



Meeting note

Project name	A417 Missing Link
File reference	TR010056
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date	9 December 2020
Meeting with	Highways England
Venue	Microsoft Teams
Meeting objectives	Project update 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.

Project update

Highways England (the Applicant) confirmed that the preferred route for the scheme had been announced in March 2019. Statutory consultation took place in autumn 2019 and supplementary statutory consultation was carried out between 13 October and 12 November 2020.

The Applicant explained that its supplementary consultation had been carried out on a digital-first basis to account for the impacts of COVID-19. Various changes to the scheme were consulted on including:

- New crossings at Cotswold Way and Gloucestershire Way;
- an increased gradient at Crickley Hill;
- a redesigned Cowley Junction;
- rerouting of the B4070 to Birdlip;
- improvements for walkers, cyclists and horse riders; and
- replacement of common land.

There had been a significant number of positive responses to the changes to the scheme, but concern was sustained by some parties in respect of issues such as climate change, that money should be spent elsewhere and the impact of the scheme on the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

The Inspectorate requested further detail regarding the change in gradient at Crickley Hill. The Applicant explained that the increased gradient had reduced the depth of the

cutting at Crickley Hill by approximately 10 metres, potentially lessening the visual impact of the scheme on the AoNB. The Applicant also explained that this change reduced the need for retaining structures and improved the earthworks balance, thus improving the project's performance on emissions and embedded carbon.

The Applicant explained that a decision was currently outstanding about whether the section of the A417 proposed to be de-trunked as part of the scheme would be owned and maintained by Gloucestershire County Council. A draft Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) with Gloucestershire County Council was under preparation.

The Applicant confirmed that pre-application discussions with a breadth of stakeholders were ongoing, and it was in the process of programming strategic stakeholder panel meetings and meetings to progress SoCGs. The Inspectorate enquired about progress with landowner negotiations. The Applicant confirmed that negotiations and meetings with affected landowners were ongoing, and it had developed a series of position statements with each affected landowner. The Applicant confirmed that it had gained access to most land by way of agreement, but in some cases it had been necessary to seek access through section 172 of the Housing and Planning Act 2016.

The Inspectorate enquired whether there was any update in relation to the scheme's interaction with National Trust land. The Applicant stated that the revised scheme would avoid National Trust land where possible, leaving a much smaller affected area. The parties were in the process of establishing the extent of National Trust land ownership in the affected area with a view to reaching a mutually acceptable solution. The Applicant confirmed that National Trust trustees had given consent to inalienable land outside Crickley Hill Country Park being used for the scheme. The Applicant was confident that the parties would reach agreement on any outstanding land matters prior to the submission of the application.

The Applicant confirmed that the scheme would require the acquisition of common land near Crickley Hill and at Barrow Wake. The proposed area of replacement common land was larger than the area proposed to be acquired. Discussions with relevant stakeholders including the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust in respect of the common land strategy were ongoing and the Applicant expected that any issues would be resolved prior to the submission of the application.

The Applicant provided an update with regards to its survey progress. Some difficulties and delays had been encountered initially, as a result of restrictions relating to COVID-19, but those impacts had been largely absorbed by the Applicant's extended pre-application programme. The Applicant believed that it had established a strong baseline for the Environmental Statement (ES). Since the last project update meeting in April 2020, the Applicant had undertaken trial trenching, water quality and flow monitoring, and had updated its agricultural land classification surveys for most of the land affected by the scheme.

The Applicant confirmed that a Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR) had accompanied the 2020 supplementary consultation. The Applicant was in the process of considering relevant responses to its supplementary consultation. Early assessment indicated that a number of likely significant effects were diminished or removed as a result of the revised scheme. A Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) screening

exercise had been completed and this was in the process of being reviewed by Natural England.

The Inspectorate enquired whether the scheme included any utilities diversions. The Applicant confirmed that the scheme affected four utilities and that communication was ongoing with each of the affected providers. No significant issues were noted.

DCO application submission

The Applicant stated it was aiming to submit draft documents to the Inspectorate in early 2021 to enable a review between February and March 2021. It anticipated submitting its Development Consent Order (DCO) application in spring 2021.

The Inspectorate advised that to enable an optimised review of the draft DCO to be carried out, the Applicant should provide a full suite of relevant draft plans to be read against it (ie Works Plans, Land Plans, Rights of Way and Access Plans). The Applicant confirmed that a draft HRA screening report would be provided. The Inspectorate advised the Applicant to include within its draft documents package a clear indication of the areas it would be most helpful for the Inspectorate to focus on in providing feedback.

The Applicant confirmed that it would contact the Inspectorate in January 2021 to confirm the date for submission of the draft DCO application documents. It was agreed that a subsequent meeting would be scheduled between March and June 2021.