

This Written Representation (WR) details the considerations by Butterfly Conservation (BC) of the impact of the scheme on Lepidoptera, butterflies and moths. It is not considered necessary for any matters raised in this WR to be set out in a Statement of Common Ground between BC and Highways England (HE).

BC wishes to ensure that effects on chalk grassland and hedgerow habitats that currently support wildlife interests, and especially butterflies and moths, are fully accounted for as part of the proposed development, and follow the principles of the mitigation hierarchy to limit any adverse effects, and provide for their mitigation and compensation as appropriate. BC is satisfied that as far as the interests of butterflies and moths are concerned, the Environmental Statement provided by HE has met that test.

The road scheme provides a substantial opportunity for creation of chalk grassland habitats, both along the road corridor and adjacent to Parsonage Down where chalk spoil would be placed. BC's view is that, if implemented, the habitats created would make a meaningful long-term contribution to wildlife conservation and provide a lasting legacy of investment in the natural environment integrated into investment in transport infrastructure. In particular, there is potential to create an effective habitat link between the western and eastern parts of Salisbury Plain SSSI that would be difficult if not possible to achieve in any other way. BC's view is that, properly implemented, the extent of chalk grassland creation would be on a scale unparalleled elsewhere as far as we are aware, and would make a substantial and long-term contribution to the conservation of chalk grassland habitat in the UK.

The design principles that underpin the proposed chalk grassland habitat creation are simple, based on creation of grasslands on infertile substrates. In essence, with little or no topsoil added to the bare chalk mineral, and with appropriately source wildflower seed, diverse and beautiful landscapes of considerable value to butterflies and moths can be established in a short time. In addition, the creation of infertile grasslands rich in wildflowers and insects, costs much less to maintain than grasslands created by the standard prescription of deep topsoil sown with amenity grass seed, providing an additional legacy of lowered maintenance costs for HE.

BC supports the proposals for chalk grassland creation as outlined in the submitted version of the OLEMP. BC has expertise and experience to bring to the table on landscape design and implementation of chalk grassland creation, on soil management during construction, and ongoing habitat management, as well as in community engagement to help realise and communicate the vision. Much of this experience was gained during the planning, design and implementation of the A354 Weymouth Relief Road, Dorset, when the now BC officer worked for Dorset County Council, the local highway authority.

As part of the Weymouth Relief Road scheme, some 7ha of chalk and limestone grassland habitats were created on road verge cuttings and adjacent land prior to the scheme opening in 2011. Regular monitoring by BC has shown that, as of the end of 2018, 30 species of butterfly have been recorded on the slope, representing over half of the native butterfly species of the UK. Colonies of notable species have established over that time including Adonis Blue, Chalkhill Blue and Small Blue, together with Dingy Skipper and Wall.

The Examining Authority should be aware that providing the principles of habitat creation set out by HE in the OLEMP are implemented, BC is confident of similar success to that achieved on the A354 in the landscape proposals for the A303 scheme. Members of the A303 project team have visited the A354 to learn from this example, and references to the Weymouth Relief Road, its landscaping and green bridges are found in various parts of the ES.

In the event that the scheme receives confirmation of its Development Consent Order, BC would be pleased to be invited by the contractor to join the proposed independent Landscape Steering Group to provide independent advice on the development and implementation of the Landscape and Ecological Management Plan for the scheme.