

Meeting note

Project name A358 Taunton to Southfields

File reference TR010061

Status Final

Author The Planning Inspectorate

Date 29 September 2021

Meeting with National Highways (the Applicant)

Venue Microsoft Teams

Meeting objectives Project update

Circulation 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 explained that engagement with the local community had continued since the last project update on 27 May 2021 and cited events such as a community forum and a walking, cycling and horse-riding forum to evidence this. The Applicant remarked that engagement had been helpful and had fed into ongoing work on design.

The Applicant further stated that they were working closely with local authorities (LA) and explained that the draft Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC) had been issued to Somerset West and Taunton Council, South Somerset District Council and Somerset County Council and replies from these LAs had since been received and were being evaluated. The Inspectorate queried whether areas of concern had emerged amongst the LAs. The Applicant responded that the LAs were broadly supportive of the approach taken but noted LAs had queried the adequacy of the bounds for the mailing zone. The Applicant explained that their response had been to state that they believed the mailing zone to be adequate in size and pointed towards the further measures to communicate with the public, particularly emphasising their utilisation of digital communication means.

The Applicant noted that the SoCC would be published soon.

Public consultations

The Applicant explained that the statutory consultation will be held between 12 October 2021 and 22 November 2021. The Applicant stated that it is their aim to provide an array of events that blended digital tools with in-person events. The

Applicant stressed that the public consultation had been planned with flexibility in mind to enable them to react to any unforeseen changes such as rising Covid-19 case rates.

The Inspectorate requested an update on the use of community forums. The Applicant noted their commitment to use an independent chair and explained that, after a thorough selection process, they had selected Sue Mann to chair the most recent community forum and would use her again for the next forum to be held next week. The Applicant remarked that feedback on appointing an independent chair had been positive.

The Inspectorate requested an update on consultation with landowners. The Applicant made clear that discussions were ongoing and noted that many landowners were eager to first understand the views that emanated from the statutory consultation before voicing their positions. The Applicant further noted that landowners were noticeably varied in their position on the scheme with some voicing support, others remaining neutral and a third grouping evidently unsupportive of the Project. The Applicant expanded on this to note that, whereas LAs had remained broadly supportive of the Project, some Parish Councils had strong views against some parts of the preliminary design. They however stressed that the Project remained an ongoing process and that whereas discussions with some Parish Councils had begun heated in nature, discussions were now more constructive, and a willingness existed to discuss specifics such as design details etc.

Any other business

The Inspectorate queried if work had been started on a Statement of Common Ground (SoCG). The Applicant advised that a draft SoCG was submitted to the LAs in June with the purpose of gaining a sense of topics that will become relevant as the Project progresses. The Applicant stressed that this work was ongoing, and a working group meeting would be held with the LAs to go through the draft SoCG in more detail.

The Inspectorate queried whether the Applicant could provide an update on the expectation for application submission. The Applicant advised that they were still working on the expectation that the application was to be submitted in Summer 2022 but noted that it is difficult, at this stage of the Project, to provide a firm date. The Applicant advised that it intends to submit draft documents by February 2022 with the further expectation that key draft documents will be provided for review; and the proposed application submission date will be provided at the next project update meeting.