

Decision Report – Non Key decision.

DRAFT FOR COMMENT

decision date – 22 June 2017

Non-statutory consultation response to the A358 Taunton to Southfields improvement scheme options consultation

Cabinet Member(s): Cllr David Hall – Cabinet Member for Resources and Economic Development

Division and Local Member(s): Hazel Prior-Sankey (Taunton South), Simon Coles (Taunton East), John Thorne (Blackdown & Neroche), David Fothergill (Monkton & North Curry), Linda Vijeh (Ilminster).

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	Local Member(s)	Cllr Hazel Prior-Sankey Cllr Simon Coles Cllr John Thorne Cllr David Fothergill Cllr Linda Vijeh	9/6/2017
	Cabinet Member	Cllr David Hall Cabinet Member for Resources and Economic Development	22/5/2017
	Opposition Spokesperson	Cllr Simon Coles Opposition spokesperson for Resources and Economic Development	9/6/2017
	Relevant Scrutiny Chairman	Cllr Tony Lock for Scrutiny Place	9/6/2017
Forward Plan Reference:	N/A – Non-key decision.		

<p>Summary:</p>	<p>This report considers the Council's response to a non-statutory consultation issued by Highways England in respect of the A358 Taunton to Southfields Improvement Scheme. The non-statutory consultation is being undertaken prior to finalisation of the preferred route for the scheme and prior to commencement of the formal consenting process for the scheme which will involve a statutory consultation process in due course. As a nationally significant infrastructure project consents will be issued by the Secretary of State under a development consent order.</p>
<p>Recommendations:</p>	<p>That the Cabinet Member for Resources and Economic Development:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Authorises the non-statutory consultation response to the A358 Taunton to Southfields improvement scheme options consultation attached as Appendix C to this report. 2. Notes the issues set out in this report and the technical information set out in Appendix A which will need to be taken account of as the improvement scheme progresses through statutory processes.
<p>Reasons for Recommendations:</p>	<p>The Council has promoted the end-to-end dualling of the A303/A358 between the M3 and M5 with complimentary smaller-scale improvements to the A303/A30 between Broadway and Honiton. The business case and economic assessment prepared by the Council demonstrated the benefits of the scheme for the economic growth of the South West and the UK, increasing safety, improving connectivity and resilience.</p> <p>The Council has a statutory role in the Development Consent Order (DCO) process for the scheme. The current consultation is a non-statutory consultation, undertaken prior to the DCO process to assist the Secretary of State in identifying a preferred route for the scheme. It is important that the Council responds to this stage of consultation to set out support for the improvements in principle and to highlight issues that should be considered by Highways England in choosing the most appropriate preferred route, and within detailed development of the scheme.</p>
<p>Links to Priorities and Impact on Service Plans:</p>	<p>Supports the County Plan priority that Somerset is a thriving local economy, attracting jobs and investment by improving key road, rail and broadband communication links.</p>
<p>Consultations and co-production undertaken:</p>	<p>Consultations on the Council's response have been undertaken with the Cabinet Member. The Opposition Spokesperson, Chairman of the relevant Scrutiny Committee, and local members affected by the recommendations have been informed as part of the decision approval process.</p> <p>The Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee considered the proposed response at its meeting of 13 June 2017.</p> <p>The Council has worked closely with Taunton Deane Borough</p>

	<p>Council and other statutory consultees including Somerset Heritage Trust in formulating this response.</p> <p>It is Highways England's responsibility to consult on the scheme as the promoter, rather than Somerset County Council. Nonetheless, Council officers have attended consultation workshops run by Highways England in order to gain an understanding of the key issues and concerns of the local communities affected by the scheme, and have received correspondence from communities which has informed this response as set out in Appendix B.</p> <p>The Council has had ongoing engagement with Highways England during the development of their proposal and whilst we have been able to inform the options development process at a strategic level, the single option for consultation for the A358 improvement has been chosen by Highways England.</p> <p>The Council would have preferred Highways England to have consulted on all the feasible options at this stage in the process rather than a single option.</p>
<p>Financial Implications:</p>	<p>There will be financial resource implications for the Council if it is to fully engage with the next stages of scheme development and the DCO process, but that is not a barrier to submitting this initial consultation response, and resource implications will be considered in due course. Somerset County Council and Wiltshire Council are jointly written to the Department for Transport to seek adequate resourcing to undertake our respective roles in the DCO process for the A303/A358/A30 improvement schemes.</p> <p>The single option being consulted on will have future financial implications in terms of maintenance and operating costs as a result of certain sections of the existing A358 becoming part of the new expressway as part of the DCO process and becoming the responsibility of Highways England. The Parties must ensure that responsibility for each section of road is discussed within the DCO process so there is clarity over what transfers to Highways England and what remains local highway.</p>
<p>Legal Implications:</p>	<p>It is Highways England who will be the lead body in any application for a DCO. The role of the Council within this process is as a statutory consultee (and one of the principal consultees). We are currently at the pre-application stage whereby Highways England are seeking at an early stage comments on the route options. The design proposals are still at a very early stage in the development process and it is necessary for further information to be made available to the Council in order for it to fully assess the proposals. Therefore the Council should retain the ability to refine its position once the additional information is available. No legal advice has been obtained by SCC at this point in the process.</p>
<p>HR Implications:</p>	<p>HR implications have been considered and none have been identified at this stage.</p>
<p>Risk Implications:</p>	<p>Risk implications have been considered and the key risk</p>

