

# A358 Taunton to Southfields Dualling Scheme

Preliminary Environmental Information Report - Appendix 7.1  
LVIA Policy and Guidance

HE551508-ARP-ELS-ZZ-RP-LS-000003

11/09/21

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# 1 Legislative and policy framework

## 1.1 National planning policy

### ***Nationally Planning Policy Framework [1]***

- 1.1.1 The *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF) sets out clear guidance that all planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment.
- 1.1.2 Paragraph 124: *Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities. Being clear about design expectations, and how these will be tested, is essential for achieving this. So too is effective engagement between applicants, communities, local planning authorities and other interests throughout the process.*
- 1.1.3 Paragraph 125: *Plans should, at the most appropriate level, set out a clear design vision and expectations, so that applicants have as much certainty as possible about what is likely to be acceptable. Design policies should be developed with local communities so they reflect local aspirations, and are grounded in an understanding and evaluation of each area's defining characteristics.*
- 1.1.4 Paragraph 127: *Decisions should ensure that developments are:*
- *Visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping (Paragraph 127b).*
  - *Are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (Paragraph 127c).*
- 1.1.5 Paragraph 128: *Design quality should be considered throughout the evolution and assessment of individual proposals. Early discussion between applicants, the local planning authority and local community about the design and style of emerging schemes is important for clarifying expectations and reconciling local and commercial interests.*
- 1.1.6 Paragraph 131: *In determining applications, great weight should be given to outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability, or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings.*
- 1.1.7 Paragraph 170: *Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:*
- *Protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan) (Paragraph 170a).*
  - *Recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland (Paragraph 170b).*
  - *Minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures (Paragraph 170d).*

- *Preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability. Development should, wherever possible, help to improve local environmental conditions such as air and water quality (Paragraph 170e).*

1.1.8 Paragraph 172: *Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues.*

1.1.9 Paragraph 180: *Planning policies and decisions should also ensure that new development is appropriate for its location taking into account potential sensitivity of the site or the wider area to impacts that could arise from the development. In doing so they should:*

- *Identify and protect tranquil areas which have remained relatively undisturbed by noise and are prized for their recreational and amenity value for this reason (Paragraph 180b).*
- *Limit the impact of light pollution from artificial light on local amenity, intrinsically dark landscapes and nature conservation (Paragraph 180c).*

## 1.2 Local planning policy

### South Somerset District Council *Local Plan* [2]

1.2.1 The South Somerset District Council *Local Plan* notes that the “*The landscape is mainly undulating, agricultural land with some very fertile belts that have traditionally been farmed for top quality food production such as apples and dairy produce. Topography and agricultural practices have helped to secure special status for outstanding landscapes such as the rolling Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) to the south west, a small part of the Cranborne Chase and West Wilts AONB to the north east, and Dorset AONB running along the southern boundary of the district.*”

1.2.2 It is noted in paragraph 13.31 that “*The Landscape Character Assessment [...] provide[s] a more detailed local context for the evaluation and consideration of development proposals and should be taken into account where they have been produced.*”

1.2.3 Paragraph 13.34 states that “*The District Council values the character and diversity of the South Somerset Landscape, and places particular emphasis upon the conservation of protected and designated landscapes. The Council thus intends to produce a Landscape Strategy, which will set out the key characteristics of the South Somerset Landscape, and provide guidance to developers and landowners on how the overall character of the district can be conserved and enhanced; and how the pattern and form of development can be sympathetically located and shaped; ensuring there is no significant adverse impact upon local landscape character, scenic quality and distinctive landscape features as set out in the Landscape Strategy.*”

1.2.4 Policy EQ2: General Development states that “*Development will be designed to achieve a high quality, which promotes South Somerset’s local distinctiveness and preserves or enhances the character and appearance of the district.*” Development proposals, extensions and alterations to existing buildings, structures and places will be considered against:

- conserving and enhancing the landscape character of the area
- reinforcing local distinctiveness and respect local context
- making efficient use of land whilst having regard to [...] local landscape character

