APPLICATION FOR CONSULTATION:

1. **RECOMMENDATION**

1.1 It is recommended that the Committee **AGREE** the proposed comments, as set out in Section 10 of this report, and they are to be submitted as the Council’s response to the consultation of the proposed Strategic Rail Freight Interchange development and the proposed works at Junction 15a of the M1 motorway.

1.2 That delegated authority is given to the Head of Planning to agree a Statement of Common Ground with the applicant, and to produce a Local Impact Report for submission to the Planning Inspectorate.

2. **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

2.1 The purpose of the report is to obtain the Council’s response to the pre-application consultation pursuant to Section 42 of the Planning Act 2008 and Regulation 11 of the Infrastructure Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2009, in regard to a proposal for Rail Central, a Strategic Rail Freight Interchange (SRFI), a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project to be located to the west of the A43 and to the south of Milton Malsor. The SRFI site falls entirely within South Northamptonshire District’s administrative boundary. In addition to the SRFI,
highway works are proposed at Junction 15a of the M1 motorway. These works fall within both South Northamptonshire and Northampton Borough.

2.2 In addition to the proposed works considered a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project, additional works classed as ‘Associated Development’ are proposed which comprise primarily of highway works, other than to J15a, on the road network surrounding the application site.

2.3 The Council has been consulted by the applicants, Ashfield Land Management Limited and Gazeley GLP Northampton s.à.r.l, as part of the Stage 2 Consultation Process in relation to the proposed development, which is the subject of a proposed application for a Development Consent Order.

3. THE PROPOSAL

3.1 The proposed development comprises the main Strategic Rail Freight Interchange site including the A43 access and all rail infrastructure; works to Junction 15a of the M1; and associated highway works.

3.2 The main SRFI site comprises of a total of approximately 291 hectares. The proposed works comprise of:

- Structural earthworks and demolition of existing buildings and structures;
- An intermodal freight terminal with direct connections to the Northampton Loop Line, capable of accommodating trains of up to 775m long, including up to 3 gantry cranes, container storage, a train maintenance depot and facilities to transfer containers to heavy goods vehicles;
- An express freight terminal with direct connections to the West Coast Main Line, capable of accommodating trains of up to 240m long, a freight platform with associated loading and unloading facilities;
- Up to 702,097 sq m (GEA) of rail connected and rail served warehousing and ancillary service buildings including a lorry park, terminal control building and bus terminal;
- New road infrastructure including a new separated access point on the A43, an internal site underpass (under Northampton Road) and necessary utilities infrastructure;
- Strategic landscaping and open space including alterations to public rights of way, the creation of new ecological enhancement areas and publicly accessible open areas, flood attenuation, and the partial diversion of the Milton Malsor Brook;
- Works to J15a of the M1 motorway, and associated works comprising various highway improvements to the road network surrounding the site.

3.3 The submitted details indicate that the proposed development would be constructed over a 10 year period commencing in 2019, with 129,790 sq. m becoming operational in 2021.

4. NATIONALLY SIGNIFICANT INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS APPLICATION PROCESS

4.1 The Planning Act 2008 introduced a new application process for categories of development that are identified as Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSP).
4.2 The Rail Central proposals meet the definition of a NSP. This means rather than preparing a planning application for determination by the Local Planning Authority, the developer submits an application for a Development Consent Order for examination by the Planning Inspectorate before being determined by the Secretary of State for Transport.

4.3 The process is very much front-loaded with a statutory requirement on the developer to carry out extensive consultation on their proposals prior to submitting a formal application for development consent to the Planning Inspectorate.

4.4 The pre-application process is now at Stage 2 Public Consultation, being held from 15th March until 23rd April 2018.

4.5 On submission of an application to the Planning Inspectorate, the Inspectorate has up to six months to carry out the examination. This is a formal process during which consideration is given to all the important and relevant matters, including the representations of all interested parties. Within three months of the examination, the Inspectorate must issue a recommendation to the Secretary of State for Transport. The Secretary of State then has a further three months to issue a decision on the proposal, following which there is a six week period for the submission of any legal challenges.

