

Date: 04 July 2024
Our ref: 476886
Your ref: TR010064



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Dear Ms Shanks

NSIP Reference Name / Code: M60/M62/M66 Simister Island Interchange TR010064

Natural England's Relevant Representations in respect of M60/M62/M66 Simister Island Interchange.

Examining Authority's submission deadline with a date of 05 July 2024

Natural England is a non-departmental public body. Our statutory purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced, and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

For any further advice on this consultation please contact the case officer Alice Watson at Alice.Watson@naturalengland.org.uk and copy to consultations@naturalengland.org.uk.

Yours sincerely

Alice Watson
Senior Officer – Sustainable Development & Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects
Cheshire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Lancashire Area Team

Natural England's Relevant Representations

1. Summary and conclusions of Natural England's advice

Summary of Natural England's advice

On the basis of information reviewed so far it is Natural England's advice that, in relation to identified nature conservation issues within its remit, there is no fundamental reason of principle why the project should not be permitted. Natural England is satisfied that all issues within our key areas of remit have been resolved, and we concur with the conclusions of the Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) submitted.

- 1.1 Natural England's advice in these relevant representations is based on information submitted by the National Highways in support of its application for a Development Consent Order ('DCO') in relation to the M60/M62/M66 Simister Island Interchange (*'the project'*), which includes a construction of a new loop road (the 'Northern Loop') to provide a new link between the M60 eastbound to the M60 southbound, widening of the M66 southbound through J18, widening of the existing M60 northbound to M60 westbound link road, realignment of the M66 southbound slip road to M60 J18, conversion of the hard shoulder along the existing four-lane controlled Motorway between M60 J17 to J18, construction of a new hard shoulder on the M60 between J17 and J1 and renewal of signs and signals.
- 1.2 Table 1 found in Appendix A on page 4 of this letter summarises what Natural England considers the main issues¹ to be in relation to the DCO application, and indicate the principal submissions that it wishes to make at this point. Natural England will develop these points further as appropriate during the examination process. Natural England may have further or additional points to make, particularly if further information about the project becomes available.
- 1.3 Where there are specific comments to make these are set out against the following subheadings which represent our key areas of remit:
 - Internationally designated sites
 - Nationally designated sites
 - Protected species
 - Biodiversity net gain
 - Soils and best and most versatile agricultural land
 - Ancient woodland and ancient/veteran trees
- 1.4 Our comments are flagged as red, amber or green:
 - Red are those where there are fundamental concerns which it may not be possible to overcome in their current form.
 - Amber are those where further information is required to determine the effects of the project and allow the Examining Authority to properly undertake its task and or advise that further information is required on mitigation/compensation proposals in order to provide a sufficient degree of confidence as to their efficacy.

¹ PINS NSIP Advice Note 11 Annex C sets out Natural England's role in infrastructure planning.

- Green are those which have been successfully resolved (subject always to the appropriate requirements being adequately secured).

- 1.5 Natural England has worked successfully with National Highways to provide advice and guidance since July 2023, and there are no substantive outstanding matters.
- 1.6 Natural England has commenced engagement with the applicant's consultants on a statement of common ground (SoCG), which we expect to receive in due course, and expects to continue discussions with the applicant.

2. Natural England's overall conclusions

- 2.1 Natural England is satisfied that the project is unlikely to have a significant impact on the nearby internationally and nationally designated sites, deep peaty soils, ancient woodland and ancient/veteran trees and all protected species issues (including any licensing requirements under the Habitats Regulations or the 1981 Act) have been addressed.
- 2.2 Overall its Natural England's advice, based on the information provided, is that in relation to identified nature conservation issues within its remit there is no fundamental reason of principle why the project should not be permitted.

Natural England's Relevant Representations

Appendix A: Natural England's advice

Table 1:

NE key issue ref	Topic	Issue summary	NE commentary and advice on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further details about the project in order to enable assessment • Further evidence or assessment work required 	Risk Red/Amber/Green
1	International designated sites	Project having adverse impacts on Rochdale Special Area of Conservation (SAC) due to air quality impacts.	<p>The following comments relate to the details within the Appendix 8.3 of the Environmental Statement – Habitats Regulations Report (National Highways, April 2024).</p> <p>In section 3 (pages 10 to 14) the report sets out the methodology and assumptions the applicant has used to inform the assessment, including the air quality thresholds applied to the scheme, and using the 1% threshold to determine significance. Natural England advise we are satisfied with the approach set out in this section.</p> <p>Section 5.4.2 (page 22) of the assessment concludes there will be no likely significant effects during the construction phase of the project on Rochdale SAC, but states likely significant effects could not be discounted for the operational phase due to air quality from operation vehicle emissions. Natural England concurs with the conclusions of the Stage 1 Screening.</p> <p>The assessment then moves on to the appropriate assessment stage, and in section 6.1.6 (page 25) concludes there will be no adverse effects on the integrity of Rochdale SAC, nor will the project go against the conservation objectives for the site, on the basis that the qualifying features of Rochdale SAC are tolerant to a wide range of nutrient conditions, and that the canal, as a mesotrophic water body, is not sensitive to changes in air quality. Natural England concurs with this conclusion, and the justification for reaching this conclusion. We are satisfied the project will have no adverse effects on Rochdale Canal SAC.</p>	Green

