Solihull’s HS2 ambition officially unveiled

- Solihull’s vision for HS2 Interchange formally submitted
- Mixed-use development to be one of Europe’s best connected destinations for business, leisure and living

The first step towards creating a new, mixed-use destination for the HS2 Interchange Station on the outskirts of Solihull has been taken today.

The UK Central Solihull Urban Growth Company (UGC) has formally asked HS2 Ltd to upgrade the current plans for a parkway-style station on the 350-acre site known as Arden Cross, situated on Junction 6 of the M42 motorway adjacent to Birmingham Airport and the National Exhibition Centre.

The UGC has outlined the changes that will need to be made to the Hybrid Act to deliver the infrastructure to develop a new, fully-connected, urban quarter with the HS2 Interchange Station at its heart.

The UGC, backed by Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council and the West Midlands Combined Authority, is the first organisation to formally propose such changes to an HS2 station site and Managing Director, Huw Rhys Lewis, said it was a sign of the region’s ambition.

“This is Solihull’s chance to make the most of HS2’s arrival, so we have to be challenging to ensure our vision becomes a reality,” he said.

“We want to create sustainable jobs, homes and commercial and leisure space for the people who live and work in the region, but the proposed parkway station won’t allow that to happen.

“The UK Central Hub is already home to Birmingham Airport, the NEC, Jaguar Land Rover, Birmingham Business Park and Arden Cross. Our recently published Hub Growth & Infrastructure Plan coordinates those organisations’ individual plans, looks at the infrastructure needed to make it all happen, and predicts the creation of up to 77,500 jobs, up to 4,000 homes, 775,000 sq metres of commercial space and up to £4.1bn GVA as a result.

“But make no mistake, the development of the Arden Cross site is absolutely critical in delivering these big ambitions which is why we’re formally requesting much more than a parkway style station.”

Changes range from altering bridges, moving roads and creating new landscape features to revising car park layouts, incorporating pedestrianised connections and making provisions for other future public transport links.

The cost of the proposed changes to the existing plans will be met by the West Midlands Combined Authority through its HS2 Growth Strategy Fund secured as part of its Devolution Agreement.
Andy Street, Mayor of the West Midlands, said: “HS2 is one of the biggest public sector infrastructure investments ever in this country and the West Midlands is uniquely positioned to benefit from this project.

“This submission demonstrates our ambition in making the most of HS2. What we are looking for is to go beyond a railway station and create something far bolder.

“HS2 will put this part of the region at the heart of the UK’s high speed rail network, with easy access to an international airport and the UK’s motorway network. This all combines to make it the best connected place in the country, something we need to make the most of.”

Chris Loughran, Deputy Chair for Delivery at GBSLEP, said: “We’ve long recognised the potential of the UK Central Hub to drive nationally-significant economic growth. Getting the station and its immediate surroundings right is absolutely critical to ensure that we maximise the benefits of HS2’s arrival in Greater Birmingham and Solihull for our businesses and our communities.

“We welcome the Urban Growth Company’s ambition and I’m pleased to say that their proposals have the full backing of the GBSLEP Board.”

HS2 Ltd is expected to begin evaluating the requests immediately with a decision likely later in the year.

Meanwhile, the UGC is currently finalising its Framework Plan which will coordinate infrastructure investment and guide future development. It is also finalising a comprehensive Value Capture Toolkit to enable the public sector to capture the value of infrastructure enhancements to fund the infrastructure itself. The toolkit has been requested by the Combined Authority and central Government for potential use on other infrastructure projects. Both documents are set to be published in autumn 2017.

- 653 words -

Editors’ notes:

The Urban Growth Company (UGC) is a special-purpose delivery vehicle created to specifically realise the full economic potential of the HS2 Interchange Station and related infrastructure. The UGC - supported by Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) and the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) - has ambitions to coordinate and facilitate infrastructure investment to create a globally renowned point of connection and a major engine for economic growth on a regional and national scale.

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