



Meeting note

File reference

Status

FINAL

Author

Robert Ranger

Date

9 August 2017

Meeting with

A1 Morpeth to Felton

Venue

Temple Quay House, Bristol

Attendees

Highways England

Nanette Hoyle – Project Manager

Jo Mahoney – Assistant Project Manager

Darlene Procter – DCO Manager

David Morrow – WSP|PB

Gemma Newell – WSP|PB

The Planning Inspectorate

Gareth Leigh – Infrastructure Planning Lead

Katherine King – EIA and Land Rights Manager

Emre Williams – Case Manager

Robert Ranger – Case Manager

Meeting

objectives

Project Update Meeting

Circulation

All attendees

Summary of key points discussed and advice given:

The Planning Inspectorate advised on its openness policy, explaining that any advice given would be recorded and placed on the Planning Inspectorate website under section 51 of the Planning Act 2008 (as amended) (the PA2008). Any advice given under section 51 would not constitute legal advice upon which applicants (or others) could rely.

The Applicant (HE) and the Planning Inspectorate (the Inspectorate) case team introduced themselves and their respective roles.

The Inspectorate noted that the project does not currently have a project page on the National Infrastructure Planning website. HE noted the requirement for this and suggested that they contact the Inspectorate in a few months when more detail of the Proposed Development is available.

Project Update

HE gave an overview of the Proposed Development. The Proposed Development is part of the Morpeth to Ellingham improvements described in the Road Investment Strategy. It includes the upgrading of parts of the single carriageway of the A1 north of Morpeth to a dual carriageway. This is likely to be split into a number of projects. This meeting was focused on the A1 between Morpeth and Felton. A further project was mentioned, that of the A1 between Alnwick to Ellingham however it was made clear that that project would be a separate Development Consent Order (DCO) application and have no land overlap with the Morpeth to Felton scheme.

In relation to the A1 Morpeth to Felton Proposed Development, public consultation took place at the end of 2016. A Preferred Route Announcement is anticipated in autumn 2017; statutory consultation under PA2008 is expected to take place in spring 2018 with submission of an application for a DCO in autumn 2018. The scheme is intended to begin construction in 2019/2020.

HE explained that the A1 is an important strategic route and that it is proposed to upgrade it north of Newcastle. The existing route has several challenges, including a difficulty in providing diversionary routes and is built to inconsistent highways standards. It has approximately 80 junctions (public and private) on the stretch proposed to be improved with an average speed of circa 53mph. Heavy Good Vehicle (HGV) traffic is not high relative to the rest of the country but has considerable impacts locally. Peak traffic is considerably higher than when the road is flowing freely and it can be difficult to overtake.

HE hopes that the project will help to support economic growth in the region. The scheme will contribute to a safer and more free-flowing network. It is also hoped that the scheme will improve the environment, particularly in relation to noise.

The Morpeth to Felton Proposed Development is approximately 8 miles or 13km long, within which there is a 6km stretch where three options have been identified. One of these options is offline, with the others being closer to the line of the existing A1. All options would require a DCO. Where the existing A1 is off the new dual route it would be de-trunked and would become a local road. The scheme includes overbridges and grade separated junctions.

Challenges for the Proposed Development include the Coquet Bridge Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) at the northern end of the scheme, and the diversion of a National Grid gas pipeline from Aberdeen that will be required by any of the three options.

Environmental issues include Badgers and Bats, as well as aquatic animals. Surveys are currently being carried out, including ecological surveys and surveys of agricultural land. There are two Noise Protection Areas potentially impacted by the scheme, and 5 ancient woodlands. The scheme is not expected to have an impact on any Air Quality Areas. 7 listed buildings may be affected.

HE is using its own traffic model to develop the scheme; the Local Planning Authority has been consulted on the modelling and has not raised any concerns.

HE feel that key stakeholders at present include the local authority, Northumberland County Council, the local parish councils, and the Members of Parliament. Consultation with potentially affected landowners has been considerable and is ongoing; there will

be more work in the future to engage with parish councils and statutory bodies in particular.

HE will seek to acquire the land required by agreement, but it is possible that the DCO application may include compulsory acquisition. There are some 170 land parcels and 250 titles potentially affected by the scheme.

HE expects to submit a scoping request to the Inspectorate in October 2017.

The Inspectorate drew HE's attention to Advice Note 7 on scoping and the new format for scoping responses that is currently being introduced. HE were asked to provide the Inspectorate with at least 2 weeks' notice prior to submission of a scoping request; it was noted that the project page on the National Infrastructure Portal website would need to be in place before the scoping request.

The Inspectorate highlighted the value of early engagement to allow for effective resource planning.

HE explained that there was no consultation activity proposed until after the Preferred Route Announcement. The Inspectorate advised that it would be helpful to avoid running consultation close to or parallel with the 28 day consultation undertaken by the Inspectorate on the scoping request.

HE explained that the DCO is likely to be informed by the input of a buildability contractor and so will not require extensive flexibility in the description of the development. The Inspectorate advised that anything relied upon as mitigation in the Environmental Statement must be seen to be secured, and therefore is often best included in the DCO.

On submission of a draft DCO for comments, the Inspectorate advised that it was important that the project description was consistent across application documents, and that any comments that the Inspectorate can provide on draft documents will be more helpful if the documents are complete and provided with good time. It is normally best to share draft documents after consultation activities have concluded, with some 6 weeks for comments, about 3 to 6 months prior to submission.

Specific decisions / follow up required?

HE will continue to speak regularly to the Inspectorate, and will highlight when there are particular issues or developments that would justify further meetings.

It is anticipated that there will be a further meeting focused on environmental issues in anticipation of the scoping request which will take place in September 2017, and a further project update meeting in February 2018.