	<p>identified is that a failure to engage in the process and submit a consultation response will risk a lack of influence over the route choice and scheme design, resulting in a missed opportunity to secure economic growth benefits and increased risk of adverse/unmitigated local impacts.</p>					
	Likelihood	3	Impact	3	Risk Score	9
<p>Other Implications (including due regard implications):</p>	<p><u>Equalities Implications</u></p> <p>Access: SCC's consultation response urges Highways England to carefully consider potential impacts of the scheme on access for local communities and access for non-motorised and vulnerable road users.</p> <p>Equality and Diversity: The consultation response urges Highways England to take account of the needs of people with protected characteristics as part of the detailed design of the preferred route once identified. Of note are the needs of people with poor mobility, people with disabilities, younger and older people who may be vulnerable road users.</p> <p>Human Rights: Impacts of the decision on human rights have been considered and none have been identified.</p> <p><u>Community Safety Implications:</u> The consultation response identifies the need for Highways England to consider the safety of all road users in the design of the improvement scheme.</p> <p><u>Sustainability Implications:</u> The consultation response identifies the need for Highways England to consider the impacts of the design of the improvement scheme on sustainability and in particular to the need for the scheme to maintain connectivity for existing walking and cycling routes and where possible provide improved facilities that promote more sustainable travel and associated health & wellbeing through physical activity.</p> <p><u>Health and Safety Implications:</u> The scheme will be taken forward by Highways England who will be responsible for considering all aspects of health and safety in the design and delivery of the scheme.</p> <p><u>Privacy Implications:</u> Privacy implications have been considered and none have been identified.</p> <p><u>Health and Wellbeing Implications:</u> The consultation response identifies the need for Highways England to consider the impacts of the design of the improvement scheme on health and wellbeing and in particular to the need for the scheme to maintain connectivity for existing walking and cycling routes and where possible provide improved facilities that promote more sustainable travel and associated health & wellbeing through physical activity.</p> <p>If designed appropriately the scheme presents an opportunity to improve air quality at a long-standing air quality management</p>					

	area in Henlade. The consultation response urges Highways England to consider how the scheme and associated measures can maximise opportunities to reduce traffic travelling through Henlade to achieve this objective.
Scrutiny comments / recommendation (if any):	The proposed response was considered by Scrutiny for Place Committee on 13 June 2017 and the committee noted that[to be added following committee meeting]

1. Background

- 1.1. The Council has promoted the end-to-end dualling of the A303/A358 between the M3 and M5 with complimentary smaller-scale improvements to the A303/A30 between Broadway and Honiton. The business case and economic assessment prepared by the Council demonstrated the benefits of the scheme for the economic growth of the South West and the UK, increasing safety, improving connectivity and resilience.
- 1.2. Highways England are currently progressing three sections of the overall route improvement and are currently consulting on a single option for the A358 Taunton to Southfields section which is proposed to be improved to dual carriageway.
- 1.3. Highways England initially assessed 26 route options, sifted down to four for further assessment, and identified a single option for consultation to inform their choice of a preferred route.
- 1.4. The single option (known technically as “Option 8/8B + NFS”) commences at the M5 approximately 3.5km south of Junction 25 at a new two-bridge roundabout which forms a new all-movements junction with the Motorway (shown as ‘Junction A’ in the consultation material). No detailed layout of this junction has been provided but it has been verbally confirmed by Highways England that the proposed junction does not link with the local road network at this location. A new dual carriageway link will then run north-east crossing the B3170 and Stoke Road before arcing around the north of Stoke Hill. From Stoke Hill the proposed road continues in a south easterly direction for 2.5km to join the existing A358 corridor at West Hatch Lane. The section from the M5 to West Hatch Lane is known as ‘Section 1’ in the consultation material.
- 1.5. The proposal is then to undertake improvements to ‘Section 2’, a largely ‘online’ widening of the existing A358 between West Hatch Lane and Southfields junction as follows:
 - Asymmetrical widening between West Hatch Lane and Capland with the southbound carriageway being formed from the existing road and the northbound carriageway being formed from new construction.
 - Offline route just to the north of the existing road between Capland and Ashill, enabling retention of the existing road as a local route between Ashill and Hatch Beauchamp also providing access to properties.
 - Asymmetrical widening between Ashill and Southfields Roundabout. Around the north of Ashill the westbound carriageway will be formed from the existing road and the eastbound carriageway being formed from new construction minimising impact on residential properties in the village. Between Ashill and Southfields this ‘asymmetrical’ widening is reversed to minimise impact on land associated with Jordans Park Local Wildlife Site.