4.6 The Local Authority is a consultee in this process and is encouraged by the Planning Inspectorate to engage with the developers to influence the preparation of the application at pre-examination stage.

4.7 The role of the Local Planning Authority predominantly comprises:

- Consultee on the Scoping Opinion for the Environmental Statement.
- Advise the developer on the Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC) setting out how the developer will consult the local community.
- Involvement and preparation of a Statement of Common Ground with the developers and the submission of a Local Impact Report.
- Commenting to the Planning Inspectorate on the adequacy of the applicant’s pre-application consultation.
- At pre-examination stage, the Local Authority are encouraged to submit a relevant representation including a summary of what they agree and/or disagree with in the application.
- Interested parties will have the opportunity to submit a written representation during the examination stage which can elaborate on matters and attend the examination.

4.8 South Northamptonshire has been consulted directly by the developer and is preparing a response to the Stage 2 consultation.

5. SITE DESCRIPTION

5.1 The main SRFI site comprises of a total of approximately 2914ha of predominantly arable farmland, with smaller areas of pastoral fields and semi-improved grasslands. Field boundaries are generally a mix of hedgerow or trees.

5.2 The majority of the site is located to the west of the A43, although a small section extends across the A43 to surround Gayton Marina. The village of Milton Malsor is located to the north, and Blisworth to the south, both villages having designated Conservation Areas. Northampton Road runs through the centre of the site, and Gayton Road runs along parts of the northern boundary. The site is bound to the east by the Northampton Loop railway line, and the West Coast Main
Line to the south. The Grand Union Canal abuts the south western boundary. The M1 motorway is located to the north and north east of the site beyond adjacent fields.

5.3 The application site also incorporates a separate site at Junction 15a and the immediate surrounding areas of land to allow for proposed highway works.

6 PLANNING HISTORY

6.1 There is no relevant planning history.

7 PLANNING POLICY

7.1 National Policy Statement for National Networks (NPS)

The NPS sets out the need and government policies for nationally significant infrastructure rail and road projects for England.

The policy sets out a vision for the delivery of national networks that meet the country’s long-term needs; supporting a prosperous and competitive economy and improving overall quality of life, as part of a wider transport system.

Paragraph 2.37 advises, in the short to medium term, the Government’s policy is to improve the capacity, capability, reliability and resilience of the rail network at key locations for both passengers and freight movements to reflect growth and demand, and maintain or improve operational performance and facilitate modal shift from road to rail.

Paragraph 2.40 recognises that modal shift from road and aviation to rail can help reduce transport’s carbon emissions, as well as providing wider transport and economic benefits.

Paragraph 2.53 advises that the Government’s vision for transport is for a low carbon sustainable transport system that is an engine for economic growth, but is also safer and improves the quality of life in our communities. It is important to facilitate the development of the intermodal rail freight industry. The transfer of freight from road to rail has an important part to play in a low carbon economy and in helping address climate change.

Paragraph 5.113 advises that the surface water drainage arrangements for any project should be such that the volumes and peak flow rates of surface water leaving the site are no greater than the rates prior to the proposed project, unless specific off-site arrangements are made and result in the same net effect.

7.2 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The NPPF has a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

Paragraph 17 seeks to proactively drive and support sustainable economic development to deliver the homes, business and industrial units, infrastructure that the country needs; planning should respond positively to wider opportunities for growth; always seek to secure high quality design and a good standard of amenity for existing and future occupants; support the transition to a low carbon future; contribute to conserving and enhancing the natural environment and reducing pollution; actively manage patterns of growth to make the fullest possible use of public transport, walking and cycling, and focus significant development in locations which are or can be made sustainable.
Section 1 advises on the Government’s commitment to securing economic growth in order to create jobs and prosperity, advising that planning should encourage and not act as an impediment to economic growth.

Section 4 advises that encouragement should be given to solutions which support reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and reduce congestion.