NE key issue ref	Topic	Issue summary	NE commentary and advice on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further details about the project in order to enable assessment • Further evidence or assessment work required 	Risk Red/Amber/Green
2	National designated sites (biodiversity & geodiversity)	Project damaging or destroying the interest features for which Ashclough Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Nob End SSSI have been notified.	<p>Ashclough SSSI and Nob End SSSI are hydrologically connected to the project through the Ribers Irwell and Roch and associated tributaries. There is the risk the notified features of these SSSIs could be impacted by pollutants being released into the connecting waterbodies from the proposal.</p> <p>Section 8.9.14 within Chapter 8 – Biodiversity of the Environmental Statement (page 84) concludes there will be no impacts on the above SSSIs due to the embedded mitigation measures in the design of the scheme, which will treat any surface or ground water before it is discharged into nearby watercourses.</p> <p>Natural England concurs with this conclusion, and is content on the basis that the design, mitigation and enhancement measures set out in section 13.9 and 13.10 of Chapter 13 – Road Drainage and the Water Environment (pages 85 to 108) are included within the final design of the scheme, especially those in relation to attenuation storage in the form of ponds, swales and pipes.</p>	Green
3	Soils and best and most versatile agricultural land	Impacts on deep peaty soils	<p>In light of Natural England’s statutory purpose (see section 2 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006) and the Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) which states that <i>degraded lowland peat accounts for 3% of England’s overall greenhouse gas emissions. Reducing these emissions, by rewetting our agricultural peat soils, is essential to meeting legally binding net zero targets.</i> Natural England do not support the principle of developing on restorable peat.</p> <p>Natural England has reviewed section 8.8.4 within Chapter 8 (page 75) regarding deep peaty soils, Chapter 9 – Geology and Soils and Appendices 9.2 - Agricultural Land Classification Survey Report, 9.3 - Ground Investigation Report and 13.4 - Groundwater Assessment Report. Based on the evidence provided Natural England is satisfied the project will not impact potentially restorable deep peaty soils, and has no objections regarding the project on account of impact on peat.</p>	Green

NE key issue ref	Topic	Issue summary	NE commentary and advice on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further details about the project in order to enable assessment • Further evidence or assessment work required 	Risk Red/Amber/Green
4	Protected species	Impacts on badgers	<p>Natural England has received the submission of draft badger licence applications for review directly from the applicant. We have recently issued a letter of Letters of No Impediment (LONI) to the applicant dated 2 July 2024. The advice in the LONI is summarised below:</p> <p>On the basis of the information and proposals provided, Natural England sees no impediment to a licence being issued, should the Development Consent Order be granted. This is conditional on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An updated walkover survey of the area must be completed prior to the formal submission. The results of this should be detailed for Natural England to assess accordingly. • Relevant plans must be provided to include communication duct routes in the proximity of setts where appropriate. 	Green
5		Impacts of Great Crested Newts (GCN)	Natural England is aware the applicant has agreed to enter the Districted Level Licensing Scheme to mitigate effects on GCN, as set out in Appendix 8.15 - Great Crested Newt District Level Licence Impact Assessment and Conservation Payment Certificate dated 17 April 2024. On this basis we have no concerns regarding the scheme and impacts on GCN.	Green
6		Impacts on other protected species	We have reviewed the assessment, mitigation and enhancement measures set out in Chapter 8 for other protected species impacted by the scheme including bats, barn owls, wintering birds, breeding birds and reptiles. Based on the mitigation and enhancement measures to be implemented, Natural England has no concerns over impacts on other protected species.	Green
7	Ancient woodland and ancient/veteran trees		Natural England welcome the commitment of the project to retain existing vegetation where practicable including existing woodland. We have reviewed sections 8.10.234 to 8.10.236 within Chapter 8 (page 134) and based on the information provided are satisfied the proposal will have no direct or indirect impacts on existing Ancient Woodland or veteran trees within the order limits or surrounding area.	Green
8	Biodiversity net		Natural England has reviewed Appendix 8.12 – Biodiversity Net Gain Report. We welcome the commitment to delivering BNG on this project. We recommend that the target increase in BNG of	

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	gain (BNG)		<p>3.68% net gain of area based units and a 58.50% net gain of hedgerow units is secured by a suitably worded requirement in the Development Consent Order.</p> <p>By reviewing the project's biodiversity gain plan at this early stage, it gives us an opportunity to help maximise outcomes and reduce risks.</p> <p>We strongly support the commitment to identify opportunities to further reduce habitat loss and minimise lags between habitat loss as the detailed design stage develops. Aswell as aiming to avoid habitat loss, we advise that during the detailed design stage there should also be a focus on identifying opportunities for enhancement to achieve greater BNG, and maximise the condition and distinctiveness of habitats to be created.</p> <p>We further note that a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP) is being developed. We advise any created habitats are subject to long term management and monitoring as part of the LEMP. The LEMP should cover a period of at least 30 years.</p>	

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