- 1.6.** The proposal is for the existing A358 between West Hatch Lane and M5 Junction 25 to remain in situ as a local road. A key objective of the Council is for traffic on this section to be reduced as much as possible, particularly to:

 - Reduce environmental (air quality and congestion) impacts of traffic flow through Henlade which is an Air Quality Management Area;
 - enable sufficient capacity for development of a new strategic employment site next to Junction 25; and
 - reduce congestion and delay at Junction 25.
- 1.7.** The Council's response therefore requests Highways England to consider including measures in the DCO which encourage traffic to use the new route rather than the current A358 through Henlade, including consideration of physical works on the existing A358 to further reduce traffic using that route, and alterations to the A358 junction with the A378 to encourage A378 traffic to use the new road.
- 1.8.** In addition to the proposed Junction A; two further all movement grade separated junctions are proposed along the route. These will enable access from the local road network at West Hatch Lane to enable interchange with the existing A358 and A378 ('Junction B'); and at Ashill ('Junction C') to provide access to communities near Ashill and Ilton. An at-grade connection would be provided to the Southfields Roundabout with the A303 ('Junction D'), although local improvements may be required at that junction. The intention is to provide a grade separated junction or other free-flow connection to the A303 as part of a future South Petherton to Southfields improvement.
- 1.9.** Junction A has attracted local community concern largely due to its proximity to residential development and due to Highways England's consultation material referring to the junction supporting major development opportunities in the area south of Taunton.
- 1.10.** The proposed junction strategy for Section 2 significantly reduces opportunities for local traffic to access the A358 compared to the current provision, and this will inevitably increase the volume of local traffic travelling along less-suitable local roads to reach an access point onto the new road; which may have significant environmental impact on communities along those routes.
- 1.11.** The Technical Appraisal Report (TAR) compares the benefits of the four scheme options considered by Highways England prior to choosing a single option for consultation, and the chosen scheme would appear to offer the lowest transport benefits of the options considered. It is disappointing at this early stage in route development that of the available options only one has been put forward for consultation; and further information has been requested in order to fully understand the performance of the proposed scheme compared to other options considered in terms of reducing network congestion and delay, and in terms of impacts on the local highway network.
- 1.12.** Whilst there are several important issues which will require resolution as the precise routing, alignment, junction strategy/ location and design is further developed, it is clear from the TAR that the proposed option if designed appropriately has the potential to deliver the economic, transport and safety benefits that the Council is seeking in promoting the need for the improvement. The proposed option will enable the timeframe dictated by the Development

Consent Order (DCO) process to be met, achieving start on site by March 2020.

- 1.13.** It is therefore recommended that at this stage in the process the overall need for the dual carriageway improvement is strongly supported but that a number of significant issues and potential impacts associated with the proposed route are highlighted to Highways England so that appropriate further technical analysis, amendments to the proposals and appropriate mitigations can be considered prior to publishing a preferred route; taking into account community and stakeholder feedback from the consultation process along with appropriate technical appraisals.
- 1.14.** The TAR raises a number of issues that will need to be taken into account as the scheme develops. Possible impacts on designated sites of historical, archaeological, landscape and nature conservation Interest, noise, air quality, landscape, townscape, listed buildings, heritage assets, biodiversity, water environment & flooding, physical fitness and journey ambience, accessibility and integration are noted and these will need to be considered and addressed as part of the finalisation of the route, and design of the preferred route scheme and associated mitigation strategy at the next stage of development.
- 1.15.** Initial indicative junction 'types', possible changes to side roads, and implications for rights of way are referred to in the technical report although outline designs have not been provided at this stage. A number of design and safety related issues have already been identified by Highways England for each of the four routes they have considered through their initial safety review.
- 1.16.** Whilst it is recognised that the design proposals are still at a very early stage in the development process, it will be necessary for further information to be made available to the Council in due course in order for us to fully assess the preferred route proposal once chosen. It will be important for the Council to engage with Highways England to validate the potential local impacts which will be identified from their technical appraisal and traffic modelling, and provide detailed observations on their designs for the preferred route, at an appropriate stage in the design process, to ensure connections and interfaces with the local road network and rights of way network maintain appropriate standards of access and safety; and to ensure appropriate mitigation for any adverse impacts or indeed betterment where possible.

2. Options considered and reasons for rejecting them

- 2.1.** Alternative options are to express clear support for the proposed route option; to remain neutral or not to submit a response. It is considered important that a consultation response is submitted in order to express strong support for a dual carriageway improvement and to highlight issues where we will need further information and engagement once the preferred route is confirmed.

3. Background Papers

- 3.1.** Highways England consultation material for proposed M5 to Southfields improvement accessed from <https://highwaysengland.citizenspace.com/he/a358-taunton-to-southfields/>

Appendix A – Technical Summary of Options and Issues.

1. Introduction

1.1. Somerset County Council together with Devon County Council, Wiltshire Council, Dorset Council and the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) provided a strong economic case to Government for improving the A303 and A358 to dual carriageway, together with smaller scale improvements to the A30. This led to Government announcing on 1 December 2014 that over the next 14 years the A303/A358 would be improved to a new 'Expressway' standard along its whole length from the M3 to the M5 at Taunton..