1.2.5 *“Development must not risk the integrity of internationally, nationally or locally designated wildlife and landscape sites.”*

1.2.6 Policy EQ5: Green Infrastructure states that *“The Council will promote the provision of Green Infrastructure throughout the district, based upon the enhancement of existing areas including public open space, accessible woodland, and river corridors, and by ensuring that development provides open spaces and green corridor links between new and existing green spaces. Development proposals should provide and/or maintain a network of connected and multifunctional open spaces that, where appropriate, meet the following requirements:*

- *Create new habitats and connects existing wildlife areas to enrich biodiversity and promote ecological coherence.*
- *Provide and/or maintain an accessible network of green spaces and improve recreational opportunities, including environmental education, local food production and support physical health and mental wellbeing.*
- *Ensure that all children and young people have reasonable access to a range of play and leisure opportunities.*
- *Provide and/or maintain opportunities for enhanced, attractive walking and cycling routes linking urban areas and the wider countryside.*
- *Enhance and/or maintain the character and local distinctiveness of the landscape.*
- *Contribute to and/or maintain local identity and sense of place.*
- *Increase the district's tree cover.*
- *Help mitigate the consequences of climate change (sustainable drainage systems, shade etc.).*
- *Alleviate current and future potential visitor and recreation pressure/disturbance to internationally designated conservation areas.*

1.2.7 *Existing Green Infrastructure will be protected against any adverse impact of development proposals. If loss of existing green infrastructure assets is unavoidable in order to accommodate necessary development, appropriate mitigation for the loss will be required.”*

1.2.8 Policy EQ6: Woodland and Forests states that *“The loss of ancient woodland as well as ancient or veteran trees should be protected against loss wherever possible. Where secondary woodland is unavoidably lost through development it should be replaced with appropriate new woodland on at least the same scale.”*

### **Taunton and Deane Core Strategy [3]**

1.2.9 The Taunton and Deane Borough Council Core Strategy notes that *“The quality of the landscape and setting of the Borough is of a particularly high standard and this is reflected by the national recognition of the Blackdowns and Quantocks as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty; the AONBs covering about 20% of the geographic area of the Borough”.*

1.2.10 Policy CP 8: Environment states that:

- *“A network of green infrastructure assets has been identified and should be retained and enhanced, including through the development of green wedges and corridors as envisaged through the Taunton Deane Green Infrastructure Strategy. [...] New green links are proposed from the town through the existing green wedges to the Quantock Hills AONB to the north and the Blackdown Hills AONB to the south. Developments will be expected to [...] contribute to realising the opportunities identified within the Taunton Deane Green Infrastructure Strategy.”*
- *“Development will need to mitigate and where necessary, compensate for adverse impacts on landscape [...] so that there are no residual effects.”*

1.2.11 Vision 4: Our Vision for Rural Areas states that *“Development will protect and enhance the local character and distinctiveness of high quality built and natural environment.”*

1.2.12 Policy DM 1: General Requirements states that *“Proposals for development, taking account of any mitigation measures proposed, will be required to meet the following criteria [...]:*

- *Additional road traffic arising, taking account of any road improvements involved, would not lead to [...] environmental degradation by [...] visual impact; and*
- *The appearance and character of any affected landscape, settlement, building or street scene would not be unacceptably harmed by the development.”*

## 1.3 Supplementary and further guidance

### National Design Guide [4]

1.3.1 The National design guide underpins the NPPF and outlines and illustrates Government priorities for well-designed places in the form of 10 characteristics that combine to create character, nurture and sustain a sense of community, and respond to climate issues. The ten characteristics are:

- Context – enhances the surroundings
- Identity – attractive and distinctive
- Built form – a coherent pattern of development
- Movement – accessible and easy to move around
- Nature – enhanced and optimised
- Public spaces – safe, social and inclusive
- Uses – mixed and integrated
- Homes and buildings – functional, healthy and sustainable
- Resources – efficient and resilient
- Lifespan – made to last

### Highways England’s *The road to good design* [5]

1.3.2 Highways England set out a Vision and 10 principles for good road design, supported by the multi-disciplinary Strategic Design Panel that includes a range of stakeholders including members from the Design Council, Landscape Institute and Royal Institute of British Architects.

