridgeshire County Council (Highways Development Control)

Comment on amendments

- 6.1 The previous reasons for refusal have fallen away. Recommend conditions on bound surfacing material, a traffic management plan, controlled hours for vehicles, construction of the access, and an informative relating to works on the public highway.

Initial comments

- 6.2 Recommend refusal. Further information required on acceptable visibility splays, rationale for the size and level of use of the maintenance compound/car parking area, and a standalone dimensioned plan of the access the width of which appears to be excessive for its indicated use.

Cambridgeshire County Council (Transport Assessment Team)

- 6.3 From a transport strategy / planning point of view, officers don't have any further comments as the applications/notifications appear to do the same in traffic terms as the TWAO. There was no information attached to the applications/notifications in relation to traffic flows / transport modelling.
- 6.4 The modelling work was reviewed for the TWAO and are content with the methodology and content that the proposals would not have a significant impact. We did note in our holding objection to the TWAO that, "there are significant concerns raised by local communities on the impact the crossing scheme may have in traffic at key pinchpoints in South Cambridgeshire and it is hoped that this continued dialogue will allow for opportunities to allay this concern and provide more information."

- 6.5 It should be noted that the holding objection was in relation to highways assets and the information provided with the TWAO application and not related to transport planning.

Environmental Health Officer - South Cambridgeshire District Council

- 6.6 Primary concern is that of nuisance noise and lighting impact to the nearby sensitive receptors, namely the residential dwellings at 51, 53, 55, 78 and 80 Meldreth Road.
- 6.7 However, the CMP advises that works should be complete within 22 shifts of work, where only 1 of those is a night shift. Normally condition against unusual working hours, or working at night, however it is accepted that in this instance, the working time must adjust to minimise interruption to the rail service.
- 6.8 Section 8 of the plan covers community liaison, this will play an important role in alleviating any pinch points with nearby residents and officers would encourage the applicant to be regular and transparent in their communication.
- 6.9 9m lighting columns will be fitted with LED luminaires. The positioning and configuration of this lighting is crucially important to prevent a lighting nuisance to the nearby receptors, which may have sensitive rooms (i.e. bedrooms) overlooking the rail crossing. Lighting assessment is required.
- 6.10 While noise impact during construction is anticipated, this is a transient impact and the timings of the works and the advance communication outlined in the CMP should mitigate potential nuisance.
- 6.11 Given that this is primarily an upgrade of the existing systems, officers do not anticipate significantly different noise levels or noise profiles once the works are complete.
- 6.12 Recommend condition for an external lighting scheme and an informative to advise the applicant to take all relevant precautions to minimise the potential for disturbance to neighbouring residents from noise and dust during construction.

Air Quality Officer - South Cambridgeshire District Council

- 6.13 The level crossings are being improved in terms of safety of the public which is welcomed. The EIA scoping request did not identify any significant impact and the application was not subject to an EIA assessment. No new use or exposure source is introduced and therefore no comments in respect of Air Quality are made in relation to this consultation.

Access Officer – GCSP

Ensure that the audible and visual warnings are suitable to aid the visually impaired pedestrians. The gaps for the rails should have some provision to ensure that the wheels of wheelchairs, particularly the small front casters, and walking sticks do not get stuck in these gaps.

Landscape Officer, Built and Natural Environment Team, GCSP

- 6.14 No objection. The proposal will help mitigate the loss the existing trees and other vegetation to the west of the level crossing. Recommend conditions for landscape implementation and details of a landscape management and maintenance plan.

Ecology Officer, Built and Natural Environment Team, GCSP

Comment on amendments

- 6.15 No objection. The updated biodiversity net gain calculations are acceptable. Noted that the trading rules have not been met, however the habitat created within the site should provide equal opportunities for wildlife as those habitats that are to be lost. Recommend condition to secure biodiversity net gain.

