



Meeting note

Status	Final
Author	James Bunten
Date	16 June 2015
Meeting with	Highways England
Venue	Temple Quay House, Bristol
Attendees	Carl Stockton – Highways England Sara Moreton – Highways England Richard Collinson – Atkins Limited Susannah Guest – Infrastructure Planning Lead Hannah Nelson – EIA and Land Rights Advisor James Bunten – Case Officer
Meeting objectives	Initial meeting to discuss potential nationally significant infrastructure project application.
Circulation	All attendees

Summary of key points discussed and advice given:

The Planning Inspectorate (the Inspectorate) advised on its openness policy, that any advice given will be recorded and placed on our website under section 51 of the Planning Act 2008 as amended (the 2008 Act) and also noted that any advice given under section 51 does not constitute legal advice upon which applicants (or others) can rely.

Project Introduction

Highways England provided an overview of the project history and gave a brief explanation of the need for the proposal. They noted the relationships with other key developments in the area. For example, the progress of construction of Liverpool 2 and the role and membership of the City Region Port Access Group was discussed. Highways England indicated the level of on-going engagement with the relevant local authorities and noted the current construction of the Thornton Link Road.

Highways England explained that there were currently two options to deliver the improvements for the A5036 Port of Liverpool route: an on-line and an off-line option with a number of sub-options within each.

The on-line option would include several works along the existing roadway and junctions of the A5036 and the off-line option would include the construction of a new

highway which would pass through the Rimrose Valley Country Park. Highways England considered that both options would likely require a Development Consent Order (DCO) however this may be subject to change as the proposals evolve.

The Inspectorate noted the definitions of a highways scheme contained in the 2008 Act and in particular the categories and thresholds associated with construction, alteration and improvement schemes. The Inspectorate encouraged Highways England to prepare a "s22 plan", particularly if the on-line scheme were progressed, to ensure that there was clarity about how the scheme would meet the definition and specific threshold of being an Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project and therefore require a DCO.

The Inspectorate when discussing the justification for the scheme, suggested it could be helpful to think about how the relationships with commercial and other developments in the vicinity of the scheme were being presented when preparing consultation material in respect of the broader justification of the particular project.

Consultation

Highways England summarised some of the engagement with local communities to date regarding options that had been previously considered and noted that a leaflet was in preparation setting out the two options currently under consideration. In the terms of the 2008 Act this leaflet would comprise non-statutory consultation for the purpose of data collection and sharing information.

Highways England outlined their on-going discussions with relevant local authorities, the Port Access group, Natural England as well as local residents' groups.

Environmental

The Inspectorate explained the EIA scoping process to Highways England, highlighting the benefit of identifying environmental issues at an early stage in consultation with statutory bodies to ensure these could be addressed at the pre-application stage. The Inspectorate advised that EIA scoping and formal consultation periods should not be overlapped to avoid confusion for statutory parties and that the Christmas period should be avoided to maximise the potential for statutory consultee responses.

In response to a query from the Inspectorate about the formal status of Rimrose Valley Country Park, Highway England noted that is designated in the Local Plan and includes a Local Nature Reserve and Site of Biological Importance. It has since been confirmed following the Publication Draft of the Local Plan which came out in January that the area is referred to as a Countryside Recreation Area under Policy NH5.

In addition, Highways England advised that European Sites are located in the surrounding area. The Inspectorate reminded the applicant that consideration would need to be given to the Habitat Assessment Regulations.

Highways England indicated that some of the environmental survey work had been commenced and further surveys have been planned. The Inspectorate emphasised the importance of speaking to consultees to agree data requirements and methodologies and the need for data to be up to date at the time of submission. Highways England confirmed that such consultations are underway.

Highways England noted that the initial optioneering work had been informed by traffic modelling based on 6-year old data. The intention was to up-date this data however the slippage in the opening of the Thornton Link road had delayed progress on this.

The Inspectorate advised that advice notes have been prepared on a range of topics, including [Advice Note 7: Environmental Impact Assessment: Preliminary Environmental Information, Screening and Scoping](#) and [Advice Note 10: Habitats Regulation Assessment](#).

Land acquisition

Highways England described that work is on-going to identify and engage with any land owners who would be affected by the two options.

Timescales

Highways England gave the following indicative timescales:

- Preferred Route Announcement – possible Q2/Q3 2017
- Scoping request – possible winter 2017
- Statutory consultation – possible early 2018
- Application submission – summer 2018

The Inspectorate noted that working towards a construction date of March 2020 would suggest formal submission of an application by late summer 2018.

Specific decisions / follow up required?

Once a request for a scoping opinion had been received, a project page would be created on the National Infrastructure webpages if one had not already been created.

For continued dialogue between Highways England and the Inspectorate about the likelihood of a scheme requiring a DCO and any subsequent timetabling implications.