1.3.3 The Highways England vision is to:

*'put people at the heart of our work by designing an inclusive, resilient and sustainable road network; appreciated for its usefulness, but also its elegance, reflecting in its design the beauty of the natural, built and historic environment through which it passes, and enhancing where possible.'*

1.3.4 The approach advocates the importance of good design on the beneficial outcomes from investment in the highways network noting that:

*'every day countless decisions are made regarding the strategic road network. These all have the potential to enhance or erode the distinctive character of a location, and our experience of driving through it. They could relate to the direction of a major road project, or a smaller, minor improvement or piece of maintenance; all can change a place for better or worse.'*

1.3.5 Highways England set out 10 design principles based on the concepts of connecting people, places and process. In summary, good road design:

- makes roads safe and useful
- is inclusive
- makes roads understandable
- fits in context
- is restrained
- is environmentally sustainable
- is thorough
- is innovative
- is collaborative
- is long-lasting

1.3.6 Of relevance to landscape and visual are the principles relating to 'Connecting Place':

- Principle 4: Fits in context: *'The aesthetic quality of a road and its design in relation to the places through which it passes, is integral to its function and the experience of those that use it. Good road design demonstrates sensitivity to the landscape, heritage and local community, seeking to enhance the place while being true to structural necessities. It builds a legacy for the future.'*
- Principle 5: is restrained: *'Functional, but responding positively and elegantly to the context, good road design allows for the expression of the character and identity of the places and communities through which a road passes. Good road design can enhance a sense of place and add to what we have inherited, particularly through the use of appropriate materials and traditions, but does not make unnecessary superficial or superfluous visual statements.'*
- Principle 6: is environmentally sustainable: *'Making an important contribution to the conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment, good road design seeks to achieve net environmental gain. It is multi-functional, resilient and sustainable, allowing for future adaptation and technical requirements, while minimising waste and the need for new materials.'*

### **National Infrastructure Commission (NIC)**

1.3.7 The NIC established a Design Group to ensure quality design in future major infrastructure. In 2018, the Group published 'The value of design in infrastructure delivery' [6] that put design at the heart of infrastructure planning with the aims to

save money, reduce risk, add value and create a legacy of infrastructure that looks good and works well.

1.3.8 In February 2020, the Design Group published Design Principles for National Infrastructure [7] establishing four key principles that can be applied to any infrastructure project:

- Climate - Mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change
- People - Reflect what society wants and share benefits widely
- Places - Provide a sense of identity and improve our environment
- Value - Achieve multiple benefits and solve problems well

#### **Campaign for better transport: *Roads and the environment* (2018) [8]**

1.3.9 The Campaign's vision and principles for greener roads provides practical guidance and guidance to support the design of new roads or 'green retrofits' on existing or expanding roads. The report emphasises how the extent and nature of impacts of road infrastructure on landscape, habitats and people can be changed significantly by how the design of the road is approached. The report also notes the potential '*to have positive impacts through improved design and maintenance of road infrastructure as well as greater use of green bridges, underpasses and tunnels in the most sensitive areas.*' (pp.20).

#### **Landscape Institute Infrastructure *Technical Guidance Note* (TGN 04/2020) [9]**

1.3.10 This strategy is guided by the advice provided by the Landscape Institute that provides advice on the role of a Landscape Design Strategy within infrastructure project. The guidance emphasises the need for a common vision and purpose, with a culture of openness to new ideas and perspective, to ensure good infrastructure design that works with the landscape and delivers valuable green infrastructure. The guidance advises that:

- all projects should: 'start with a clearly defined and described design vision...[that] should be developed with the broadest range of input to maximise its impact in challenging, motivating and inspiring the design team.' (page 15)
- The design vision should inform the Landscape Design Strategy, which will set out:
  - beneficial outcomes for people, place and nature (including green infrastructure) that can be achieved through the scheme
  - key constraints and opportunities
  - objectives and design principles that provide a framework for the design and delivery of the design vision
  - a detailed study of the existing landscape, including character assessments and be informed by other studies such as habitat and ecology
  - identify features or characteristics that should be preserved, conserved, enhanced or replaced
  - provide guidance on how mitigation should be designed

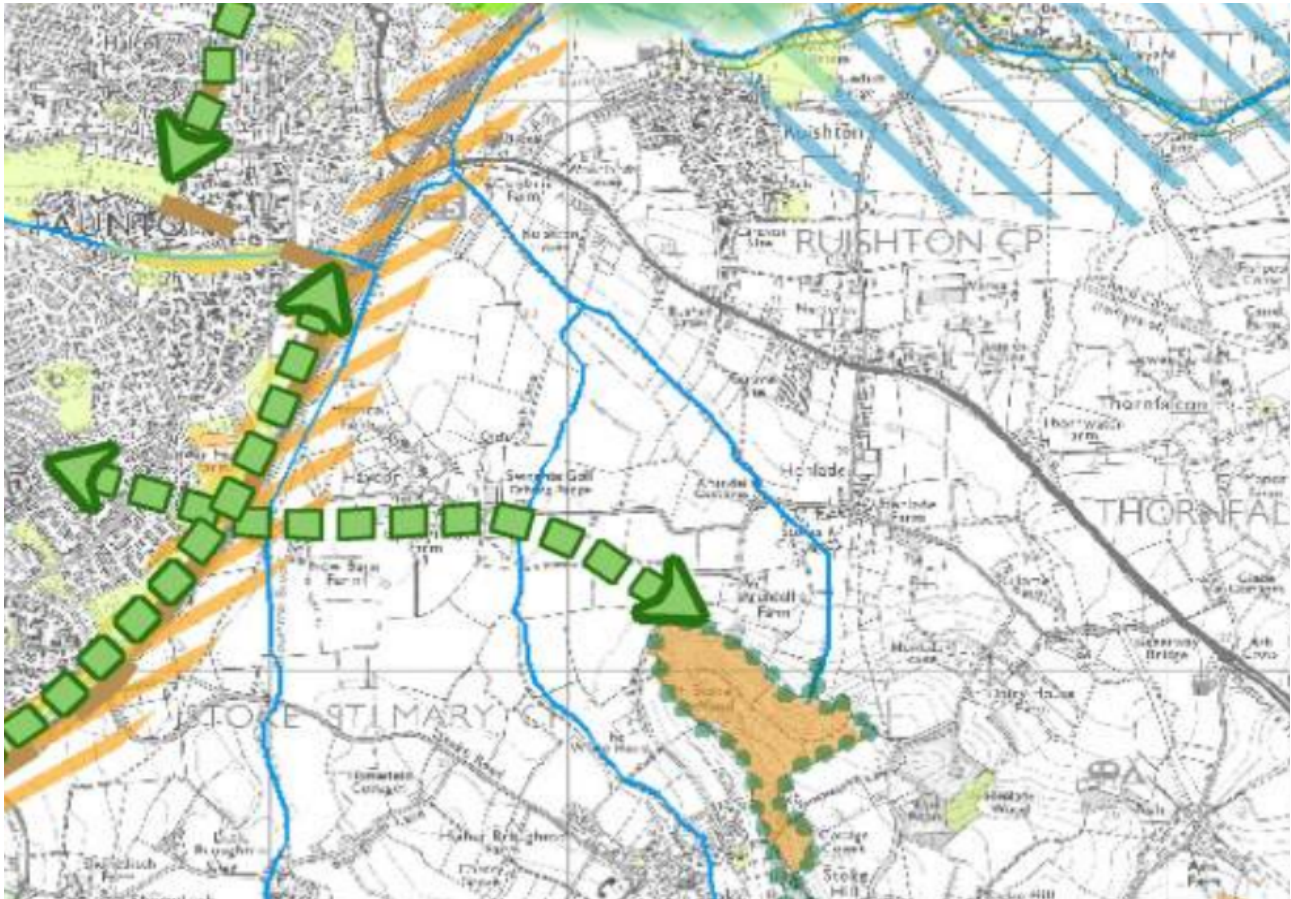


## Taunton and Deane Borough Council Green Infrastructure Strategy [10]

- 1.3.11 The document outlines Taunton and Deane Borough Council's strategy to ensure that high quality, multifunctional green infrastructure is delivered across the borough. The purpose of the Strategy is to:
- “Create and enhance green infrastructure across the Borough, particularly at Taunton and Wellington, and maximise its potential to meet a diversity of functions, including wildlife habitat, recreation, flood alleviation and visual amenity, and to identify opportunities for GI within and adjacent to potential development areas to inform the LDF, and to identify approaches to funding and implementation of the green infrastructure proposals.”*
- 1.3.12 The potential impacts from development on existing green infrastructure are noted to include:
- *“Severance of existing formal and informal green links, with potential impacts on access to the countryside;*
  - *Severance of wildlife corridors, creating barriers to movement of species in the borough, including significant impacts on the foraging range of the population of bats for which Hestercombe House is designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC);*
  - *Potential impacts on the landscape, historic character and visual amenity of relevant areas; and*
  - *Effects on the environmental functionality of the landscape, including impacts on flood alleviation, water attenuation, and climate control functions.”*
- 1.3.13 Key issues include *“Maintaining important views to key landmarks and distinctive/memorable features within Taunton and its setting (including church towers and views to the surrounding Quantock Hills AONB and Blackdown Hills AONB), which contribute to a sense of identity.”*