Initial comment

- 6.16 The site sits within the Impact Risk Zone of a nearby statutory protected site and may qualify for a consultation with Natural England as it is a transport project. No consultation has been sent to Natural England; this should be reviewed if not considered already.
- 6.17 There are no non-statutory protected sites in the vicinity that are likely to be impacted by the application. Species data shows great crested newt, barn owl and other breeding birds, flowering plants, fungus, invertebrates, reptiles, bats, otter, water vole, and hedgehog have all been recorded locally.
- 6.18 The report did not find any evidence that a protected species licence would be required from Natural England prior to works commencing. The report has recommended non-licensable avoidance and mitigation strategies for reptiles, nesting birds, and bats, which is agreed.
- 6.19 The report has provided evidence that a total of 0.53 habitat units will be lost to development, and that there are currently no plans to provide these on site. As this is one of several similar projects being undertaken by the applicant it would be practical to deliver biodiversity net gain for all applications at a single offsite location.

- 6.20 Recommend conditions for compliance with submitted Ecological Impact Assessment, a scheme for ecology enhancement and a Biodiversity Net Gain plan.

Tree Officer, Built and Natural Environment Team, GCSP

- 6.21 Responded 'no comments required'.

Sustainable Drainage Engineer, GCSP

- 6.22 No objection.

- 6.23 A number of sites are located in flood zone 2 and 3. For these sites finished floor level of the equipment buildings should be minimum of 300mm above flood level. This will provide flood resistance and also ensure that flood plain storage is not compromised.

- 6.24 It is recommended that for each site, surface water runoff destination will be an area immediately adjacent to the building onto the concrete cable trough and into the surrounding walking route, comprising of unbound granular material, replicating the current 'greenfield' runoff.

Natural England

- 6.25 The proposed development will not have significant adverse impacts on designated sites Shepreth L-Moor SSSI, Barrington Pit SSSI and Melwood LNR and has no objection. This is subject to best practice pollution control and other construction measures being implemented, likely to be secured through an appropriate planning mechanism.
- 6.26 Flora and fauna is being removed and represents habitat loss and that there are currently no plans to provide these on site. As this is one of several similar projects proposed by Network Rail Infrastructure Ltd. it would be practical to deliver Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) for all applications at a single offsite location.
- 6.27 The above responses are a summary of the comments that have been received. Full details of the consultation responses can be inspected on the application file.

7.0 Representations

- 7.1 Representations have been received from the owner/occupiers of the following properties objecting to the application:

94 Meldreth Road, Shepreth
113 North End, Meldreth

The representations can be summarised as follows:

- Concerns about the methodology of the traffic modelling, including the estimated increase in downtime, and about apparent inconsistencies and inaccuracies in the submitted data.
- Concern that the application is premature, and should not be determined until the associated TWAO.
- The landscape and visual impact of the proposed service yard.
- The changes to the nearby Shepreth station have had a significant impact on journey times / inconvenience and the impact is likely to be similar.
- The safety gains would be undermined by increased drive frustration at longer wait times.

7.2 The above responses are a summary of the comments that have been received. Full details of the consultation responses can be inspected on the application file.

8.0 Procedural Matters

8.1 Comments have been received from third parties in relation to whether this planning application is premature and should not be determined until after the associated TWAO.

8.2 This TWAO primarily relates to the temporary and permanent acquisition of land to facilitate the proposed works across the C3R project area, including at the Meldreth Road Level Crossing. This application for a change of use and operational development associated with the level crossing works considers separate matters and it is not considered that determination of this planning application will prejudice the determination of the TWAO, or that there is any reason this application cannot be determined ahead of the TWAO.

8.3 Officers have considered the application against the South Cambridgeshire Scheme of Delegation. Whilst it has objected, the Parish Council has not requested the application be considered by Planning Committee. The application is not a significant departure for the Local Plan, has not been made by an Officer or elected member, does not relate to Council own land, and does not involve the demolition of a Listed Building or BLM. It is not considered by officers that the application is especially complex or sensitive. On this basis the application can be determined under delegated powers.