Paragraph 31 advises that Local authorities should work with neighbouring authorities and transport providers to develop strategies for the provision of viable infrastructure necessary to support sustainable development, including large scale facilities such as rail freight interchanges.

Paragraph 32 requires all developments that generate significant amounts of movement to be supported by a Transport Statement or Transport Assessment; promotes the use of opportunities for sustainable transport modes to reduce the need for major transport infrastructure; and advises that development should only be prevented or refused on transport grounds where the residual cumulative impacts of development are severe.

Paragraph 35 encourages the use of sustainable transport modes for the movement of goods or people.

Section 7 advises on the importance of good design as a key aspect of sustainable development.

Section 10 seeks to ensure new development takes account of climate change and flooding. Paragraph 103 advises that new development should ensure flood risk is not increased elsewhere.

Section 11 seeks to ensure the natural environment is conserved and enhanced, including consideration of the impacts of new development in relation to noise, air and light pollution.

Section 12 advises on the need to ensure heritage assets and their settings are conserved and enhanced.

7.3 West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (2014)

The West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (JCS) provides an up to date evidence base and considers the current Government requirements for plan making as it has been prepared in full conformity with the NPPF. Policies of particular relevance are:

The JCS sets out a number of Spatial Objectives which include:

- Ensuring new development promotes the use of sustainable travel modes.
- To strengthen and diversify West Northamptonshire’s economy by taking advantage of our internationally well-placed location, strategic transport network and proximity to London and Birmingham.

Policy S1: The Distribution of Development – development will be concentrated primarily in and adjoining the principal urban area of Northampton.

Policy S7: Provision of Jobs – provision will be made for a minimum net increase of 28,500 jobs in the period 2008-2029.

Policy S8: Distribution of Jobs – the majority of new job growth will be concentrated within the principal urban area of Northampton.

Policy S10: Sustainable Development Principles – seeks to ensure development achieves, amongst other things, the highest standards of sustainable design; protects, conserves and
enhances the natural and built environment and heritage assets and their settings; minimises pollution from noise, air and run-off.

Policy S11: Low Carbon and Renewable Energy – major development should contribute to reductions in carbon emissions and adapt to the effects of climate change. All new non-residential developments over 500m² gross internal floorspace should achieve a minimum rating of at least BREEAM very good standard or equivalent, subject to viability.

Policy C2: New Developments – new development will be expected to achieve the modal shift targets by maximising travel choice from non-car modes.

Policy C3: Strategic Connections – the priorities to retain and enhance West Northamptonshire’s Strategic connections for economic advantage are to work in partnership with, and support the relevant transport providers in order to secure the introduction of additional rail services to the wider North West for passenger and freight movements along the M6 corridor to relieve congestion on the road network.

Policy BN5: The Historic Environment and Landscape – heritage assets and their settings will be conserved and enhanced.

Policy BN7: Flood Risk – new development proposals will need to demonstrate that there is no increased risk of flooding to existing properties and is (or can be) safe and shall seek to improve existing flood risk management.

Policy BN9: Planning for Pollution Control – development proposals likely to cause pollution or result in exposure to pollution or risks to safety will need to demonstrate that they provide opportunities to minimise and where possible reduce pollution.

Policy INF2: Contributions to Infrastructure Requirements – new development should provide the necessary on and off-site infrastructure that is required to support it and mitigate its impact.

8. CONSULTATIONS/ REPRESENTATIONS

8.1 NBC Public Protection has been consulted and will respond directly to the developer with regard to issues relating to air quality, contamination, noise and lighting. Discussions will be ongoing to inform the Statement of Common Ground.

8.2 Consultees such as the Local Highway Authority, Highways England and the Environment Agency have been consulted and will respond directly to the developer.

8.3 The consultation process requires members of the public and interested parties to direct comments to the developer, and not to the Local Authority. Any comments received by the Local Authority would be forwarded to the developer for consideration.

