



Meeting note

Project name	A358 Taunton to Southfields
File reference	TR010061
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date	31 March 2022
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.

Update on Statutory Consultation 2021

The Applicant confirmed that the local authorities were consulted on the Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC) and the proposed scheme was publicised in local and national newspapers according to S48, and newspaper notices were posted explaining that the SoCC was available for inspection, in advance of consultation. The Applicant stated that the consultation ran from Tuesday 12 October 2021 to Monday 22 November 2021. The activities described in the SoCC had been undertaken; including mailing to households and businesses in the local community, E-bulletins, stakeholder briefings, letters and emails to statutory consultees and community organisations. The Applicant explained consultation was designed so that people could access information online as well as in person.

The Applicant received over 900 responses, which covered the geographical spread of communities along the route. They believed they had captured the groups of people who are directly impacted by the project. Over 600 people attended the in-person events, 275 people attended the webinars, 787 attended the virtual exhibition, there were over 2600 webpage views and more than 4000 views of the flythrough video.

Overarching themes

The Applicant explained that in the consultation feedback there was support and some concerns. The high-level feedback is set out in a report published on 14 February 2022 and was also presented at a community forum on 15 February 2022. The

Applicant summarised the overarching themes that came out of the consultation feedback, which included:

- positive feedback on the bypass of Henlade and the effect it will have on reducing traffic;
- general support for the increased access for walking, cycling and horse riding;
- concerns about:
 - junction layouts and the number of junctions;
 - general environmental impacts and some specific concerns raised by the statutory bodies; and
 - the potential impact of traffic at the M5 Junction 25 and Nexus roundabout, the Mattock's Tree Green Junction, Southfields roundabout, and local roads.

The Applicant explained they had presented three options for Capland Link at consultation and a majority of people supported Option 1, which was the connection between Capland Link and Village Road, this would place the link closer to the A358. The Applicant is considering all the feedback in detail and looking at their preliminary design to decide whether any changes are needed, however following a high-level review of responses, the Applicant expects that the fundamentals of the preliminary design will not change.

The Planning Inspectorate questioned whether the Applicant will be carrying out any targeted consultation on changes to the design made following the statutory consultation. The Applicant confirmed they are considering this as part of their review of the consultation responses.

Community Engagement

The Applicant is continuing to engage with parish councils and the wider community about the preliminary design. The Applicant explained that their design standards are set out in National Highways' Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB). NH objective is seeking to deliver a high-quality and high-performing dual carriageway. The Applicant stated that they are following the latest industry design standards, which will allow agricultural vehicles to safely use the new route. They are also working with Somerset County Council (SCC) who continue to support the scheme, particularly on the air quality issue and the demand on the road.

The Planning Inspectorate requested an update on landowner engagement. The Applicant explained that the talks with landowners have been constructive and that they are continuing to engage with a number of landowners affected along the route.

The Planning Inspectorate queried if there were any issues raised by prescribed consultees. The Applicant responded that they are engaging with specialist public bodies, including Natural England (NE), and potential effects on several species of bats (and other protected species) were one of the key issues that had been raised. The Applicant stated that it had undertaken a number of ecological surveys and was continuing to develop mitigation proposals in consultation with NE.

Update on Statement of Common Ground with Joint Councils

The Applicant has established working groups with the Joint Councils (SCC, Somerset West and Taunton Council, and South Somerset District Council). The Applicant also explained that a DCO working group has been established with meetings scheduled through to the summer, and it meets monthly to review the Statement of Common

Ground (SoCG) and discuss ongoing matters. The Applicant also mentioned that SoCGs are being progressed with the Environment Agency, NE, and Historic England.

Next steps

The next meeting will be organised for early June. The Applicant is expecting to submit draft documents in Summer 2022. The DCO submission is expected to be later in 2022.