9.0 Planning Assessment

9.1 The key considerations in this application are:

- Principle of Development
- Character and Appearance of the Area
- Highway Matters

- Residential Amenity/ Environmental Health
- Trees
- Flooding
- Biodiversity
- Heritage
- Other Matters

Principle of Development

Transport

- 9.2 Policy S/2 (Objectives of the Local Plan) outlines the broad vision for which the Local Plan seeks to deliver. Part f. states that one of the key objectives of the Local Plan is to “maximise potential for journeys, to be undertaken by sustainable modes of transport including walking, cycling, bus and train.”
- 9.3 The purpose of the proposed works is to enhance the safety, reliability and efficiency of railway infrastructure in the region, ensuring sustainable transport options remain well maintained and managed is supported. The proposal is considered acceptable in accordance with South Cambridgeshire Local Plan (2018) policy S/2.

Development Framework

- 9.4 Policy S/7 (Development Frameworks) states that development and redevelopment of unallocated land and buildings within development frameworks will be permitted provided that:
- a. Development is of a scale, density and character appropriate to the location, and is consistent with other policies in the Local Plan; and
 - b. Retention of the site in its present state does not form an essential part of the local character, and development would protect and enhance local features of green space, landscape, ecological or historic importance; and
 - c. There is the necessary infrastructure capacity to support the development.
- 9.5 The impact on the character of the area is assessed below. In summary, the works are not considered to significantly affect the character of the area compared to the existing context and would not adversely affect any local landscape or natural environment features.

Agricultural Land Quality

- 9.6 The proposal includes the change of use and loss of agricultural land. The site includes land within the Grade 2 agricultural land classification. Policy NH/3 (Protecting Agricultural Land) states that planning permission will not be granted for development which would lead to the irreversible loss of Grade 2 agricultural land unless, among other factors, sustainability considerations and the need for

the development are sufficient to override the need to protect the agricultural value of the land.

- 9.7 The proposed loss of Grade 2 agricultural land would be minimal and would be marginal verge land, which would not have a significant impact on agricultural productivity. For the reasons set out above, the need for the development for improvements to the railway line is sufficient to override any minimal loss to the agricultural value of the land. The proposal is acceptable in accordance with South Cambridgeshire Local Plan (2018) policy NH/3.

Conclusion on principle of development

- 9.8 Overall, the proposed development is considered to support the reliability and safety of the strategic rail network, promoting the use of public transport. The development will result in only very limited loss of agricultural land, and subject to mitigation as discussed below, is not considered to have a significantly detrimental impact on the character or appearance of the area. On this basis, the principle of development is considered acceptable.

Landscape, character, and appearance

- 9.9 The site comprises the existing level crossing, two small buildings, warning lights, barriers, signage, and associated infrastructure, together with an area of open land which includes scrub, hedging and trees.
- 9.10 The works to the level crossing will replace existing equipment, with a limited increase in associated paraphernalia including lighting columns and a new larger equipment building. These works will have a greater visual impact than the current crossing, however it is considered the proposals will not have a significantly urbanising impact and will not significantly affect the character of this edge of village location. The proposed lighting columns have the potential to result in glare, however it is considered that the use of lighting is justified for safety reasons and can be adequately controlled through use of a condition (Condition 11).
- 9.11 The proposals will also result in provision of a new parking and material storage compound. This will extend into the corner of what is currently an open field. The parking area is proposed to be gravel and is likely to be used infrequently, however materials storage is proposed. Since the submission of the application, landscaping plans have been submitted which show hedgerow and tree planting to screen the compound. A 1.4m high post and wire fence is proposed to secure the compound, which will not be visually obtrusive.
- 9.12 Whilst the site is currently an open field, it is partially screened from the public realm by established tree and hedge planting. The corner location, together with

low-impact nature of the development, combined with the proposed screening are considered to ensure the development will not significantly affect the character or distinctiveness of the local landscape.

