

A358 Taunton to Southfields Dualling Scheme

Preliminary Environmental Information Report - Chapter 1
Introduction

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Table of contents

	Pages
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Purpose of the report	1
1.2 Overview of the project	2
1.3 Legislative and policy framework	3
1.4 The Applicant	9
1.5 Competent expert evidence	9
1.6 Stakeholder engagement	10
1.7 Structure of the PEI Report	12
1.8 Next steps	13
Abbreviations List	15
Glossary	15
References	16
Table of Tables	
Table 1-1 Stakeholder workshops	10

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the report

- 1.1.1 Highways England proposes to construct the A358 Taunton to Southfields Dualling scheme (hereafter referred to as 'the proposed scheme'). The proposed scheme is considered a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) under the *Planning Act 2008* (2008, c.29) [1] (the 'Act') and therefore Highways England proposes to submit an application for a Development Consent Order (DCO) to provide the appropriate planning consent for the proposed scheme.
- 1.1.2 The proposed scheme falls under the criteria included in the *Infrastructure Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (EIA) Regulations 2017* (SI 2017/572) [2] (the 'EIA Regulations') and is, therefore, an 'EIA Development'. The application for DCO must therefore be accompanied by a statutory Environmental Statement (ES) describing the findings of an EIA undertaken in compliance with the EIA Regulations.
- 1.1.3 Consultation is an important part of the DCO process, and applications need to demonstrate how such consultation has been undertaken. This Preliminary Environmental Information (PEI) Report supports part of the consultation process.
- 1.1.4 This PEI Report has been prepared in compliance with the EIA Regulations to enable the local community, stakeholders and any other interested party to understand the environmental effects of the proposed scheme and enable an informed response to the consultation. The PEI Report sets out how each environmental topic area is being assessed, the potential environmental effects of the proposed scheme based on the information available at the time, and measures proposed to avoid or reduce such effects. This is to support consultees in developing an informed view of the likely significant environmental effects of the proposed scheme.
- 1.1.5 It should be noted that the proposed scheme design is currently under development, environmental information is still being assembled, and impacts are still being identified. The information contained within this PEI Report should be regarded as a preliminary account of the principal environmental issues identified to date. The PEI Report details a number of uncertainties and assumptions and may be subject to change as the environmental assessment work progresses. The PEI Report may also be subject to change as a result of consultation responses which will in turn inform the ongoing environmental assessment process. The results will be reported within the ES which will be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) as part of the DCO application.
- 1.1.6 On 19 August 2021, Highways England and the Department for Transport (DfT) announced that Highways England will change its name to National Highways. The name change reflects the role of the strategic road network – to connect the nation's regions – and the part it plays in setting highways standards across the UK. The name change in project documents, reports and communication materials will be a gradual process; this PEI Report, and accompanying appendices and figures, has therefore retained reference to Highways England. It is expected that for the ES, all references to Highways England will be replaced with National Highways.