9. APPRAISAL

9.1 In respect of this consultation, consideration should be given to the impacts arising from the development on Northampton Borough. These main impacts are considered as follows:

Transport

9.2 Vehicular access to the site is proposed from the A43 via a new grade separated junction, with an estate spine road serving the site running west to east. A vehicular access underpass is proposed on the route of the main estate road under Northampton Road. During the construction phase, the existing left in, left out access on the A43 will be used to access the site.
9.3 Pedestrian and cycle access to the site will be provided from Northampton Road via foot and cycleway connections both to the east and west of Northampton Road in the vicinity of the underpass. A continuous off-carriageway foot/cycleway is proposed to be provided along Northampton Road. There are existing bus stops on Northampton Road, and a bus interchange is proposed within the site providing connectivity to the wider area.

9.4 Each of the proposed units would be served by their own adjacent car and HGV parking provision, to be provided in accordance with Northamptonshire Parking Standards.

9.5 There are three existing public rights of way through the main SRFI site that will need to be altered to facilitate the proposed development, including a footpath to Collingtree. Public Footpath KX13 between Collingtree and Blisworth will be diverted around the eastern edge of the Main SRFI Site, crossing the Northampton Loop Line and running down the edge of retained farmland.

9.6 The development proposals include improvements to J15a of the M1 including the following:

- Pre-development works to facilitate carriageway widening and configuration, including development of a construction compound to the east of the junction and partial demolition of existing carriageway;
- Widening and signalisation of existing northern roundabout;
- Widening of A5123 approach; widening of M1 southbound off-slip approach;
- Widening of A43 northbound approach to northern roundabout;
- Reconfiguration of existing southern roundabout to provide signalised T-Junction;
- Provision of two lane free flow slip on the A43 southbound;
- Provision of new link road between southern junction to M1 northbound on and off slips;
- Widening of A43 northbound approach to southern junction; and
- Provision of ecological mitigation to the south-west of the J15a, to mitigate habitat loss at the main SRFI Site, and landscaping around the junction. This is Associated Development and does not form part of the J15a NSIP (NSIP 2).

9.7 The Transport Assessment concludes that the proposed improvements to J15a of the M1 will “provide a significant benefit to the operation of the wider highway network, with trips returning to major routes and away from, in some cases, inappropriate minor routes”. In addition, the Assessment concludes that the Rail Central highway mitigation proposals mitigate against both the Rail Central and the Northampton Gateway developments. Further work is proposed prior to the submission of the application to assess whether further mitigation is required.

9.8 In considering the impacts of the development proposal, it is considered that in addition to the proposals for the Northampton Gateway, account should be taken of the cumulative impacts of the development proposal alongside existing committed development and allocated sites within the JCS. In particular the cumulative impacts of allocated Sustainable Urban Extensions (SUEs)
at Northampton South SUE (Collingtree), Land South of Brackmills SUE (Hardingstone) and Daventry International Rail Freight Terminal (DIRFT) should be considered.

9.9  The timing of the delivery of the rail terminal and ensuring appropriate rail network capacity is available is vital to ensure appropriate mitigation in respect of highway, noise and air quality impacts and impact on surrounding amenity, and to ensure that the relevant infrastructure is in place for the associated warehousing.

9.10  The Highway Authority, Highways England and Network Rail have been consulted directly and will respond directly to the developer.

Noise

9.11  The proposed development will have the potential to generate noise during the construction phase, including associated highway improvements to J15a and the surrounding road networks, and during the operational phase, with additional freight train movements and associated freight activity, increase movement of heavy goods vehicles and other operational activities associated with the proposed warehouse uses on site, including plant and machinery.

9.12  The nearest receptors within Northampton Borough are Collingtree village and Hunsbury, located some distance to the north and north east of the site beyond the M1 motorway, with the site area around J15a in closer proximity.

9.13  A draft Code of Construction Practice and Traffic Management Plan have been submitted as part of the consultation documents for consideration. NBC Public Protection has been consulted and will respond directly to the developer to ensure appropriate mitigation measures are proposed to mitigate any impacts on the amenity of properties affected within the Borough.

