



## Meeting note

<b>Project name</b>	A358 Taunton to Southfields
<b>File reference</b>	TR010061
<b>Status</b>	<b>Final</b>
<b>Author</b>	The Planning Inspectorate
<b>Date</b>	27 May 2021
<b>Meeting with</b>	Highways England
<b>Venue</b>	Microsoft Teams
<b>Meeting objectives</b>	Project update
<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.

### Programme update

The Applicant advised that it had organised two rounds of community forums since the last project update meeting, and that several parish councils had attended each forum. The Applicant advised that it had received mixed but useful feedback from the forums in respect of what form people hoped the scheme would take, including desired local access routes.

Business forums and Walking, Cycling and Horse-riding (WCH) forums had also been held. Positive feedback was stated to have been received from the most recent business forum regarding the need for the scheme (particularly in respect of the ongoing local development such as Nexus 25), its setting, and effects on tourism. Positive feedback was also received from the WCH forums about the proposed design, and the Applicant was in the process of seeking further views on desired WCH routes.

The Inspectorate queried the potential impacts of the scheme on businesses in the immediate vicinity of the development, including those businesses over which Compulsory Acquisition powers were sought to be exercised. The Applicant advised that initial meetings were being held with affected landowners, and that work was underway to understand the impact of the scheme on businesses using the local network.

The Applicant advised that it had worked with Somerset County Council (SCC) to appoint an independent chair for the forums. It had also presented an early draft Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC) to representatives from SCC, Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWTC) and South Somerset District Council (SSDC). The local

authorities (LAs) were stated to be generally content with the proposed approach to consultation, although discussions were ongoing in respect of the Applicant's intention to hold in-person events as part of a hybrid consultation model subject to COVID-19 restrictions. Formal consultation on the SoCC is proposed for August 2021.

The Inspectorate advised the Applicant to consider the precedents being set by other Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) in respect of holding consultation events during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Applicant stated that it had sought input from SCC about its experience of the PA2008 process, noting the importance of early work on the Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) which the Applicant confirmed it was undertaking. The Applicant indicated that it would likely be producing a joint SoCG with SCC, SWTC and SSDC which would clearly present the views of each party, as the Applicant had been working with them all jointly. The Inspectorate encouraged early engagement on the SoCG.

The Inspectorate advised the Applicant to consider the potential impact of utilities diversions associated with the scheme given that some proposed works of this type had triggered the NSIP threshold in other schemes. The Applicant advised that it had completed its updated enquiries with utilities providers and was looking to incorporate protections for (and avoidance of) existing utilities assets into the scheme design where possible. At present no required works to utilities were expected to trigger any thresholds in the PA2008 and therefore would not be considered NSIPs in their own right.

## **Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Scoping Opinion**

The Applicant confirmed that it had received the Inspectorate's Scoping Opinion on 5 May 2021 and advised that it was in the process of reviewing this; however, it sought a few points of clarification regarding the approach to EIA.

In respect of major accidents and disasters, the Applicant sought feedback on its proposal to cover pipeline and landslip risks in a geotechnical brief rather than in the Environmental Statement (ES) geology and soils chapter. These would be the only specific risks not covered within the ES itself. The Inspectorate advised that this would be acceptable in principle provided that a clear cross-reference was included in the ES to where the relevant information was contained.

In respect of transboundary effects, the Applicant sought feedback on its proposal to provide the relevant details as a section within an upfront chapter of the ES, expanding on the information provided in the Scoping Report. The Inspectorate indicated that this was a common approach, but that the Applicant should ensure that it clearly presented its view on transboundary effects.

In respect of cultural heritage, the Applicant sought feedback on its proposal to address most (if any) impacts on archaeological heritage as construction effects. It also proposed not to include operational vibration in the wider ES as it had been scoped out, but was considering assessing impacts on buried archaeological remains beyond the scheme boundary due to vibration. The Inspectorate advised the Applicant to ensure that it demonstrated in the ES that cultural heritage impacts had been given consideration, and advised that it would be helpful to include a cross-reference in the operational

assessment to the text in the construction assessment of the ES cultural heritage chapter that discussed the permanent effects.

The Applicant clarified that it would be assessing impacts on local landscape character areas (LLCAs), however it sought feedback on its proposal to scope out a LLCA near/that encompassed part of the existing Southfields roundabout at the eastern end of the scheme. The Applicant proposed to add a dedicated left slip-road at this location, and anticipated no significant impacts. The Inspectorate advised that it would consider this further.

In respect of climate change, the Applicant clarified that it would be incorporating text into the baseline of the climate change chapter of the ES to describe the climate emergency, and would be accommodating SWTC's comments on emissions and the climate emergency by referring to the relevant policies that had been developed as part of the local plan; however, it was considering how to compare any changes identified in its assessment of emissions according to the SWTC policies. The wider Highways England was understood to be working on new guidance, however this would not be available in time for the publication of the Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR). The Inspectorate advised that it would consider if it could provide any advice on how to approach this matter; however, it clarified that the PEIR need only reflect the environmental information that was available at the time the PEIR was prepared.

### **Next steps**

The Applicant indicated that it expected to submit a suite of draft documents to the Inspectorate for review in February/ March 2022, and was targeting consultation for late September/ early October 2022; although these dates had not been finalised. The Applicant was aiming to arrange the next meeting with the Inspectorate prior to the consultation period, possibly in early September 2021. The Inspectorate noted the indicative timeline and confirmed that it was happy to review the draft SoCC in parallel with the LAs if desired.

The Inspectorate queried whether it was possible that there may be targeted consultations between the statutory consultation and the submission of the Development Consent Order application. The Applicant confirmed that this was possible.

### **Specific decisions/ follow-up required**

The following actions were agreed:

- The Applicant agreed to summarise the various points of clarification it was seeking in relation to the Inspectorate's Scoping Opinion by way of email after the meeting.
- The Inspectorate agreed to provide feedback where possible to the outstanding points of clarification sought on the Scoping Opinion, including that relating to the approach to local landscape character areas and the climate emergency.
- The Applicant agreed to share the draft SoCC with the Inspectorate in parallel with the relevant LAs.