1.2 Overview of the project

- 1.2.1 The proposed scheme is part of a programme of improvements planned along the A303/A358 corridor aimed at improving connectivity between London, the south-east and the south-west. The A303, alongside the A30, forms part of the strategic road network (SRN) and together with the A358, provides important components of that link.
- 1.2.2 The programme of improvements, as set out in the UK government's *Road Investment Strategy* (RIS) [3] made a commitment to "...upgrade all remaining sections of the A303 between the M3 and the A358 to dual carriageway standard, together with creating a dual carriageway link from M5 at Taunton to the A303...".
- 1.2.3 Funding for delivery of the proposed scheme has been confirmed within the second *Road Investment Strategy* (RIS2) [4], which covers the period between 2020 and 2025 and which was published on the 11 March 2020.
- 1.2.4 The A303/A358 corridor is heavily used by long-distance, local business and leisure traffic. It is also critical to the economy of the south-west of England and connects several local towns including Andover, Amesbury, Salisbury, Shaftesbury, Warminster, Yeovil, Honiton, Taunton and Ilminster.
- 1.2.5 The existing A358 between the M5 at junction 25 at Taunton and the Southfields Roundabout on the A303 is predominantly single carriageway with a short dual carriageway section (about 1.2 miles / 1.9km long) in the vicinity of Thornfalcon, and a three-lane section (about 0.4 miles / 0.6km long) on the westbound approach to the junction at Mattock's Tree Hill.
- 1.2.6 This proposed scheme proposes to upgrade the A358 to high-quality dual carriageway between Southfields roundabout on the A303 and the M5 junction 25 at Taunton to address the traffic issues and long delays currently experienced along the route. Further information on the proposed scheme is provided in Chapter 2 The project of this PEI Report.
- 1.2.7 The existing A358 is currently maintained by the local highway authority, Somerset County Council (SCC). The aim is for the sections of the existing A358 required for the proposed scheme to be adopted into the SRN. It will then be trunked, with the Secretary of State (SoS) for Transport becoming the highway authority.
- 1.2.8 A location plan and overview of the proposed alignment is provided in Figure 1.1 Proposed Scheme Location.

Need for the project

- 1.2.9 Along the A358, there are a number of common issues that result in the poor level of operation often experienced by motorists, businesses and residents. These can be broadly summarised as:
- The mixed road typology – the corridor is comprised of a mix of dual 2-lane, single 3-lane and single 2-lane carriageway which leads to localised congestion where the standard reduces, impacting on journey times and journey time reliability.
 - High level of local roads and private accesses directly joining the road.
 - Accidents – several sections of the corridor suffer from accidents as a result of alignment not in accordance with current standards, poor junction visibility,

changes in road provision and number of private means of access linking onto the road.

- High traffic flows – many sections of the route experience traffic demand above that for which they were designed, leading to long queues.

1.2.10 In addition to these existing issues, the corridor is subject to the pressures brought about through traffic growth, something which is forecast to increase as local authorities along the length of the route seek to deliver their development plans for more jobs and housing, especially as the economic outlook improves.

1.3 Legislative and policy framework

1.3.1 To support the preparation of this PEI Report, it is necessary to review the national and local planning policy and legislation that informs the overall approach. Details of the legislation and policies relevant and important to the proposed scheme are presented in this section. Topic specific policies have been reviewed within each of the topic chapters and are set out within Chapter 5 to 14 of this PEI Report.

Environment Bill 2019 – 2021

1.3.2 The *Environment Bill* [5] was first introduced to Parliament on 15 October 2019 to tackle environmental priorities by bringing environmental protections and recovery into UK law to protect and enhance the natural environment. The bill aims to lay out a legal framework for the protection and recovery of the environment and will set long-term, legally binding environmental targets.

1.3.3 The bill is currently progressing through parliament following its first reading to the House of Commons on 30 January 2020. It is probable that it will be enacted during the design and construction stages of the proposed scheme and an update will be included in the ES.

The Planning Act 2008 (the Act)

1.3.4 The proposed scheme is a NSIP under section 14.1(h) of the Act as it meets the criteria set out in section 22 of the Act.

1.3.5 Section 22(1) states that highway-related development is an NSIP only if it is within one of three specified categories, namely construction, improvement or alteration of a highway.

1.3.6 The proposed scheme is a combination of construction of new highway and widening of the existing carriageway, and meets the following NSIP criteria for construction of a highway:

- The proposed scheme would involve the construction of a highway that is wholly within England.
- National Highways (as the strategic highways company) will be the highway authority for the highway (section 22(4)b of the Act).
- The proposed scheme would involve the construction or alteration of a highway, other than a motorway, where the speed limit for any class of vehicle is expected to be 50 miles per hour (mph) or greater, and the area of development is expected to be greater than the 12.5 hectares (ha) defined in section 22(4)(b) to the Act. The proposed scheme is likely to be greater than 100 ha in area.

