

Meeting note

Project name	A46 Walsgrave Project
File reference	TR010066
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date	08 June 2023
Meeting with	National Highways
Venue	Microsoft Teams
Meeting objectives	Inception Meeting
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.

Proposed Development

The Applicant introduced the location of the proposed development, which is the A46 Eastern Bypass located near Walsgrave and Coventry, forming a link between the M40 and M6. National Highways clarified that this project is part of a larger 'Road Investment Strategy' in order to create a free flow between the M40 and M6.

Improvements at Binley have already been delivered under Highways Act works and Walsgrave is the last junction in that section. The applicant stated that the preferred route (PRA) was announced in 2022 and the scheme includes a grade separated solution and two lanes of A road running in each direction, a dumbbell arrangement which incorporates roundabouts on top of embankments with a new bridge structure over the existing alignment of the A46 around the existing roundabout which is being removed.

The junction would need to be restricted to 50mph, similar to nearby junctions. The applicant confirmed that they are delivering the project through a regional delivery partnership which is a design and build and they have engaged with Octavius to run through their PCF stages 3-7 and project buildability.

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Scoping

The Applicant informed the Inspectorate that it is currently undertaking a Scoping Report. Key restraints for the site were listed as: Walsgrave Hospital emergency department, historic landfill sites, a Grade II listed building, a flood plain, a 132KV powerline, a SSSI, an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) which covers the whole of Coventry City and a registered park and garden which covers most of Coombe Park and Coombe Pool, immediately to the east of the A46.

National Highways stated that they had started discussions with the Environment Agency and Natural England in 2022. They will also keep them updated with PSO stage 3. With regards to Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) target and approach, National Highways have a plus ten percent BNG target. The Applicant is currently investigating possible approaches to try and achieve this either onsite or offsite.

National Highways stated that they are planning to submit the scoping report by 7 July and will also provide the GIS shapefile of the boundary to the Inspectorate ten working days prior.

Environmental Surveys

The Applicant stated that they had undertaken numerous ecology surveys over the last year and that they have been doing environmental survey work which will form part of the Environmental Statement (ES). Work on the wintering birds survey is still on-going. The Inspectorate enquired whether the wintering birds' surveys data is only from one year. The Applicant confirmed this. The Inspectorate advised that on other projects, Natural England (NE) have requested two years' worth of data and that the Applicant may need two years' worth of data for examination. The Applicant replied that they had not specifically queried this with NE to date but had informed NE of the surveys being undertaken. The Applicant was going to look into this and speak to Natural England once Discretionary Advice Service (DAS) agreement was in place.

Surveys still left to be completed are: water features survey, landscape survey, noise survey, flood risk survey, soil resources and agricultural survey and heritage surveys including a geophysical survey and potential trial trenching.

National Highways discussed that they are currently writing a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA). The Inspectorate queried the relevance of undertaking this in addition to the scoping report. The Applicant responded that they are trying to provide detail in order to agree to scope out certain topics from the ES. The Inspectorate suggested there may be limited benefit in undertaking a high-level PEA based on previous meetings and feedback from relevant consultees.

The Applicant informed the Inspectorate that the Environmental Statement will be submitted with the application, currently targeted for September 2024, and that a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) screening determined that there was not likely to be any Adverse Effects on Integrity on any designated sites.

The Inspectorate notified the Applicant that they will arrange for the project webpage to be setup to publish scoping documents and that they will publish the proposed DCO submission date as Autumn 2024.

Stakeholder Engagement

The Applicant discussed engagement with relevant Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) about the Development Consent Order (DCO) process. which may include a joint response to the draft Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC) and Local Impact Report (LIR).

In addition, the Applicant has engaged with local businesses, environmental bodies, landowners, Parish Councils, the Warwickshire Local Economic Partnership LEP, the A46 Partnership and Midland Connect and Transport for West Midlands. National Highways has existing relationships with stakeholders from the completed Binley scheme and stated that further engagement from businesses, environmental bodies, Historic England and horse-riding groups is scheduled in run up to statutory consultation.

Consultation

The Applicant commented that the options consultation was held in February 2022. Feedback suggested linking the scheme with a blue light access into the hospital, extra provision for Non-motorised users (NMU) routes and further engagement for speed limit enforcement.

The Applicant allotted July/August 2023 for the draft SOCC consultation and October to December 2023 for statutory consultation. The Inspectorate enquired whether the Applicant is looking into entering into Planning Performance Agreements (PPA) with LPAs to assist with resourcing. The Applicant responded that no PPA's have been confirmed. The Inspectorate also asked whether any of the LPAs are preparing Local Plans. National Highways advised that Rugby Borough Council will be going through consultation this year on their Local Plan and they identified the possibility for a PPA and are going to discuss resourcing with Warwickshire County Council.

Development Consent Programme

The Applicant is currently engaging with the host local authorities: Coventry City Council, Warwickshire County Council and Rugby Borough Council on technical input into the scheme.

They stated that they are aiming for DCO submission in September 2024. National Highways were aware of changes with the NSIP regime and review of the National Policy Statement (NPS). The Inspectorate advised the Applicant in regard to draft documents that a response could be expected 6-8 weeks after submission to the Inspectorate. The Applicant should allow sufficient time before the submission of the DCO to make any changes to documents following receipt of advice.

Compulsory Acquisition and Crown Land Issues

There is no Crown Land located in or around the scheme. National Highways outlined that there are two significant landowners who both have the same land agent. They have recently been contacted about access for a land investigation.

The Applicant highlighted that part of the scheme sits in the Green Belt which follows the local authority boundary on the western verge of the A46. The area also contains some local green space noted in the Coventry City Local Plan. The Inspectorate suggested that the Applicant familiarise themselves with the A57 link Roads DCO approach to Green Belt considerations. The Applicant also noted that there is a development that has progressed at Walsgrave Hill Farm which proposed 900 dwellings to the west of the A46. The proposed hospital link is contained within this

junction. The Inspectorate verified that there is no demolition of residential properties to facilitate this scheme.

AOB

The Applicant agreed the scheme name for the project was A46 Coventry Junctions Walsgrave. The Applicant highlighted that the next steps are to send the Inspectorate the red line boundary and the scoping report submission.

The Applicant suggested further meetings pre and post statutory consultation.

PINS had some final queries for the Applicant including about the farm bridge displayed on the site map. The Applicant responded that they were not sure if the bridge will be affected or not and will get this clarified.

The Inspectorate also asked if the overhead powerline will stay on the existing alignment. National Highways confirmed that the powerlines will remain unaffected and that there are no other NSIP projects that are planned around the site.

The Inspectorate asked when the traffic modelling was being undertaken and the Applicant clarified that a survey was completed in 2019 by the LPA's. The Inspectorate suggested making it clear that the surveys were undertaken prior to the Coronavirus pandemic. Lastly the Inspectorate asked about legal representation and the appellant said they have counsel at National Highways who are leading and have access to the statutory template but will also have an external legal support appointed this summer.