



The Planning Inspectorate

National Infrastructure
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All Interested Parties, Statutory Parties
and Other Persons

Your Ref:

Our Ref: TR010059

Date: 3 November 2020

Dear Sir/ Madam

Planning Act 2008 (as amended) and The Infrastructure Planning (Examination Procedure) Rules 2010 (as amended) – Rule 17

Application by Highways England for an Order Granting Development Consent for the A1 in Northumberland - Morpeth to Ellingham

Request for further information

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with an update on the progress of the application by Highways England for the A1 in Northumberland - Morpeth to Ellingham (the Application) and to issue a request for further information from all interested parties.

The Application is considered a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) which is a project considered by the Government to be over a certain size and of a type that is seen to be of national importance so that permission to build it needs to be given at national level by the relevant Secretary of State. Therefore, instead of applying to the local authority for planning permission, the applicant must apply to the Planning Inspectorate (the Inspectorate) for a Development Consent Order (DCO). An overview of the NSIP process for members of the public and others can be found in Advice Note 8 on the National Infrastructure Planning website.

In August 2020 the Inspectorate (on behalf of the secretary of State) accepted the Application for a DCO under the Planning Act 2008.

The application relates to the proposed upgrade to dual carriageway of 13 miles of the A1 in two stretches between Morpeth and Ellingham (the Project). Details of the Project and copies of the application documents are available to view online through the project page of the National Infrastructure Planning website:

<https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/projects/north-east/a1-in-northumberland-morpeth-to-ellingham/?ipcsection=docs>

The public health situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect social movements, public gatherings and work practices. At the same time, activity in the economy remains crucial, and businesses are adapting their procedures and ways of working to allow continued services and productivity. The Government recognises the importance of progressing the consideration and determination of applications for development, including NSIPs, and consequently we have been exploring ways of protecting public health while allowing the examination of the project to proceed in an open, fair and impartial manner.

While the latest Government announcements may mean that it is possible to hold the Preliminary Meeting and Issue Specific Hearings physically, it may be that certain individuals may not be able attend sessions or that future restrictions may prevent physical assemblies. With that in mind, consistent with the [Written Ministerial Statement of 13 May 2020](#), the Examining Authority (ExA) is considering whether and how virtual or part virtual (i.e. with some people in a room together and others joining via electronic means) events should proceed for this case, including the practical measures needed to ensure fair participation by all.

To this end, the ExA is exploring the possibility of conducting the initial meeting, known as the Preliminary Meeting (where the ExA will consider how the application should be examined) and subsequent Examination events, either partially or wholly without the need for public gatherings. Our Advice Note 8.6 provides guidance on how we are delivering National Infrastructure casework using virtual examination events and a link to that Advice Note is provided here:

<https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/legislation-and-advice/advice-notes/advice-note-8-6-virtual-examination-events/>

Nevertheless, any changes to the established approach will be made in the context of the Examination being principally a written process, and with full regard to the applicable legislation, Government guidance and the Inspectorate's purposes and values and its Customer Charter.

Questionnaire

Under Rule 17 of The Infrastructure Planning (Examination Procedures) Rules 2010, in order to progress with the Examination of this application, the ExA requests information from each of you about your availability and capability to engage with the Examination remotely, including the use of virtual events. Our specific questions are set out in this questionnaire:

https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=mN94WIhvq0iTIpmM5VcIjW1cnTqJcUZGgycYD_YzzH5UNkIZUDNFSDFDN1dJSjFGU01RRjA2TkIzQi4u

Your responses will help the ExA to decide:

- the format and arrangements for the Preliminary Meeting;
- what Hearings will be held; and
- what the arrangements and preparations for those Hearings will be.

Given current circumstances related to COVID-19, people may need to access events from their home, rather than their workplace or a public place. Please assume this to be the case. Could each person who may wish to speak at, or observe, the Preliminary

Meeting and any Hearings complete the table of questions.

We would be grateful for your response to this request by **16 November 2020**. Whilst there may appear to be a lot of questions, please be assured of the importance of obtaining your answers. We consider it crucial to hear your views on the way in which the application should be examined and they will help me to finalise my arrangements in due course.

This is an information-gathering exercise only and it does not commit the ExA to any particular action. No date has yet been set for the Preliminary Meeting. The responses to the questionnaire will not be published as they are considered to relate to practical matters around the timing and organisation of Examination events and do not constitute submissions on the merits of the Proposed Development. As such, they will not influence our Recommendation or, ultimately, the Secretary of State's decision.

We look forward to receiving your response to the questionnaire and thank everybody for their patience and understanding during these difficult times.

Yours faithfully,

Kevin Gleeson

Lead Member of the Panel of Examining Inspectors

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