- 1.3.7 As the proposed scheme is a NSIP, an application to PINS for a DCO is being progressed.
- 1.3.8 PINS has the responsibility for administering the examination of DCO applications and supporting the appointed examining authority that will make a recommendation to the SoS as to whether to grant development consent and 'make' the order. If granted by the SoS, the DCO will provide the authorisation for the proposed scheme to proceed to construction and subsequent operation.

The Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations 2017

- 1.3.9 The EIA Regulations set out the legislative requirements for undertaking an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). EIA is defined by Regulation 5 of the EIA Regulations as a process consisting of:
- “(a) the preparation of an environmental statement or updated environmental statement, as appropriate, by the applicant;*
- (b) the carrying out of any consultation, publication and notification as required under these Regulations or, as necessary, any other enactment in respect of EIA development; and*
- (c) the steps that are required to be undertaken by the Secretary of State under regulation 21 or by the relevant authority under regulation 25, as appropriate, in determining an application”.*
- 1.3.10 The proposed scheme falls within Schedule 1 of the EIA Regulations, and is therefore an 'EIA development'. An EIA will be carried out in accordance with the requirements of the EIA Regulations, the preliminary results of which are reported in this PEI Report. An ES will be prepared to support the application for a DCO.

National Policy Statements (NPS)

- 1.3.11 NPS's are of primary importance to the decision making process when DCO applications are being examined. Section 104 of the Act states that:
- “(2) In deciding the application the Secretary of State must have regard to –*
- (a) any national policy statement which has effect in relation to development of the description to which the application relates (a “relevant national policy statement”) ...*
- (3) The Secretary of State must decide the application in accordance with any relevant national policy statement, except to the extent that one or more of subsections (4) to (8) applies.”*
- 1.3.12 The proposed scheme is a highway-related development under the Act. Therefore, the national policy of relevance is the *National Policy Statement for National Networks* (NPSNN) [6]. The NPSNN sets out the 'vision and strategic objectives for the national networks'. This recognises that there is a critical need to provide safe, expeditious and resilient networks that better support social and economic activity, and to provide a transport network that is capable of supporting economic growth and rebalancing the economy. Section 104(3) of the Act states that the SoS must decide the application in accordance with any relevant national policy statement. As such, the NPSNN is the primary planning policy document for the proposed scheme.

National Policy Statement for National Networks

- 1.3.13 The *National Policy Statement for National Networks* (NPSNN) [6] sets out the need for, and the government's policies to deliver development of, NSIPs on the national road network in England. The NPSNN also outlines the primary basis for making decisions of development consent for NSIPs in England. The government recognises in the appraisal of sustainability accompanying the NPSNN that some developments will have some adverse local impacts on noise, emissions, landscape/visual amenity, biodiversity, cultural heritage and water resources. The significance of these effects and the effectiveness of mitigation is uncertain at the strategic and non-location specific level of the NPSNN. Therefore, whilst applicants should deliver developments in accordance with government policy and in an environmentally sensitive way, including considering opportunities to deliver environmental benefits, some adverse local effects of development may remain.
- 1.3.14 The environmental requirements of the NPSNN have been taken into consideration when preparing this PEI Report, as described in each on the technical assessment Chapters 5 to 14. Evidence that the EIA has been undertaken in compliance with the NSPNN will be presented in the ES. An updated NSPNN is expected in Spring 2023, and should this come into force prior to the proposed scheme being determined an assessment will be made to ascertain compliance with the new policy.

