

### **Comments of Project Fields Concerning Washwood Heath (EXAM 137 - 139)**

Project Fields supports the revised AXA Real Estate proposal for the Washwood Heath Rolling Stock Maintenance Depot (RSMD), as set out in the AXA Real Estate letter to the House of Commons HS2 Bill Select Committee dated 10 December 2014.

The proposal is seen as a positive and immediate opportunity to tackle and mitigate the scale of unemployment the City of Birmingham faces whilst also fulfilling the requirements for the RSMD. The proposal also offers a way through to a solution that could potentially allow policy GA6 to be removed from the BDP.

We note however that we are not aware of what the full relocation opportunity was for the RSMD.

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Key points to support our response:

- The revised proposal will free land for immediate employment development (18-24mths).
- Washwood Heath is an area which is one of the more deprived areas of Birmingham. It is an area of low skills, low employment and an area known for its persistent worklessness. The area would therefore benefit positively from the proposal.
- The release of the land will form part of what has been identified as the “East Birmingham Prospectus for Growth” (launched February 2015). This initiative intends to create jobs and homes in an area of the city that is in desperate need for both. The proposal for Washwood Heath is planned to generate and contribute up to 2,500 jobs to the prospectus with investment also in skills and training for local people.

The proposal has another positive effect which is that it will significantly diminish the need for policy GA6. This is for the following reasons:

- The Washwood Heath site was part of the 2010 draft local plan as best quality strategic employment land and the main location for any new employment development. The site was removed from the plan due to the land instead being allocated to the priorities of HS2 Ltd. This requirement has now been removed.
- Policy GA6 justified the release of the Green Belt as there was believed to be a shortfall in good employment land. But with this land being made available the exceptional circumstance the Birmingham City Council believed existed is no longer valid.
- Furthermore, the land available at Washwood Heath will fall only 7ha short of the 40ha allocated for B1/B2 development in policy GA6. The principal infrastructure is already in place here without need for significant financial investment. The remaining 40ha for B8 use noted within policy GA6 was a long term view which has yet to be proven.