1.2. Expressways will generally be dual carriageway – safe, well-built and more resilient to delay. Junctions will be largely grade-separated, so traffic can move freely from the start of the Expressway to its end.

1.3. Specific schemes announced for this first five year period (2015/16 to 2019/20) include improving the A358 to dual carriageway between Southfields roundabout and the M5; the dualling of the Sparkford to Ilchester section of the A303; and construction of a tunnel past Stonehenge with a dual carriageway bypass for Winterborne Stoke.

1.4. The final expressway standard has yet to be agreed and the Taunton to Southfields options consultation notes that the scheme will not be built to full expressway standard but will be *"..developed as a high quality dual carriageway making an essential contribution to the 'expressway' link between the south-east and south-west. It is anticipated that future enhancements will make this section 'expressway' compatible."*

1.5. The process to deliver the schemes is a complex process that will take several years to complete and involves a number of stages including, project preparation, option identification, option selection, preliminary design, statutory procedures & powers, and construction preparation. Consent for the scheme will be granted via the Development Consent Order (DCO) process used for national infrastructure projects.

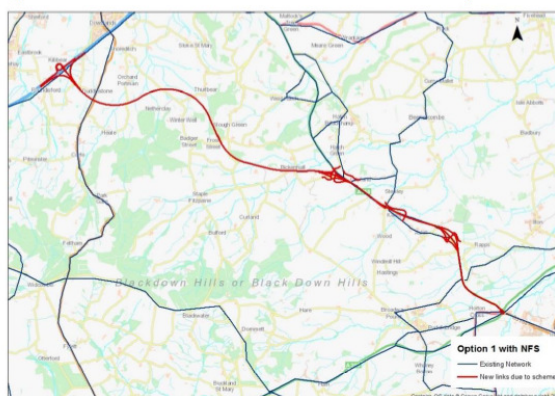
1.6. Highways England is now taking three A303/A358 schemes through the initial stages of development seeking to identify a preferred route for each prior to entering the DCO process.

2. Option Identification

2.1. Twenty-six route options were identified by Highways England during the option identification stage, which were subject to a sifting process. From the initial twenty-six, four were recommended by HE for further assessment. These were:

- **Option 1/1B + NFS (north facing slips):** Connects to the M5 approximately 4km south of Junction 25 via a three-way all movements grade separated junction; passing very close to the Blackdown Hills AONB, and joining the route of the existing A358 approximately half way along its length, following the A358 through to the Southfields Roundabout. This option has the most significant section of offline construction of all the four options.

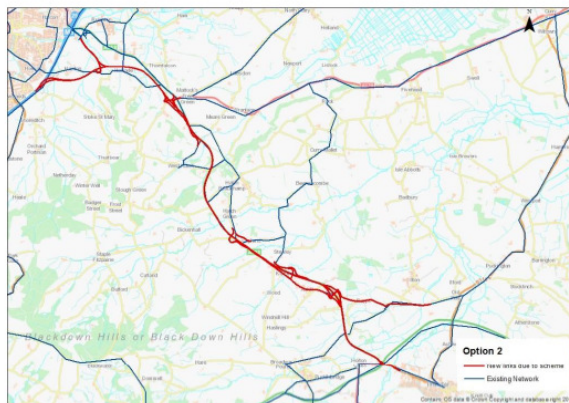
Figure 6.2: A358 Taunton to Ilminster network – with option 1 with NFS



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- Option 2A/2B:** Connects to the M5 approximately 2km south of Junction 25 with south facing slips only. Takes the route much closer to Henlade than Option 1/1B + NFS with a direct interchange between the proposed road and the A378. Provides a 1.5km link road running between the new road and M5 Junction 25. Includes largely online widening between West Hatch Lane and Southfields.

Figure 6.5: A358 Taunton to Ilminster network – with option 2A/2B



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- Option 8/8B + J25:** The online section for this option is almost identical to that proposed for Option 2A/2B. However the offline section takes a more southerly route than Option 2A/2B. Connects to the M5 approximately 2km south of Junction 25 with south facing slips only. Provides a 2km link road running between the new road and M5 Junction 25. Does not have a direct interchange with the A378.

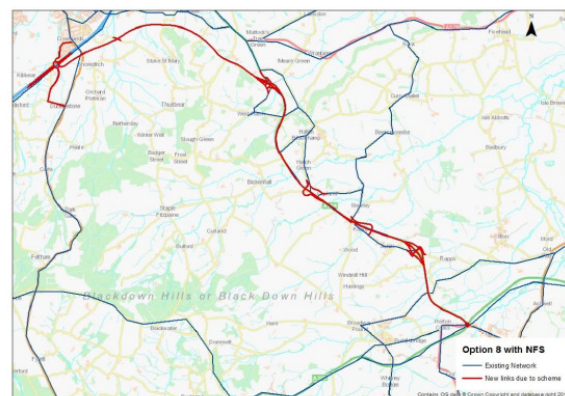
Figure 6.4: A358 Taunton to Ilminster network – with option 8 with J25



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- Option 8/8B + NFS:** The online section of this option is almost identical to that proposed for Option 2A/2B. The offline section takes a similar route to Option 8/8B + Jct25, although the link to Junction 25 is omitted in favour of a new all-movements junction with the M5 approximately 3.5km south of Junction 25. Does not have a direct interchange with the A378. HE have chosen this scheme as the single option for consultation.