Drivers of need for development of the national road network

- 1.3.15 The NPSNN sets out the 'vision' and strategic objectives for the national networks. The NPSNN acknowledges that the national road network that connects cities, regions and international gateways play a significant part in supporting economic growth, economic activity, economic productivity and facilitates passenger, business and leisure journeys across the country. It is also stated that *"well-connected and high-performing networks with sufficient capacity are vital to meet the country's long-term needs and support a prosperous economy"*.
- 1.3.16 The NPSNN states that *"a well-functioning Strategic Road Network is critical in enabling safe and reliable journeys and the movement of goods in support of the national and regional economies."*
- 1.3.17 The NPSNN also outlines the government's vision and strategic objectives for the national networks:
- "The Government will deliver national networks that meet the country's long-term needs; supporting a prosperous and competitive economy and improving overall quality of life, as part of a wider transport system. This means:*
- *Networks with the capacity and connectivity and resilience to support national and local economic activity and facilitate growth and create jobs*
 - *Networks which support and improve journey quality, reliability and safety*
 - *Networks which support the delivery of environmental goals and the move to a low carbon economy*
 - *Networks which join up our communities and link effectively to each other"*.

Assessment principles

- 1.3.18 The NPSNN predominantly deals with linear infrastructure, designed to link together separate points and provide connectivity to the wider network. Development and benefits are usually determined by economy, population, location and the level of improvement provided.
- 1.3.19 Paragraph 4.2 outlines that *“subject to the detailed policies and protections in this NPS, and the legal constraints set out in the Planning Act, there is a presumption in favour of granting development consent for national networks NSIPs that fall within the need for infrastructure established in this NPS. The statutory framework for deciding NSIP applications where there is a relevant designated NPS is set out in Section 104 of the Planning Act.”*
- 1.3.20 Paragraph 4.3 states the considerations required for the SoS:
- “In considering any proposed development, and in particular, when weighing its adverse impacts against its benefits, the Examining Authority and the Secretary of State should take into account:*
- *its potential benefits, including the facilitation of economic development, including job creation, housing and environmental improvement, and any long-term or wider benefits;*
 - *its potential adverse impacts, including any longer-term and cumulative adverse impacts, as well as any measures to avoid, reduce or compensate for any adverse impacts.*

In this context, environmental, safety, social and economic benefits and adverse impacts, should be considered at national, regional and local levels. These may be identified in this NPS, or elsewhere.”

National Planning Policy Framework

- 1.3.21 The *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF) [7], last updated in July 2021, sets out the government’s planning policies for England and the requirements for the planning system. It provides a framework within which local authorities and residents can produce local and neighbourhood plans reflecting the needs and priorities of communities.
- 1.3.22 The NPPF seeks to achieve sustainable development through three overarching objectives which are interdependent but need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways. The three objectives are an economic objective, a social objective and an environmental objective.
- 1.3.23 The NPPF does not contain specific policies for NSIPs for which particular considerations apply. NSIPs are determined in accordance with the decision-making framework set out in the Act and relevant National Policy Statements (NPS) for major infrastructure. For highways schemes, the relevant NPS is the NPSNN, details of which are outlined above.

Local plans

- 1.3.24 Applications under the Act are not subject to s38(6) of the *Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act* (2004, c.5) [8], which states that determination of a planning application must be made in accordance with the local development plan, unless other material considerations indicate otherwise. Local plans may be

factored in during the consideration of applications for DCO consent, but it is unnecessary for such applications to comply with the development plan.

- 1.3.25 If there is a conflict between the NPS and local policies, the NPS takes precedence.

Relevant planning authorities

- 1.3.26 The proposed scheme is situated within the boundaries of three authorities:

- Somerset County Council (SCC): The upper tier planning authority for the county of Somerset. The county council is responsible for the most significant local government services in most of the county. The county council has jurisdiction across the four non-unitary districts of Somerset comprising Mendip, Sedgemoor, South Somerset and Somerset and West Taunton.
- South Somerset District Council (SSDC): The lower tier planning authority for the South Somerset District. SSDC is the local planning authority responsible for planning and development in the district.
- Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWTC) (formerly Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset Borough Council): The lower tier planning authority for West Somerset and Taunton. SWTC is the local planning authority responsible for planning and development in the West Somerset and Taunton non-unitary district.