Air Quality

9.14  An Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) is located along the M1 corridor situated beyond the Northampton Loop and fields to the north east of the site. The Council issued a Scoping Opinion to the Planning Inspectorate on 11th January 2016 drawing attention to the Air Quality Management Area along the M1 between junctions 15 and 16.

9.15  The draft Environmental Statement (ES) has considered impacts arising from the proposed development during construction and operational phases. The impact of dust in particular during the construction phase is considered to be high and will require appropriate mitigation.

9.16  The draft ES considers the operational impact of the proposed development on existing South Northamptonshire receptors to be negligible. It is not clear as to whether consideration has been given to the M1 corridor AQMA and further clarification should be sort in this regard.

9.17  The detailed assessment of the impacts with regard to Air Quality will be considered by NBC Public Protection and a formal consultation response will be sent to the developers in this regard.

Lighting

9.18  The development will have the potential to impact in respect of light pollution both during the construction and operational phases. The impacts on the nearest residential receptors in Collingtree and Hunsbury will be distant views and it is not considered the proposal would lead to any undue impact in this regard. The cumulative impacts of both this scheme and the Northampton Gateway Scheme will need to be considered.
9.19 NBC Public Protection will liaise further with and provide more detailed comments directly to the applicants.

**Landscape and Visual Impact**

9.20 The very nature of the scale of the development proposed will lead to significant changes in the character of the landscape from one predominantly dominated by arable farmland to one dominated by large scale employment units, rail infrastructure and associated infrastructure which will be permanent and irreversible.

9.21 The submitted details indicate that the height of the tallest building would be 18.5m to the ridge, with extensive landscaping, screening and open space created around the main development site. The submitted illustrative Masterplan indicates an area of mounding and landscaping to the south of Milton Malsor extending across to the north west of the site and the boundary of the site within the Northampton Loop railway line. The intermodal area would be located adjacent to the Northampton Loop with limited landscaping in this area of the site.

9.22 The nearest residential properties within Northampton Borough are situated within Collingtree and Hunsbury to the north of the M1 motorway. Views of the SRFI site would be limited and distant, being situated beyond the motorway, the fields to the north of the application site and beyond the existing Northampton Loop railway line.

**Employment**

9.23 The ES advises that it is estimated that an investment of the scale proposed by Rail Central will directly generate 2,677 person years of direct employment.

9.24 Over the 10 year construction period the ES estimates the creation of 301 jobs supported annually in the Wider Impact Area (Northampton, Daventry, Milton Keynes, South Northamptonshire and Wellingborough) during the construction period.

9.25 In respect of employment related to the operational phase of the development, the ES advises that within the Wider Impact Area, a total of 9,125 net additional jobs would be supported.

9.26 The proposal has the potential to contribute significantly to the provision of jobs within the locality of the site contributing towards the required provision of 28,500 jobs as identified in the JCS for the period 2008-2029, and is broadly consistent with the priority of the East Midlands Strategic Economic Plan to deliver increased levels of private sector investment.

**Ecology**

9.27 National and local planning policy seek to conserve and enhance biodiversity and ensure, where impacts are unavoidable, appropriate mitigation is sought.

9.28 The majority of the site currently comprises agricultural land with intervening hedgerows and trees along field edges, and water courses. The nature and scale of development will inevitably have considerable ecological impacts that will need to be off-set.

9.29 The Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits Special Protection Area (SPA) is within 6km of the SRFI site. Whilst some distance from the site, the submitted details acknowledge that the site is designated for bird species that may roost on agricultural land at considerable distances from the SPA.

9.30 In addition to proposed landscaping areas within the main SRFI site which are intended to provide opportunities for habitat creation and enhancement and leisure opportunities, part of the proposed ecological off-set to mitigate ecological impacts is proposed through a 26 hectare area
adjacent to J15a, to the south of the motorway. Further ecological survey work is required, however, the Ecological Mitigation Plan submitted, suggests how ecological mitigation may be brought forward by retaining existing marshland and woodland, renovated barns renovated barns for owls and bats, new marshland areas and waterbodies, hedgerows and new vegetation including native trees and shrubs and providing ditches alongside hedgerows could create “blueway” links to enhance habitat value.