- 1.3.14 The Strategy notes *“It will be important to maintain veteran trees, planning for their future replacement to ensure a continued tree cover – notable opportunities for new planting of native species that could enhance links to the Vale of Taunton landscape (suitable native tree species include Willow, Alder, Ash, Birch, Oak, Hawthorn, Beech, Elm, Hornbeam and Field Maple).”*
- 1.3.15 The vision for Taunton's green infrastructure is:
- “To create a network of green infrastructure across the Borough, focussing on the opportunities provided by new development areas. This will help to conserve and enhance the Borough's natural and cultural heritage, to enhance quality of life for Taunton's residents, and secure climate change mitigation and adaptation.”*
- 1.3.16 Nine overarching concepts represent principles to be applied to the planning, design, and enhancement of green infrastructure in Taunton Deane (described further in paragraph 4.2 of the Strategy):
- Sustainable
  - Multifunctional
  - Integrated
  - Climate change adapted
  - Deliverable
  - Quality
  - Reflect local character and sense of place

- Engage communities
- Partnership working to support GI management

1.3.17 GI opportunities are presented on Figure 4.1 of the Strategy (an extract in the vicinity of the Scheme is provided on Figure 1-1). Green arrows represent opportunities to create green links, orange lines represent a biodiversity and landscape enhancement corridor, green dots represent the extent of existing woodland blocks, blue lines represent existing waterways, and orange shaded areas represent existing nature conservation designations.



**Figure 1-1 Strategic GI opportunities near the Site of the Scheme (extract from Figure 4.1 of the Strategy)**

1.3.18 Green links are described as “existing or proposed access link through urban and rural areas, for use by pedestrians, cyclists and horse-riders where appropriate. Management will conserve and enhance biodiversity, landscape and cultural heritage features, including zoning areas to be prioritised for wildlife and public access to ensure a balance between these two functions. The route of these links is indicative and the appropriate route should be informed by further research and consultation to determine feasibility.”

1.3.19 Specific green infrastructure issues and opportunities include:

- Linking the green infrastructure network up with existing initiatives such as the trail at Castle Neroche.
- Sensitive views to and from the Quantock Hills AONB and Blackdown Hills AONB.
- Maintaining important views to key landmarks and distinctive/memorable features within Taunton and its setting.