Local development plans

- 1.3.27 Local development plans of relevance are listed below. Specific environmental policies from local plans are included, where relevant, within the individual environmental chapters (Chapters 5-14) of this PEI Report.

- SCC:
 - *The Somerset Minerals Plan Development Plan Document up to 2030* (Adopted 2015) [9]
 - *The Somerset Waste Core Strategy 2013-2028* (Adopted 2013, currently under review) [10]
 - *Somerset's Future Transport Plan 2011-2026* (Adopted 2011) [11]
- SSDC:
 - *South Somerset Local Plan 2006-2028* (Adopted 2015) [12]
 - *South Somerset Environment Strategy* (Adopted 2019) [13]
- SWTC:
 - *Taunton Deane Local Plan 2004* (Adopted 2004, currently under review). Many policies no longer apply, but a small number are Saved Policies [14]
 - *Taunton Deane Adopted Core Strategy 2011-2028* [15]
 - *West Somerset Local Plan to 2032* (Adopted 2016) [16]
 - *Taunton Deane Site Allocations and Development Management Plan* [17]

Non-statutory plans

- 1.3.28 This section outlines the non-statutory plans of relevance.

Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan (2019-2024) (Adopted 2019)

- 1.3.29 The AONB is partially bound by the M5 and A35 trunk road and is dissected by the A303/A30. The A358 and A373 are acknowledged in the *Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan (2019-2024)* [18] as major periphery roads. In relation to the potential development in the future, it is stated that: *“Alterations or improvements to any of the above routes could have an impact on the special qualities and setting of the AONB, and affect local communities. Full consideration of the environmental and landscape impacts would be required as part of the feasibility and scheme development.”*
- 1.3.30 The vision for the Blackdown Hills AONB in 2029 outlined in the management plan is as follows:
- “The Blackdown Hills remains an ancient landscape of small villages and farms, deep valleys and high hedges shaped by its unique geology.*
- Its sense of tranquil timelessness and lack of change provides reassurance in a polluted, overcrowded world and gives a sense of well-being to residents and visitors alike.*
- Its wildlife is thriving and heritage conserved due to sympathetic management that is keeping alive traditional skills. They are enjoyed and understood by local people and visitors alike.*
- Vibrant, diverse communities, with a strong sense of identity, live and work sustainably, supporting the local economy and conserving and enhancing the area’s rich resources for future generations.”*
- 1.3.31 The Blackdown Hills AONB contains all elements of the ‘natural beauty criterion’ outlined by Natural England, comprising landscape quality, scenic quality, relative wildness, relative tranquillity, natural heritage features and cultural heritage.
- 1.3.32 A non-exhaustive list of policies within the Blackdown Hills AONB Management Plan pertinent to the proposed scheme (Transport and Highways) are outlined below:
- **Policy TH1:** Road and transport schemes (including design, maintenance, signage, landscaping and safety measures) affecting the AONB will be undertaken in a manner that is sensitive and appropriate to landscape character, having regard to the purpose of AONB designation and conserving and enhancing the area’s special qualities. The landscape and cultural features of the AONB’s road network (including hedge banks, flower-rich verges, and locally distinctive historic highway furniture) will be protected and conserved.
 - **Policy TH2:** Traffic management measures will be supported which reduce the impact of large and heavy vehicles on the most minor roads and help to provide a safer environment for walking, cycling and horse riding, where this is compatible with conserving and enhancing natural beauty.
 - **Policy TH3:** Promote the development of high quality, integrated and sustainable transport services and initiatives in and around the AONB where they can be achieved without compromising the conservation of natural beauty and local character.