Figure 6.3: A358 Taunton to Ilminster network – with option 8 with NFS



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2.2. The junction strategy is provisional at this stage, the intention being that this can be refined during subsequent stages.

2.3. The TAR includes the following information in comparing scheme options:

- Option 2A/2B attracts the most traffic to the new A358 (54,600 AADT), with most of this traffic (73%) accessing the M5 and Taunton via the new link to junction 25. The other options attract less traffic to the new A358 with little difference between the options.

- Each of the four options would improve access times along the A358 corridor between the A303 at Ilminster and the M5 at Taunton, and none of the options would be more complex to build or maintain than any of the others.
- Option 2A/2B has the greatest dis-benefits due to roadworks in construction and the greatest long term accident savings.
- All options show local improvements in ambient air quality due to reduced congestion on the affected road network. This is balanced against predicted regional increases in emissions due to overall traffic growth. For Option 2A/2B, the regional increases outweigh the local improvements, resulting in a small dis-benefit for this option with small benefits for the other options.
- All options have the potential to decrease noise in local residential areas, apart from option 8 NFS which has the potential to increase noise in local residential areas.
- Overall, the environmental and social assessment concluded variable results across the different route options, but with Option 1 NFS performing substantially worse in its effect on the landscape and biodiversity.

2.4. A comparison of the quantified benefits of the four options is shown in the following table:

Table 0.1: Analysis of Monetised Cost Benefits (£000s)

Item	Opt 1 + NFS	Opt 8 + NFS	Opt 8 + J25	Opt 2A/2B
Accidents (not assessed by TUBA)*	6,977	-314	9,666	10,184
Roadworks (not assessed by TUBA)**	-28,162	-54,916	-54,691	-58,676
Greenhouse Gases (not assessed by TUBA)***	-22,330	-21,791	-16,589	-18,969
Noise (not assessed by TUBA)****	315	-837	2204	493
Air Quality (not assessed by TUBA)*****	76	71	180	-136
Economic Efficiency: Consumer Users (Commuting)	103,727	95,830	108,557	122,843
Economic Efficiency: Consumer Users (Other)	111,111	98,781	127,916	159,928
Economic Efficiency: Business Users and Providers	218,925	200,801	239,090	283,355
Wider Public Finances (Indirect Taxation Revenues)	36,496	33,533	28,412	30,474
Present Value of Benefits (PVB)	427,135	351,158	444,745	529,496
Broad Transport Budget / Present Value of Costs (PVC)	256,945	243,851	266,270	284,094
OVERALL IMPACTS				
Net Present Value (NPV)	170,190	107,307	178,475	245,402
Initial Benefit to Cost Ratio (BCR)	1.66	1.44	1.67	1.86
Reliability Benefits	52,269	47,738	53,621	62,545
Adjusted BCR	1.76	1.54	1.87	2.08

Notes: All monetary values are expressed in 2010 prices discounted to 2010. 1 - From COBALT; 2 - From QUADRO; 3 - TAG Unit A3 Chapter 2; 4 TAG Unit A3 Chapter 3; 5 - TAG Unit A3 Chapter 4

2.5. This appears to conclude that Option 2A/AB has the greatest quantified transport benefits particularly in terms of journey time and safety benefits, and whilst it is significantly more expensive than the other options it is assessed as having the greatest value for money at this early appraisal stage.