- 9.13 Subject to a condition to control lighting, and landscape implementation and management works (Conditions 7, 8 and 11) the proposed works are not considered likely to have a significant landscape impact, or significantly affect the character or appearance of the area and the proposal is compliant with South Cambridgeshire Local Plan (2018) policies HQ/1 and NH/2

Residential Amenity

- 9.14 The nearest residential properties are located northeast, north west, and south of the crossing, at a distance of approximately 20-25m.
- 9.15 The Environmental Health team has not identified any operational concerns in terms of the impact on residential amenity, and the proposals would not have an impact in terms of the physical form of the development on residential amenity in terms of overbearing, overshadowing or enclosure, due to the location and siting of the buildings.
- 9.16 The increased downtime of operation may result in some additional noise; however, this is unlikely to be significant. The application also notes that the noise volumes can be adjusted to local conditions.
- 9.17 The proposals will include the installation of new lighting columns, which have the potential to harm the amenity of residents through unwanted glare. Condition 11 is proposed to secure details of lighting.
- 9.18 The applicant has submitted a Construction Management Plan. No objections have been raised by the Environmental Health Team and a condition (condition 9) is recommended to secure compliance with this document. The Environmental Health team has recommended construction hours. It is noted however that Network Rail intend to undertake works outside of standard construction hours. In response to this, the Environmental Health team has recommended an informative to require consultation. This is not considered to be adequate, and instead a condition is recommended to secure compliance with standard construction hours unless a procedure is followed which includes consultation with residents and notification to the local planning authority.
- 9.19 Subject to conditions on construction hours, and lighting, the proposal is compliant with South Cambridge District Council Local Plan (2018) policies CC/6, SC/9 and SC/10.

Transport

- 9.20 The applicant has submitted a Transport Assessment specific to these proposals. The report considers the impact of the barrier down time, the new parking area, and a junction visibility assessment. Officers observe that Meldreth Road is primarily a local access road, serving the surrounding villages, with the A10, running parallel, serving as the primary vehicular route to Cambridge, Royston and further afield.
- 9.21 The report states that the barrier down time would be for an average total of 2 minutes and 49 seconds, which would be approximately 107 seconds more than existing. These figures have been based on the Hinxtton level crossing data. The report finds that the increased barrier down time would have a minimal impact on eastbound journey times and an approximate 65 second delay to westbound traffic. It finds that vehicle queues would also increase by approximately 9 cars which it considers would not be significant. It concludes that the proposals would have no material impact on the local transport network, and accords with relevant adopted national, regional and local policy guidance
- 9.22 The local parish councils and third-party representations have raised concerns about apparent inaccuracies and inconsistencies with the modelling work undertaken by the applicant, and therefore the reliability of the information within the applicant's Transport Assessment. These concerns have also been raised through representations submitted to Network Rail's application for a Transport and Works Act Order. This has been examined as matter for the public inquiry however no decision has been made on that public inquiry. The applicants have also provided a response addressing concerns regarding the transport modelling.
- 9.23 The local highway authority is a statutory consultee on this planning application and Network Rail's application for the Transport and Works Act Order. The County Council transport assessment team has reviewed the applicant's Transport Assessment in relation to both applications. The local highway authority has not objected to either application on the grounds that the transport modelling is inadequate, flawed or unreliable, and nor on the grounds that the finding of the report is unacceptable. The advice of the local highway authority is accepted.
- 9.24 Moreover, the local highway authority has specifically reviewed the comments from Shepreth Parish Council and has explicitly advised the local planning authority that the concerns raised do not alter their advice.
- 9.25 Notwithstanding the local knowledge of the Parish Council and Third Parties, officers do not consider there is any evidence to suggest that the findings of the submitted Transport Assessment are substantially inaccurate. Therefore, while acknowledging the strong objections that have been made, officers for the local planning authority are satisfied that the concerns raised by the parish councils and third parties have been fully assessed by the relevant statutory consultees

and that there would be no reasonable transport grounds on which to refuse the planning application.