9.31 The County Ecologist and Natural England have been consulted and will respond directly to the developer in this regard.

**Flood Risk and Drainage**

9.32 National and local policy requirements seek to ensure new development takes account of climate change and flooding. Paragraph 103 advises that new development should ensure flood risk is not increased elsewhere.

9.33 The majority of the site lies within Flood Zone 1 (low probability, having less than 1 in 1,000 annual probability of river or sea flooding), with some low lying areas in the western section of the site and areas immediately adjacent to Milton Malsor Brook in Flood Zone 3.

9.34 Mitigation measures are proposed with the realignment of Milton Malsor Brook and an unnamed watercourse around the proposed units to provide suitable capacity flows. The submitted details indicate that infiltration is not viable, and in the majority of cases each building and associated hardstanding will contain storage features to deal with their own attenuation requirements, likely to be in the form of underground storage tanks. Additional opportunities for surface water storage would be likely to include attenuation ponds/basins within landscaped areas.

9.35 The Environment Agency, NCC Lead Local Flood Authority and Anglian Water have been consulted directly on the development proposals and will respond directly to the developer.

10. **CONCLUSION**

10.1 The proposed scheme is in line with the Government's objectives and long term vision for a low carbon sustainable transport system for economic growth and the promotion of a transfer of freight from road to rail. The development would make a valuable contribution towards the economic growth of Northampton and the provision of jobs. Notwithstanding this, a development of such magnitude will inevitably have impacts and appropriate and proportionate mitigation should be sought.

10.2 In considering the impacts of the development proposal, particularly in regard to transport, air quality, noise and light pollution impacts, account should be taken of the cumulative impacts of the development proposal alongside existing committed development and allocated sites within the JCS. In particular the cumulative impacts of allocated Sustainable Urban Extensions (SUEs) at Northampton South SUE (Collingtree), Land South of Brackmills SUE (Hardingstone), Daventry International Rail Freight Terminal (DIRFT) and proposals for the Northampton Gateway. Appropriate mitigation should be sought in respect of these impacts to ensure the impacts of the development within Northampton Borough are appropriately managed.

10.3 The timing of the delivery of the rail terminal at an early stage of the development and ensuring appropriate rail network capacity is available is vital to ensure appropriate mitigation in respect of highway, noise and air quality impacts and impact on surrounding amenity, and to ensure that the relevant infrastructure is in place for the associated warehousing.

10.4 The development proposals will be required to have regard to Northamptonshire County Council Parking Standards (2016).
10.5 The nearest receptors within Northampton Borough are Collingtree village and Hunsbury located to the north of the M1 motorway. The noise impacts of the development proposal both during construction and operation, will therefore need to be considered in relation to these receptors, and the requirement for an appropriate Construction and Environmental Management Plan to ensure any impacts during construction are satisfactorily mitigated.

10.6 Provision should be made for the early implementation of proposed areas of bunding and landscaping, and subsequent maintenance, to ensure the proposed mitigation for the visual impacts of the development are achieved at an early stage.

10.7 Policy S11 of the JCS requires that major development should contribute to reductions in carbon emissions and adapt to the effects of climate change. The development should seek to achieve a minimum rating of at least BREEAM very good standard or equivalent.

10.8 Appropriate measures should be put in place to ensure there is no increased risk of flooding in the area and appropriate drainage mitigation and ongoing maintenance is in place both during the construction and operational phases of the development.

10.9 Policy S11 of the JCS requires that major development should contribute to reductions in carbon emissions and adapt to the effects of climate change. The development should seek to achieve a minimum rating of at least BREEAM very good standard or equivalent.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 N/2018/0434.

12. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

12.1 None.

13. SUMMARY AND LINKS TO CORPORATE PLAN

13.1 In reaching the attached recommendations regard has been given to securing the objectives, visions and priorities outlined in the Corporate Plan together with those of associated Frameworks and Strategies.