3. Potential Implications

3.1. Traffic Implications

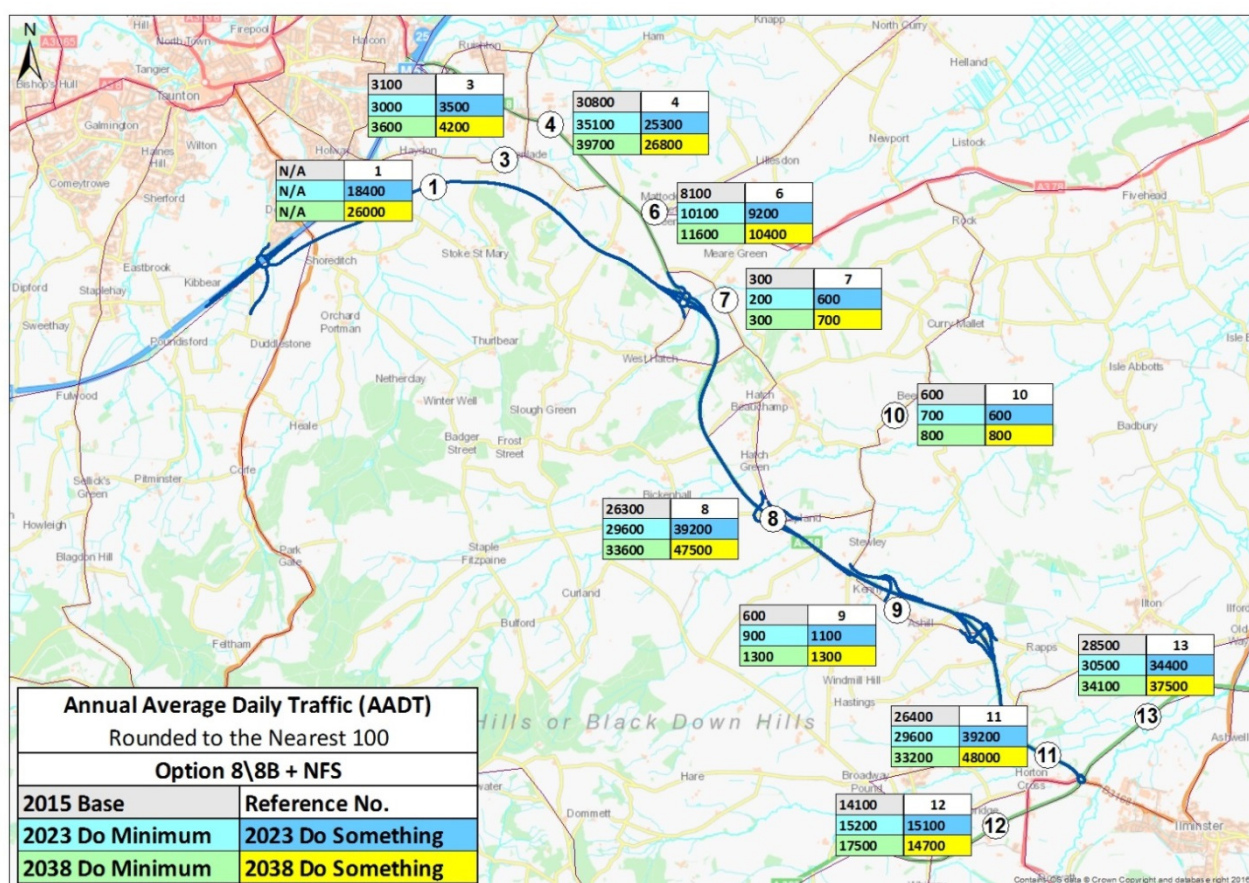
3.1.1. Traffic forecasts have been prepared for the scheme opening year (2023) and a design year 15 years later (2038) and the TAR sets out the following traffic implications.

3.1.2. The different developments identified by local councils were assessed to identify those likely to be built by the opening or design years, and the additional trips that these sites were projected to attract were incorporated into the model, although the full traffic forecasting report has not yet made available to The Council. Although not specifically referenced in the TAR, Highways England have confirmed that the 'Nexus 25' strategic employment site trip generation has been included but at the time of preparing this response no details have been made available regarding what numbers have been assumed.

3.1.3. The TAR notes the following forecast (2038) 2 way traffic flows on the new A358 to the east of the M5 under each option, showing option 2A/2B attracting the most traffic.

Option	New A358: Annual Average Daily Traffic Flow (2 way in 2038)
Option 1 + NFS	31,700
Option 8/8B + J25	45,900
Option 8/8B + NFS	26,000
Option 2A/2B	54,600 (73% accessing the M5 and Taunton via new link to J25.)

3.1.4. In addition to the limited traffic information set out in the TAR, Highways England has supplied SCC with the following diagram showing forecast traffic flows at key locations on the network for the single consultation option 8/8B + NFS.



3.1.5. This shows that the proposed scheme is predicted to reduce annual average daily traffic on the existing A358 at Henlade by 4,000 vehicles in 2038 when compared to current (2015) flows, and that taking account of predicted traffic growth, the scheme results in 12,900 fewer vehicles travelling though Henlade in 2038 than there would otherwise have been. There are predicted to be a similar number of vehicles using the new road and the 'old road' though Henlade (about 26,000 on each road) in 2038.

3.1.6. The diagram also shows that the improvement scheme as a whole attracts some 15,000 additional daily trips to the A358 route in 2038 (comparing the forecast 2038 'do-minimum' flow of 33,200 just west of Southfields junction with the 'do-something' flow of 48,000).

3.1.7. The diagram shows that traffic on some of the key local roads running parallel to the proposed 'online' section of improvement will increase significantly (e.g. an increase from 300 to 700 vehicles per day on the link between Hatch Beauchamp and the new West Hatch Lane junction).

3.1.8. The following journey time savings have been calculated across all four options in 2038.

Route	Journey time saving	
	AM period	PM Period
A303 east of the Southfields junction to the north of Taunton via the A358	11%-15%	14%-20%
A303 east of the Southfields junction to the M5 north of Bridgwater via the A358	17%-18%	19%-21%
A303 east of the Southfields junction to the M5 at Junction 29 (Wincanton-Exeter) along the A303 and A30	-3%to -4% (A slight increase in journey time due to congestion at Southfields).	-1% to -3% (A slight increase in journey time due to congestion at Southfields).