- 9.26 Regarding the parking proposals, these include a new parking area which would be located to the west of the barrier. This would provide parking for maintenance staff serving the level crossing, the wider railway and occasionally being used to store materials for works on the railway line in the vicinity. The applicant provided additional information during the course of the application in the form of a Briefing Note in response to comments made by the local highway authority about the use of the parking area. The note explains the during maintenance, up to 3-4 vans are anticipated, and this would be twice per year, plus inspections by the level crossing manager in a small van several times per year. Occasionally there would be larger vehicles including transit vans attending during level crossing failures and large flatbed lorries delivering materials to the site anticipated no more than once per year. This information is accepted by the local highway authority.
- 9.27 Regarding the junction visibility, revised drawings were submitted during the course of the application. The Highway Engineer for the local highway authority has reviewed the information and has removed their objection. The consultee has recommended conditions to secure acceptable materials and details of the ditch / watercourse crossing. A further condition is applied to secure implementation of the access, turning area and visibility splays and to ensure these are kept clear from obstructions for the lifetime of the development; and to remove permitted development rights for the erection of gates across the access to allow vehicles to turn into the site and avoid waiting on the public highway. Subject to this, the impact on highway safety is acceptable.
- 9.28 For construction traffic, the Briefing Note submitted during the course of the application anticipated daily visits by small vans and transits, and weekly visits by a large flatbed lorry. The impact of construction works on the local highway network would be mitigated by a condition recommended by the local highway authority for a Traffic Management Plan (Condition 3). This advice is accepted.
- 9.29 For these reasons, and subject to conditions, the proposal is compliant with South Cambridgeshire Local Plan (2018) policies TI/2 and TI/3 and paragraph 111 of the NPPF.

Ecology

- 9.30 The application was accompanied by a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) and Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA). The Ecology Officer advised that species data shows great crested newt, barn owl and other breeding birds, flowering plants, fungus, invertebrates, reptiles, bats, otter, water vole, and hedgehog have all been recorded locally. The applicant has submitted an Ecological Impact Assessment. The report has recommended non-licensable

avoidance and mitigation strategies for reptiles, nesting birds, and bats. This is agreed by the Ecology Officer and a condition is recommended to secure compliance with the measures in the EclA report. This advice is accepted.

- 9.31 The site sits within the Impact Risk Zone of a nearby statutory protected site. Natural England advised that the proposed development will not have significant adverse impacts on designated sites Shepreth L-Moor SSSI, Barrington Pit SSSI and Melwood LNR, subject to best practice pollution control and other construction measures being implemented. The EclA report details mitigation measures include pollution prevention measures, appropriate site clearance methods during suitable times of year, establishment of exclusion zones to safeguard protected species and/or habitats and a sensitive lighting regime. These measures would be secured via the condition requiring compliance with the EclA.
- 9.32 During the course of the application, a Landscape Screening and Ecological Enhancement Plan (LSEEP) was submitted. Proposals include new tree, shrub and hedgerow planting. The proposals were accompanied by a biodiversity net gain assessment which showed there would be a 33 per cent net gain in biodiversity as a result of the proposals. While the habitat trading rules have not been met, as the arable field margin cannot be replaced, the proposed planting is considered to have more ecological value than the existing habitat that will be lost. The installation of a bird box, bat box and wildlife habitat piles will also provide further ecological enhancement and appropriate fencing will allow freedom of movement for hedgehogs and other wildlife.
- 9.33 The Ecology Officer supports the proposals and the biodiversity net gain assessment. Conditions are proposed to secure the ecological enhancements to achieve the biodiversity net gain including management and monitoring (Conditions 5 and 6). This advice is accepted, and it is considered that the proposal is in accordance with South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018 policy NH/4, the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Biodiversity SPD 2022 and the NPPF.