A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment

- 1.3.33 *A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment* (the '25 Year Environment Plan') [19] sets out the UK government's action plan to help the natural world regain and retain good health. Through the adoption of the plan, the government seeks to achieve cleaner air, water, improved biodiversity, climate and environmental resilience, efficient and sustainable resource/land use and enhancement and engagement with the environmental and cultural environment. This plan does not form part of the development plan for the area but is an important and relevant national strategy that the proposed scheme will have regard to.
- 1.3.34 The six key areas that the 25 Year Environment Plan policy actions focus upon are outlined below:
- Chapter 1: Using and managing land sustainably
 - Chapter 2: Recovering nature and enhancing the beauty of landscapes
 - Chapter 3: Connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing
 - Chapter 4: Increasing resource efficiency, and reducing pollution and waste
 - Chapter 5: Securing clean, productive and biologically diverse seas and oceans
 - Chapter 6: Protecting and improving the global environment

1.4 The Applicant

- 1.4.1 Highways England is the Applicant and the strategic highways company as defined in the *Infrastructure Act 2015* (2015, c.7) [20] and is charged with operating, maintaining and improving England's motorways and major A roads on behalf of the DfT.
- 1.4.2 Highways England is responsible for motorways and major (trunk) roads in England. Their road network totals over 4,300 miles (6,920km). Whilst this represents only 2% of all roads in England by length, these roads carry a third of all traffic by mileage and two-thirds of all heavy goods traffic.

1.5 Competent expert evidence

- 1.5.1 The EIA Regulations require that the PEI Report and ES are prepared by 'competent experts' (as referred to in Regulation 14 (4)(a)). The EIA is being undertaken by Arup and Ramboll on behalf of Highways England. Both organisations have been awarded the EIA Quality Mark from the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA), demonstrating competency in ES preparation.
- 1.5.2 The EIA is being undertaken by competent experts with the relevant and appropriate level of experience in their respective topics. The EIA technical leads responsible for the individual chapters and professionals responsible for coordinating and managing the EIA/ES will be summarised at the start of the relevant ES chapter.

1.6 Stakeholder engagement

Consultation undertaken to date

- 1.6.1 Following a stakeholder mapping exercise, the first of a series of workshops with key statutory stakeholders took place in December 2015. The workshop was attended by representatives from:
- Local authorities: SCC, SSDC, and Taunton Deane Borough Council (now incorporated into SWTC).
 - Statutory environmental bodies (SEB): Environment Agency, Natural England, and Historic England.
 - A non-statutory consultee, the National Trust, who were invited due to key interests in this area.
- 1.6.1 The purpose of the workshops was to keep the key statutory stakeholders up to date with the project's progress, seek views to ensure the project was aligned with local plans and receive input into the ongoing stakeholder engagement programme.
- 1.6.2 During the initial meeting, the attendees identified a number of additional stakeholders that possessed additional technical knowledge, information, and local area expertise that would be beneficial during the options development stage. The additional stakeholders were subsequently included in the stakeholder engagement programme. Details of the workshops held, the topics discussed, and the location are summarised in Table 1-1.

Table 1-1 Stakeholder workshops

Meeting agenda	Date	Location
Introduction to the A358 project and Highways England/Mott MacDonald Sweco Joint Venture team.	4 December 2015	Taunton Deane Borough Council offices
Scheme progress and Development Consent Order (DC) process.	22 March 2016	Taunton Deane Borough Council offices
Scheme progress and options development.	13 July 2016	Taunton Deane Borough Council offices
Scheme progress, parish council engagement and the public consultation.	11 November 2016	Taunton Deane Borough Council offices
Scheme progress and plans for the supplementary consultation with key stakeholders.	4 October 2017	Taunton Deane Borough Council offices

- 1.6.3 In addition to the stakeholder workshops, a group was formed to assist with the development of a draft Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC) for best practice purposes. The SoCC development group comprised local authority communications, planning and community engagement officers. Many of the group's suggestions and local information knowledge was incorporated into the draft SoCC, which included recommendations about identifying and engaging with different sectors of the community, including hard to reach groups. The final SoCC has been prepared for the 2021 statutory consultation.
- 1.6.4 A period of key stakeholder engagement commenced during the summer of 2016 with a series of meetings with key and statutory stakeholders. The information and views captured during the meetings was considered during the planning of the public consultation processes.