3.1.9. An operational assessment of Junction 25 in the year 2038 (using Somerset County Council's proposed Junction 25 improvement layout) has been carried out by Highways England for the options both with and without a Junction 25 link. This showed that with the junction improvement the junction would operate at around 85% saturation in both the AM and PM peak periods either with or without the Junction 25 link. (85% saturation in the type of traffic model used is the point at which the junction still operates effectively but any further traffic load will start to cause congestion and delay).

3.1.10. All options will remove traffic to M5 South from Junction 25 whilst for options without the link road the majority of traffic to Taunton and M5 North will still pass through Junction 25 via the old A358. This explains why there is not much difference in the operation of Junction 25 between the options.

3.1.11. For Option 8/8B+NFS an analysis of the operational performance of the proposed Junction A was assessed. This showed that for peak period design year 2038 traffic forecasts that the junction would operate at about 45% of its potential capacity for both peak periods.

3.1.12. The traffic assessment undertaken represents a neutral month weekday (in accordance with Department for Transport guidance), rather than when peak traffic occurs on Fridays, weekends and bank holidays due to weekly commuting and holiday traffic. Further modelling of the weekends and holiday periods will be considered in the next stage of scheme development as poor performance of the current road during these times was one of the key reasons for the investment in improvements.

3.2. Safety Implications

3.2.1. A Strategic Safety Action Plan has been prepared by Highways England based on a desk top safety assessment of the four alignment options, supplemented by a site visit during which the locations of the tie-ins between the existing and proposed road alignments were observed. Information on existing non-motorised user (NMU) amenities, such as footways and bridleways, in the study area was available for the review, as was the results of NMU surveys conducted in September 2016.

3.2.2. A number of issues were raised which will need to be taken into account in further development of the design in subsequent stages of the scheme development. Overall, the main safety concerns identified related to junction arrangements, proximity between junctions, footway/ bridleway provision and side road alignments. The high-level economic benefits

assessment discussed in 2.4. shows the proposed option as the worst performing in terms of accident savings- with a slight dis-benefit.

3.3.3. A key issue raised relates to the proposal to upgrade a section of the existing A358 alignment to 'expressway', with no parallel local access road provision, limiting opportunities for east-west movements by local traffic. This may encourage 'junction hopping' by local traffic between any proposed junctions with its associated adverse safety implications due to excessive merging/weaving on the mainline, or else use of inappropriate local roads, many of which are of relatively low standard. The assessment notes that HE should consider providing a Local Access Road or an easily identifiable east-west route made up of existing links and suitable for local and prohibited traffic.

3.2. Environmental and Social Implications

3.2.1. Air Quality

Henlade Air Quality Management Area is located within 1km of the Options 2A/2B, 8 + NFS and 8 + Jct25. The TAR notes that recent TDBC air quality reports (2011) do not report any exceedances of the annual mean nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) objective in 2010 at Henlade. Somerset County Council understands that more recent data does show exceedances in 2016 so our consultation response will urge HE to use the latest data as a basis for decision making.

All options show local improvements in ambient air quality due to reduced congestion on the affected road network. This is balanced against predicted regional increases in emissions due to overall traffic growth. For Option 2A/2B, the regional increases outweigh the local improvements, resulting in a small dis-benefit for this option with small benefits for the other options. There is currently no baseline air quality data in the vicinity of any of the scheme options, and therefore an air quality monitoring survey is currently being undertaken in support of the scheme on behalf of Highways England.

3.2.2. Noise

The TAR notes that all options have the potential to decrease noise in local residential areas, apart from option 8 NFS which has the potential to increase noise in local residential areas. There is currently no baseline noise data within the vicinity of the scheme. Therefore, in support of the scheme and future environmental assessment, baseline noise monitoring would be undertaken at locations representative of sensitive receptors within the study area. This would be undertaken in future stages prior to the production of the Environmental Statement.

3.2.3. Landscape

All of the proposed scheme options sit within four National Character Areas (NCAs): Yeovil Scarplands, Mid Somerset Hills, Vale of Taunton & Quantock Fringes and Blackdowns; comprising a diverse and complex landscape with considerable local variation representing physical and economic influences. There are many visual receptors located within the scheme's likely Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV), including approximately 228 footpaths, 21 bridleways and five restricted byways. There are also a number of elevated views outside of the 1km study area.

3.2.4. Heritage and Historic Resources

Poundisford Park Pale Scheduled Monument and Poundisford Park Grade II Registered Park and Garden are located within 300m of Option 1 + NFS. There is a Cross in St. Aldhelm and St. Eadburga churchyard Scheduled Monument within 1km of Options 2A/2B, 8 + NFS and 8 + Jct25. There are many listed buildings within the 1km of all four scheme options, consisting of Grade I, Grade II and Grade II* listed buildings; and many records of archaeological events and finds within 1km of the proposed options, many of which run along the existing A358.