Trees

- 10.0 This application is accompanied by an Arboricultural Impact Assessment, which describes the results of a survey of trees at Meldreth Level Crossing in August 2022. The Arboricultural Impact Assessment confirms that the proposed layout will require the removal of groups G2, and G3, both category C areas of emergent scrub on the southwestern side of the level crossing. The report concludes that the loss of these groups will not be of great detriment to the surroundings.
- 10.1 The Council's tree officer has reviewed the proposals and has not objected to the scheme. Following updates to the landscape scheme a number of trees are

proposed to be planted next to the parking compound which is considered to compensate for the proposed loss of trees. The proposal is considered acceptable in accordance with South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018 policies NH/4 and NH/6

Flood risk and water management

- 10.2 Policy CC/9 (Managing Flood Risk) seeks to minimise flood risk by only permitting development where it complies with the requirements as set out within the policy including the use of suitable flood protection and mitigation measures. The policy also requires the submission of site-specific Flood Risk Assessments (FRA).
- 10.3 A high-level Surface Water Strategy Statement has been submitted in support of the application, which details how SMIO Housings will be constructed around a permeable gravel base, which ensures the proposed development will not lead to any localised or wider surface water flooding or impacts. This approach is considered to be in-line with the SuDS drainage hierarchy set out within the Cambridgeshire Flood and Water SPD.
- 10.4 The submitted surface water strategy states that some parts of the wider C3R project are within higher risk flood zones, however Environment Agency mapping shows that the site is in Flood Zone 1 and is at low risk of surface water flooding.

The Surface Water Strategy Statement identifies that due to the small surface areas of the equipment building roofs it is considered that infiltration into the ground provides a suitable solution for dealing with runoff. The Council's drainage team have no objection to the proposed drainage strategy and recommend a condition requiring details of finished floor levels in flood zones are provided. As this site is not within a flood zone, it is not considered necessary for a condition in this instance. A condition is however proposed to secure details of where the proposed site access crosses a ditch/watercourse as recommended by the LHA (Condition 4).

- 10.5 The proposed development is not considered to be at risk of flooding or to be likely to increase the risk of flooding elsewhere. The proposals are in accordance with South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018 policies CC7, CC/8, and CC/9.

Heritage

- 10.6 The site is not in close proximity to any designated heritage assets and is not likely to affect the setting of heritage assets. The proposals will not involve significant works below ground and are unlikely to affect any archaeological assets. The proposal would not give rise to any harmful impact on the identified heritage assets and is compliant with the provisions of the Planning (LBCA) Act 1990, the NPPF and South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018 policy NH/14.

Sustainability

- 10.7 The applicant has submitted a sustainability statement to accompany the application. This sets out how aging equipment needs replacement, and that the works will provide the signalling system with an expected 35-year life. The proposed signalling system is designed to be energy efficient, with LED lighting and other measures used to reduce energy consumption by 15-30%. The embodied carbon of the proposals has also been considered including using cabling equipment made from recycled materials, and low-carbon concrete. The proposals are considered acceptable in accordance with South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018 policy CC/1.

Accessibility

- 10.8 The proposed updated crossing will have high contrast signage, warning lights, and audible warnings to alert users to the barriers being lowered. The proposed lighting will also illuminate the crossing. It is noted that Meldreth Road does not have a pedestrian footway on either side west of the crossing, and pedestrian traffic is likely to be very low. It is considered the proposals are acceptable in relation to accessible and inclusive design.

Conclusion / Planning Balance

- 8.10 The proposal is considered to be supported by the Local Plan objective of supporting sustainable travel, and is considered to contribute to the economic, social, and environmental objectives of sustainable development as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework. The proposal would have an acceptable impact on the character of the area, residential amenity, highway matters, ecology, trees, flooding, heritage, sustainability, and accessibility matters, subject to mitigation secured via condition. For these reasons, the proposal accords with the development plan and the NPPF, and there are no other material considerations that outweigh this.

9 Recommendation

APPROVE, subject to conditions.