

A358

**Taunton to Southfields
Dualling Scheme**

Public consultation summary report
February 2022



The project

At National Highways we believe in a connected country and our network makes these connections happen. We strive to improve our major roads and motorways - engineering the future to keep people moving today and moving better tomorrow.

The A358 Taunton to Southfields Dualling Scheme is one of several improvements on the A303 and A358 designed to make it easier to travel across the south of England from the M3 to the M5 and beyond.

The South West's economy is under-performing compared to the rest of the UK. Local councils and business leaders agree that upgrading the rest of the A303/A358 corridor to dual carriageway would help connect the South West better to neighbouring regions, unlocking its potential for growth and supporting plans for more homes and jobs.

We're improving the A358 between Taunton and Southfields roundabout, near Ilminster. The project is intended to improve road safety, reduce traffic congestion and keep road users and local communities connected, while unlocking economic growth in Somerset and the South West.

The project will:

create opportunities by:

- building a direct and convenient connection between local towns and the wider region, and areas of business such as Taunton and the new Nexus 25 employment site, paving the way for more job opportunities
- making faster connections with more reliable journey times, encouraging tourism and helping local businesses to operate more efficiently and with lower costs
- generating an estimated £37.7m per year for South Somerset and Somerset West and Taunton, as well as 630 jobs

keep people connected to places by:

- improving connectivity between towns whilst maintaining connectivity between villages
- reducing congestion during peak travel times, weekends and the summer
- allowing traffic to leave the A358 without queuing to access local road connections from the main carriageway

future-proof the route by:

- reducing congestion and journey times
- reducing traffic through local towns and villages quickly and effectively. In Henlade, for example, we hope to see average daily traffic levels reducing from 33,500 vehicles to 4,000 by 2038
- providing clear improvements to air quality in the area – we expect the project will enable the Air Quality Management Area in Henlade to be removed because fewer vehicles would travel through the village

facilitate a growth in jobs, investment and housing by:

- providing a free-flowing and reliable connection between the area and other parts of the UK

As part of our development of the project we have engaged with a number of stakeholders to discuss the preliminary design. These stakeholders include the local councils (Somerset County Council, South Somerset District Council and Somerset West and Taunton Council), statutory bodies such as Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency, local parish councils via a Community Forum, business groups via a Business Forum and walkers, cyclists, horse-riders - including disabled users via a Walking, Cycling and Horse Riding Forum.

In this booklet we explain the methodology of the consultation and outline the key themes from the public consultation. We also give details of what will happen next.

2021 public consultation

As part of the planning process for the project we are required to consult on our preliminary design, which we have been working on since announcing our preferred route for the project in June 2019.

The consultation ran from 12 October to 22 November 2021, for a period of six weeks.

During the consultation we wanted to know what you thought about our more detailed proposals. We divided the route into four sections:

- **Section 1:** M5 junction 25 to Mattock's Tree Green junction
- **Section 2:** Mattock's Tree Green junction to Griffin Lane
- **Section 3:** Griffin Lane to Ashill junction
- **Section 4:** Ashill junction to Southfields roundabout

We sought feedback on the preliminary design and requested comments on our proposals for walkers, cyclists and horse-riders including disabled users, and on our plans for construction and environmental mitigation. Some of the key design features we consulted on included changes to the M5 junction 25 and the Nexus roundabout, a new junction at Mattock's Tree Green, a new connection linking Village Road to Mattock's Tree Green junction and a new junction at Ashill.

Our approach to the consultation was set out, in advance, in a Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC). This document, which was published on 30 September 2021, was developed in consultation with the local councils (Somerset County Council, South Somerset District Council and Somerset West and Taunton Council). By working with the local authorities in this way, we

were able to draw on their expertise and previous experiences, and integrate their feedback into shaping the nature of the consultation.

Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic the consultation was delivered in venues and online, using a blended digital and in-person format. The consultation was conducted in accordance with the SoCC. There was a virtual consultation space, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, which mirrored the look and feel of a traditional consultation event. It attracted 787 visitors during the consultation period and was supplemented by three in-person consultation events.

