



## Meeting note

<b>Project name</b>	A358 Taunton to Southfields
<b>Status</b>	<b>Final</b>
<b>Author</b>	The Planning Inspectorate
<b>Date</b>	2 March 2021
<b>Meeting with</b>	Highways England
<b>Venue</b>	Microsoft Teams
<b>Meeting objectives</b>	Project inception meeting
<b>Circulation</b>	All attendees

### Summary of key points discussed and advice given

The Planning Inspectorate (the Inspectorate) advised that a note of the meeting would be taken and published on its website in accordance with section 51 of the Planning Act 2008 (the PA2008). Any advice given under section 51 would not constitute legal advice upon which applicants (or others) could rely.

### Project overview

Highways England (the Applicant) provided an overview of the proposed scheme which would comprise the dualling of a section of the A358 between Southfields Roundabout on the A303 and junction 25 of the M5 at Taunton, including two new junctions and various alterations to existing junctions including the Nexus 25 roundabout. The Applicant explained that the existing single-lane road has various private accesses and local roads joining directly with it. It is often congested causing delays to road users and increasing the risk of accidents. To address this the Applicant was proposing to upgrade a nine-mile section of the A358 between Southfields Roundabout on the A303 and junction 25 of the M5 at Taunton to a high-quality dual carriageway.

The Applicant confirmed that two non-statutory options consultations were held from March to July 2017 and January to February 2018. Following these consultations, the Preferred Route Announcement was made in June 2019. The preferred route ('Pink Modified') was a modification of the Pink Route which received the most public support during options consultation, with the route aligning most closely with the existing A358 save for offline sections between Ash and the M5 and at Ashill. The Applicant explained that a Local Development Order had been made for a new employment site east of junction 25 of the M5, known as Nexus 25. Access roads for the Nexus 25 development, permitted by the former Taunton Deane Borough Council through a Local Development Order, were already open to traffic and had been designed cognisant of the proposed alignment of the A358 under the Applicant's scheme, if development consent was granted.

The Applicant stated that it had begun engagement with key stakeholders such as Somerset County Council (SCC), Somerset West and Taunton and South Somerset District Council and planned to increase engagement with landowners, communities and other key stakeholders in the coming months. Statutory consultation was scheduled to take place in autumn/winter 2021.

## **Environmental baseline**

The Applicant summarised the key aspects of the environmental baseline. The scheme was stated to be near two Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA), various heritage assets (including a registered park and garden), and ancient woodland. The potential for cumulative effects with the Nexus 25 site was noted. Visual receptors included settlements and views from the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and public rights of way. The Applicant discussed the biodiversity profile of the potential land take, noting its proximity to several designated sites, several watercourse crossings, areas of potential flooding, and sites of potential contamination. The Applicant confirmed that it would carry out a Habitats Regulations assessment, Water Framework Directive assessment, flood risk assessment and arboricultural impact assessment to support its Environmental Impact Assessment.

The Inspectorate queried what effect the Applicant was anticipating the scheme would have on the AQMAs. The Applicant advised that it was expecting improvements in air quality. The Inspectorate queried whether any environmental bodies had raised any concerns in respect of the assessment at this stage. The Applicant advised that consultation with environmental bodies was at an early stage.

The Inspectorate queried what the impact of ground works on the wider road networks would be. The Applicant stated that although the cut and fill earthworks would be largely balanced, there would be a degree of material haulage from one section of the scheme to the other. Ground investigations had not yet been undertaken, and the impacts on the wider road network during construction had not yet been assessed.

The Inspectorate queried which utilities would be affected by the scheme. The Applicant outlined the utilities assets that it was currently aware of and confirmed that its utilities survey was in the process of being updated.

## **Project timeline**

The Applicant stated that it intended to submit a geographic information system (GIS) shapefile depicting the scheme's red line boundary (RLB) to the Inspectorate in early March 2021. This would be followed by submission of a Scoping Report in late March 2021. The Applicant explained that the RLB would represent a worst-case interpretation of the RLB due to areas of uncertainty in the assessment to date.

The Applicant would request to meet with the Inspectorate following issue/receipt of the Scoping Opinion; prior to and following statutory consultation in autumn/winter 2021. Draft application documents would be provided to the Inspectorate for review in February 2022, followed by submission of the Development Consent Order application in summer 2022.