- 1.6.5 Early consultation has been held with local parishes along the route. Parish council area group (PCAG) meetings were held in November 2016 with all of the parish councils within the vicinity of the proposed scheme extents. These provided a forum for the parish councils to discuss their priorities, perceptions and concerns about the proposed scheme.
- 1.6.6 A further period of non-statutory public consultation commenced on 28 March 2017, open to the public. A series of consultation events were held for key and local stakeholders, including the public, where the scheme proposals could be viewed and discussed with the project team. Stakeholders were encouraged to provide their feedback about the proposed scheme proposals through a questionnaire, which was available to collect at the stakeholder events, as well as being available to complete online. The consultation period was scheduled to end on 20 May 2017. However, this was extended due to a period of purdah for the General Election. The final scheduled event on 8 May 2017 was postponed and rescheduled for 30 June, and the consultation period close date was moved to 16 July 2017.
- 1.6.7 A strong feedback theme from the initial 2017 consultation was a wish to see more options for connecting with the M5, for providing traffic relief for the village of Henlade, and for connecting more directly with the future 'Nexus 25' development (a major new employment site planned in the southeast quadrant of the existing M5 junction 25). This feedback was carefully considered and informed the decision that it would be beneficial to re-consult and seek further views on the whole scheme with alternative options presented. The second non-statutory public consultation for the proposed scheme commenced on 16 January 2018 and ran until 27 February 2018.
- 1.6.8 The design was further developed following feedback on the options received from the public consultations in 2018. A Community Liaison Forum meeting was held in February 2019 before the preferred route announcement was made in June 2019. A further Community Liaison Forum meeting was also held in September 2019.
- 1.6.9 In November 2020, new suppliers were appointed by Highways England to take forward the design and construction of the proposed scheme. Preliminary design and development of the preferred route commenced in January 2021 and an Environmental Scoping Report [21] was submitted to PINS in March 2021.
- 1.6.10 A Scoping Opinion was received from PINS on behalf of the SoS in May 2021 [22] in response to the Scoping Report. Comments received on Chapters 1-4, and the respective specialist topics reported on in Chapters 5-14 will be formally responded to within the ES.
- 1.6.11 Further consultation and engagement has continued throughout 2021 as part of the development of the preferred route, comprising:
- three community forums in March, May and June
 - one walking, cycling and horse-riding forum in May
 - various one-to-one meetings with stakeholders and landowners
- 1.6.12 During the community forums, representatives from local Parish Councils and resident groups have been provided with key updates on the proposed scheme, including the preliminary design, and an open forum for feedback, insight and discussion has been provided. This feedback has been noted and reviewed as

part of the proposed scheme's design process. To ensure safety measures during Covid-19, these events have been held virtually.

Proposed consultation

- 1.6.13 Statutory consultation is proposed to take place from 12 October 2021 until 22 November 2021.
- 1.6.14 The Statutory Consultation is planned to comply with sections 42, 45, 46, 47 and 48 of the Planning Act 2008 in the following ways:
- Section 42: Relevant consultees will be consulted, in accordance with sections 42 (a)(aa)(b)(c) and (d).
 - Section 45: outlines the timetable for consultation, of which the A358 statutory consultation will be greater than the minimum 28 days required.
 - Section 46: Highways England will notify the SoS of the proposed application via the PINS
 - Section 47: people who live and work in the vicinity of the scheme will be consulted and a SoCC outlining how consultation will take place will be prepared.
- 1.6.15 The PEI Report will be made available for consultation by the relevant consultees outlined above. In addition to the following documents:
- Consultation brochure
 - Feedback questionnaire
 - Map of the route
 - Plans of the scheme
 - Notice of application
 - SoCC
- 1.6.16 The feedback received during consultation will be carefully considered. Responses will be taken into account in finalising our application before we submit it to the PINS.
- 1.6.17 We will summarise our findings in a Consultation Report which will include a description of how our application was informed by the responses received, and outline any changes made as a result of consultation. The Consultation Report forms part of our submission to the PINS.