In addition, we ran themed webinars, hosted web chats, and offered telephone appointments with members of the project team. Consultation documents, including the consultation booklet, were available to view online throughout the consultation period and paper copies could be requested by calling 0300 123 5000 or emailing A358TauntontoSouthfields@highwaysengland.co.uk

The following materials and documents were available to view online, free of charge, during the consultation period. They were hosted on a dedicated A358 Taunton to Southfields Citizen Space page, which was accessible via our website, www.nationalhighways.co.uk/A358-Taunton-to-Southfields and were also available within the virtual consultation space:

- A358 Taunton to Southfields consultation booklet
- A358 Taunton to Southfields consultation feedback questionnaire
- Preliminary Environmental Impact (PEI) Report
- Non-technical summary PEI Report
- A358 General Arrangement Drawings
- A358 Plan and Profile Drawings
- A358 Scheme Boundary Plan
- A358 Walking, Cycling and Horse-rider, including disabled users - strategy drawings

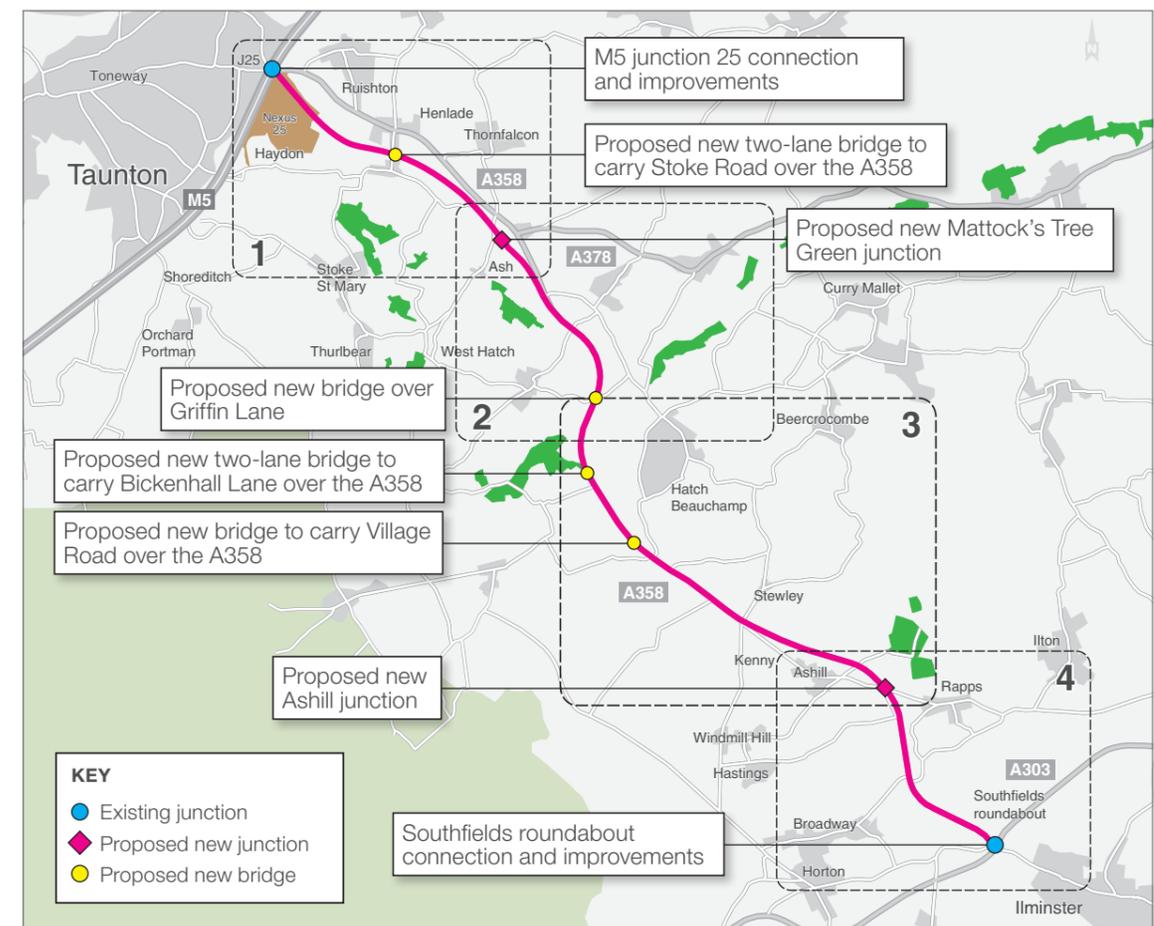
- A358 Technical Traffic Note
- S47 Notice
- S48 Notice
- A358 Taunton to Southfields - Statement of Community Consultation
- A358 Deposit Point Locations
- A358 Taunton to Southfields Flythrough Video
- Easy read version of the A358 Taunton to Southfields consultation booklet
- Easy read version of the A358 Taunton to Southfields consultation feedback questionnaire

Hard copies of the consultation materials were also placed at public information points at the following locations, during the consultation period:

- Taunton Library, Paul Street, Taunton TA1 3XZ
- South Petherton Library, 3 St James's Street, South Petherton TA13 5BS
- Martock Library, North Street, Martock TA12 6DL
- Priorswood Library, Hillside Children's Centre, Eastwick Rd, Taunton TA2 7HD

- Ilminster Library, Ditton Street, Ilminster TA19 0BW (hard copy of the PEI Report was also available for inspection at this location)
- Chard Library, Holyrood Street, Chard TA20 2YA
- Somerset County Council mobile library
- Ilminster Meeting House & Arts Centre, 35 East Street, Ilminster TA19 0AN
- Henlade Post Office, Henlade, Taunton TA3 5DH
- Blackbrook Leisure Centre & Spa, Blackbrook Way, Taunton TA1 2RW
- Somerset West and Taunton Council, Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton, Somerset TA1 1HE (hard copy of the PEI Report was also available for inspection at this location)

In addition, we spoke to parish councils ahead of the consultation to understand the number and type of documents they would find most useful. In most situations we provided copies on USB sticks to minimise the environmental impact, where requested hard copies were provided.



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Publicising the consultation

A postcard was sent to 12,500 addresses across two mailings (25,000 postcards sent in total) on 21 September 2021 and on 12 October 2021 to advertise the launch of consultation.

A briefing about the consultation was included in the Community Forum on 7 October 2021. We used our mobile engagement van to advertise and draw attention to the consultation in the local area. It was parked in the following locations:

- Friday 8 to Sunday 10 October 2021 at Tesco Superstore, Ilminster
- Monday 25 to Tuesday 26 October 2021 at Sainsburys, Hankridge Farm Retail Park

The consultation was also advertised in the local press, with posters in the local area and through Twitter and Facebook on our dedicated South West accounts.

We published the statutory notices in both the national and local press. The Section 48 notices were displayed at 12 locations in the local area.

We produced a stakeholder resource pack to raise awareness of the consultation and help us reach a wide group of people. The stakeholder resource pack provided details of the consultation, the process and the ways to get involved. We sent this to 52 stakeholder groups including local parish councils, members of the business groups, local authority partners, MPs and others on 5 October 2021 and followed up again on 15 October 2021.

Events and opportunities to ask questions

We held three in-person consultation events during the consultation period, at locations close to the project, which attracted 619 visitors in total. At these events hard copies of the consultation materials were available for inspection.

- Tuesday 19 October 2021 at Taunton Racecourse, 2.00pm – 8.00pm
- Saturday 23 October 2021 at Monks Yard, Ilminster, 11.00am – 6.00pm
- Wednesday 3 November 2021 at Holiday Inn, Taunton, 11.00am - 6.00pm

We held nine webinars during the consultation period. These themed sessions involved a presentation being delivered by a member of our project team followed by an opportunity for people to ask questions using the live chat function. These webinars attracted a total of 275 attendees.

We provided 11 opportunities for members of the public to engage with our project team via live web chat facilities linked to the online virtual exhibition. Various members of the project team made themselves available to answer questions during the publicised live chat times.

We held 13 telephone appointments; these were requested by members of the public and involved members of our project team being available to talk about the project and answer questions.

Consultation responses

Consultation responses were accepted through the following channels:

- By completing the online response form found on the project's Citizen Space page, which was accessible via www.highwaysengland.co.uk/a358-Taunton-to-Southfields
 - By emailing A358TauntontoSouthfields@highwaysengland.co.uk
 - By writing to us at the freepost address
- We received a total of 913 consultation responses.
- By completing a paper copy of the consultation feedback questionnaire and returning it using the freepost address – FREEPOST A358 TAUNTON TO SOUTHFIELDS



Key themes

Consultation responses varied and through initial review we were able to identify several key themes. We will respond to all queries as part of the full Consultation Report, which will be published as part of our Development Consent Order (DCO) application.

Consultation responses included comments on the positive outcome the project would have on current delays through Henlade.

Many consultees also welcomed the need to resolve the issues of queuing traffic and air pollution at Henlade and have supported the way in which the project would improve these problems. A number also raised queries around the impact of air quality elsewhere.

Questions were raised about the impact on the local road network. People commented on whether there would be increased pressure on the local road network and around the existing A358 including the ability for rural roads to take additional traffic, particularly in Ashill Village and Hatch Beauchamp. They also commented on whether the level of rat running through the villages would decrease after the project is complete.

Concerns were expressed about junction layouts, including whether there were enough junctions along the route and further requests were made for additional access.

Some respondents felt that the Mattock's Tree Green junction and the Ashill junction were over engineered and complicated.

In relation to the Capland Link, the majority of responses supported Option 1 as it was considered to improve connectivity between local villages and offered the most direct link.