- Notable opportunities for new planting of native species that could enhance links to the Vale of Taunton landscape.

### **South Somerset District Council *Environment Strategy* [11]**

1.3.20 The *Environment Strategy* outlines plans to create sustainable thriving communities, through thriving green infrastructure projects, including enhancement of biodiversity and replanting of trees.

1.3.21 Stated actions and activities within the Strategy include:

- Use South Somerset District Council owned land to draw down carbon through planting of 1,000 trees and investigate investment opportunities through the Woodland Carbon Fund.
- Protect existing wetland, wet meadows, marsh and bogs and encourage additional planting of water vegetation in rivers and ponds.
- Review our policy on tree and hedgerow preservation, to include tree replacement standards.
- Work with Parish and Town Councils and County Highways to increase tree canopy.
- Work with Somerset Local Nature Partnership to ensure Nature Recovery Networks are linked in at county and regional scale.

### **Natural England *National Character Area (NCA) Profiles* [12]**

1.3.22 NCAs are broad divisions of landscape that form the basic units of cohesive countryside character, on which strategies for both ecological and landscape issues can be based. England is divided into 159 distinct NCAs, identified and described by Natural England. Each is defined by a unique combination of landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity, history, and cultural and economic activity. Their boundaries follow natural lines in the landscape rather than administrative boundaries.

1.3.23 Each profile contains a description of the NCA and details of the following:

- Topography.
- Geology and soils.
- Rivers and coastal features.
- Trees and woodland.
- Field patterns and boundary features.
- Agricultural uses.
- Semi-natural habitats.
- Species closely associated with the area.
- History of the area.
- Settlement and development patterns.
- Roads, railways, and rights of way.
- Commonly used building materials and building design.
- Tranquillity and remoteness.

1.3.24 The profiles also provide the main facts and data about the area, information about change in the landscape, and the main attributes of the landscape assessment of provisioning, regulating and cultural ecosystem services.

- 1.3.25 The statements of environmental opportunity found in each profile helps to bring together this information and offers suggestions where action can be best targeted to conserve and improve the natural environment within the NCA.

**Blackdown Hills AONB 2019-2024 Management Plan [13]**

- 1.3.26 This statutory Management Plan sets out the policy framework for the conservation and enhancement of the Blackdown Hills AONB between 2019 and 2014. Its purpose is to:
- Highlight the special qualities and significance of the AONB.
  - Present a vision for the future of the AONB.
  - Set out objectives and policies to secure the vision.
  - Identify what needs to be done, and by whom.
  - State the condition of the AONB and how the effectiveness of its management will be monitored.
  - Reflect the views and aspirations of a wide range of AONB stakeholders and parties with an interest in it.
  - Co-ordinate the work of different partner organisations.
- 1.3.27 The plan has been prepared by the AONB Partnership on behalf of local authorities. All those that have an active interest and role in the management of the Blackdown Hills landscape, and in supporting the communities that live and work within it, have a role in implementing the Blackdown Hills AONB 2019-2024 Management Plan.
- 1.3.28 As the statutory policy document for the AONB, the plan can be used to guide, inform, and support all other plans and activities developed by public bodies and statutory undertakers that may affect the AONB, in line with their duty to have regard to conserving and enhancing natural beauty. It does not override the plans and policies of other organisations, who may also be the lead body in respect of responsibility for decision making and implementation.
- 1.3.29 The plan states that consideration should be given to impacts on natural beauty within the setting of the AONB, particularly in the context of visual impact (for example, views into and out of the AONB) and impacts on tranquillity.
- 1.3.30 The special qualities of the AONB are described in the Management Plan, and include (but are not limited to):
- The elevation and long, panoramic views out from the Blackdown Hills create a sense of detachment from surrounding towns and transport corridors.
  - Areas of high tranquillity spared many of the intrusions of modern life.
  - Dark night-time star-filled skies contrasting with the light pollution of the surrounding towns.
- 1.3.31 The presence of straight, uninterrupted ridges are evident as a visual backdrop over a wide area.

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