1.7 Structure of the PEI Report

- 1.7.1 The main text of this PEI Report is divided into four parts:
- Chapters 1 to 4 introduce and describe the proposed scheme, the considered alternatives and the approach/methodology of the EIA.
 - Chapters 5 to 14 present the preliminary assessment of the likely significant effects of the proposed scheme in relation to ten specialist topics covering aspects of the environment (based on survey data available at the time).
 - Chapter 15 considers the potential inter-relationships between the environmental aspects covered in Chapters 5 to 14, and between the proposed scheme and other developments in the surrounding area.
 - Chapter 16 presents a preliminary summary of the likely significant environmental effects.
- 1.7.2 The specialist topics covered in Chapters 5 to 14 of this PEI Report are:

- Chapter 5: Air quality
- Chapter 6: Cultural heritage
- Chapter 7: Landscape and visual
- Chapter 8: Biodiversity
- Chapter 9: Geology and soils
- Chapter 10: Material assets and waste
- Chapter 11: Noise and vibration
- Chapter 12: Population and human health
- Chapter 13: Road drainage and the water environment
- Chapter 14: Climate

1.7.3 A separate document has also been prepared to provide a Non-Technical Summary (NTS) of this PEI Report.

1.7.4 Three other PEI Report chapters are provided that collate the abbreviations (Chapter 17) and glossary of terms (Chapter 18) used within the PEI Report.

1.8 Next steps

1.8.1 This PEI Report has been prepared to support consultees in developing an informed view of the likely significant effects of the proposed scheme. Highways England invites comments on the proposed scheme and the environmental issues addressed in this PEI Report.

1.8.2 Further details on the consultation and downloadable copies of this PEI Report and NTS can be downloaded at:

www.highwaysengland.co.uk/a358-taunton-to-southfields

1.8.3 All consultation responses must be made in writing (subject to any coronavirus [COVID-19] restrictions in place at the time) by:

- Completing the online feedback questionnaire via:
www.highwaysengland.co.uk/a358-taunton-to-southfields
- Requesting a hard copy of the freepost questionnaire to be sent to you in the post and return to our freepost address.
- Picking up a hard copy at one of our display/deposit locations which can be posted via freepost.
- Email us or write to us at the following addresses:
 - Email: A358TauntontoSouthfields@highwaysengland.co.uk
 - Freepost: FREEPOST A358 TAUNTON TO SOUTHFIELDS

1.8.4 All responses must be received by **22 November 2021 at 11:59pm. Responses received after that date may not be considered.**

1.8.5 After the consultation period, all responses will be considered in finalising the proposed scheme design and progressing the EIA and ES. Comments will be taken into account when considering the need for further assessment or modification to the proposed scheme design or mitigation measures.

1.8.6 Following submission of the DCO application, PINS will consider, on behalf of the SoS, whether the application should be accepted for examination. If the application is accepted, consultees including the general public will then be able to make relevant representations about the proposed scheme and its potential impacts. The documents accompanying the DCO application will be publicly

available on the PINS website, and consultees will be able to submit comments to PINS. These comments will then be considered as part of the examination into the DCO application. Following examination, PINS will make a recommendation to the SoS, who will then decide whether to grant a DCO.

- 1.8.7 If the DCO is granted, construction is planned to start in late 2024 and the proposed scheme is due to open to traffic in mid-2028.

Abbreviations List

Please refer to PEI Report Chapter 17 Abbreviations.

Glossary

Please refer to PEI Report Chapter 18 Glossary.

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