Consultees also expressed a preference for options for walking, cycling, horse-riders including disabled users as part of the preliminary design. This included the use of the proposed bridge at Bickenhall Lane, requests for segregated cycle lanes and increased public rights of way provision. Respondents also commented on the engineering design standards, particularly with the proposals for the roundabout at the M5 junction 25 and at Southfields.

People expressed concerns that they didn't fully understand the preliminary design and wanted to understand more about the highway design standards being adopted.

The impact on the environment featured highly in a number of responses; people expressed concerns due to potential impacts on the climate, wildlife and the landscape. People provided valuable insight into areas where localised flooding takes place and locations where veteran trees are sited.

Next steps

The project is classified as a 'Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project' defined under the Planning Act 2008 and therefore we need to obtain planning consent to build the project through a DCO.

We are considering the responses to the consultation and developing our proposals further for the DCO application.

Our DCO application will include a full Consultation Report summarising all the feedback and showing how it has informed the development of the project.

We are continuing to work with the statutory environmental bodies and the local authorities to develop our environmental assessments and

address topics such as climate change. These developments to our assessments will be incorporated into the Environmental Statement that will be submitted as part of our DCO application planned for 2022.

Upon receipt of our application, the Planning Inspectorate will have 28 days to decide whether to accept the application for examination. Once our application has been accepted, the Planning Inspectorate (acting on behalf of the Secretary of State) may examine the application through written representations and public hearings.

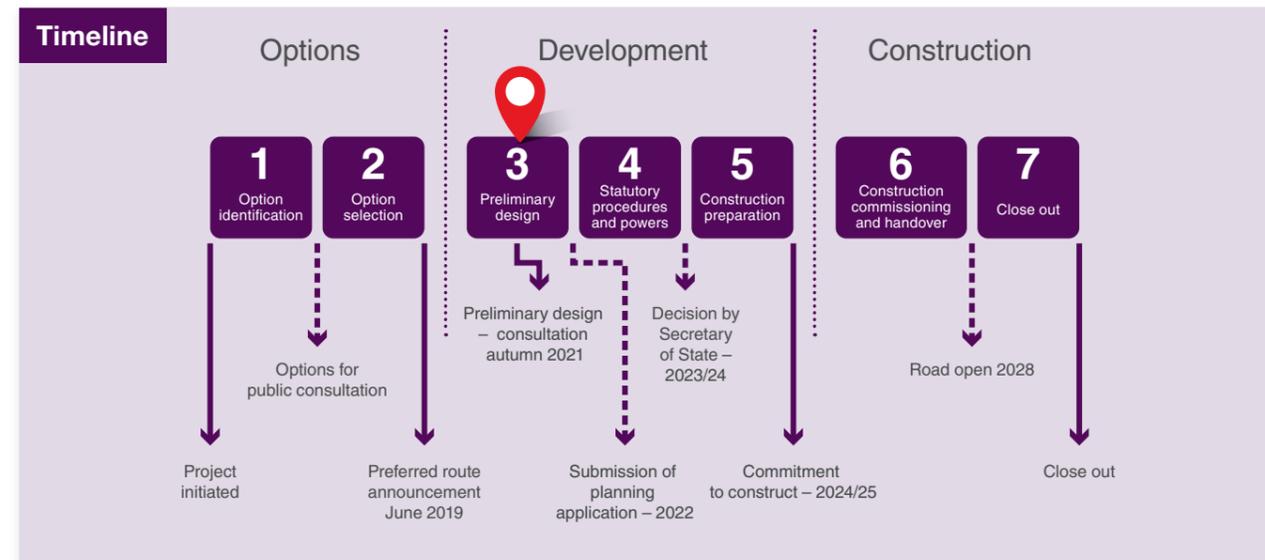


The examination period is a maximum of six months. Following the examination, the Planning Inspectorate will report its recommendation to the Secretary of State for Transport, who will then make the final decision on whether the DCO should be granted.

We'll carry on working on our detailed design throughout this process and, assuming the DCO is granted, we expect to start construction work in 2024/25.

Although the Secretary of State for Transport will decide whether to give permission for the project, local planning authorities such as Somerset County Council, South Somerset District Council and Somerset West and Taunton Council have an important role to play in the process. We've already been talking to them about our proposals and will continue to engage with them before, during and after we submit the DCO application.

More information on the DCO process can be found on the Planning Inspectorate's website: <https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk>



If you have any further questions or would like to find out more, please contact us by:

☎ Telephone: 0300 123 5000

@ Email: A358TauntontoSouthfields@nationalhighways.co.uk



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