3.2.5. Biodiversity

Thurlbear Wood and Quarrylands Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), lie within 200m of Option 1 + NFS. Four Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) designated for bat populations are located within 30km of all four scheme options. There are between 25 and 34 Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) scattered within 1km of all four options. Further, three Local Nature Reserves (LNR) are located within the study area of the proposed options. Identified habitats suitable to support bats, breeding birds, barn owls, kingfisher, badgers, dormouse, reptiles, white clawed crayfish, great crested newts, otters, and water voles. Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Priority Habitats are also located within 1km of all four scheme options.

3.2.6. Water Environment

The four scheme options are partially situated within Flood Zones 2 and 3. There are areas within the study area at risk of flooding from surface water, particularly along the existing A358 within areas identified as Flood Zones 2 and 3.

3.2.7. Rights of Way

There are many Public Rights of Ways (PRoWs) and restricted byways, undesignated paths and cycle routes situated within the vicinity of all scheme options, a number of which have been severed by the construction of the existing A358, A303 and M5 roads. Crossings suitable for non- motorised users (NMU) are not common features in the area.

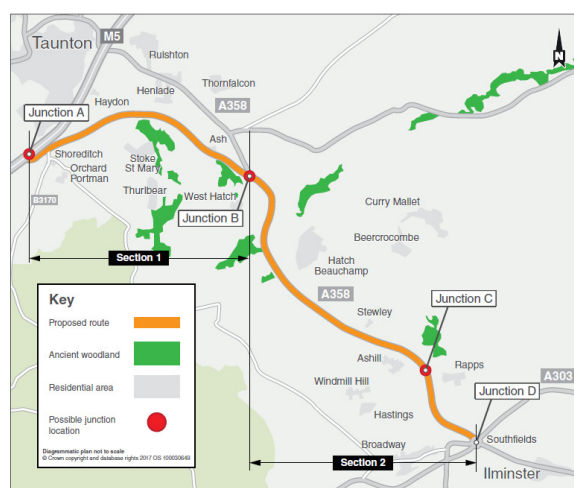
The TAR states the number of these within 200m of each option as follows:

- Option 1 + NFS: 73 footpaths, 2 Sustrans cycle routes, 12 bridleways and 2 long distance paths;
- Option 2A/2B: 54 footpaths, 2 Sustrans cycle routes, 10 bridleways and 2 long distance paths;
- Option 8 + NFS: 77 footpaths, 2 Sustrans cycle routes, 10 bridleways; and 2 long distance paths;
- Option 8 + Jct25: 57 footpaths, 2 Sustrans cycle routes, 10 bridleways and 2 long distance paths.

4. Conclusions from options assessment

Option 8/8B + NFS was recommended by Highways England to be taken forward to public consultation as they have concluded it would provide improved opportunities for future growth in housing and employment leading to increased prosperity. Highways England suggest that the provision of an additional junction on the south side of Taunton would help relieve pressure on Junction 25, reduce journey times and queue lengths. Route resilience would be improved by providing alternative route opportunities between the A378 and the M5. Reduced traffic through Henlade will improve air quality.

The consultation diagram shows the single option scheme and location of proposed junctions.



Appendix B: Issues that the Community has communicated to Somerset County Council informing the proposed consultation response to Highways England.

Community Comment	How this has informed SCC's response
Consultation	
Request to HE to extend original consultation period due to Purdah impact	SCC notes that HE has extended the consultation with a new deadline yet to be announced.
Request for SCC to publish its response before close of HE consultation to inform community responses.	SCC will publish its response prior to close of HE consultation.
Request for consultation to be re-run with all four route options 'on the table'.	SCC would have preferred HE to consult on all the feasible options at this stage in the process rather than a single option. SCC notes that this is a non-statutory stage of consultation and that respondents have commented on the alternative options set out in the TAR and in particular raised the need for HE to further consider the need for a link road between the new expressway and J25, as well as concerns raised about the location of the proposed J25a. SCC's response urges HE to further assess and consult on these issues prior to selecting the preferred route.
Concern that some Parish Councils have not yet been consulted on the scheme.	SCC notes that HE has not yet closed the consultation period and urges continued HE engagement with affected communities.
Need for greater Parish Council involvement in the scheme development	
Location of proposed J25a	
Accept that a J25a will be needed due to capacity constraints at existing J25	SCCs response urges HE to further assess this matter before finalising a preferred route but supports the principle of a new junction on the M5 close to Taunton with both north and south facing slip roads.
Concern about location of proposed J25a falling inside existing urban boundary and conurbation of Taunton South	SCCs response highlights these concerns and requests HE provide further information, assessment and dialogue on this issue prior to finalising a preferred route.
Concerns about location of proposed J25a as there are no suitable local access roads.	
Concern about the feasibility of J25a at the proposed location	
Availability of Information & traffic modelling issues	
Information provided is inadequate to provide informed comment	SCCs response requests further information in order to understand the rationale for the proposals and likely impacts.
Concern that the effect on communities cannot be ascertained until more detail is provided.	
Request for more traffic modelling information.	SCCs response requests that SCC has a role in agreeing the scope of the technical work undertaken by HE to identify and validate local impacts, including weekend and seasonal impacts.
Concern that traffic modelling has not covered peak holiday traffic.	
Concern about lack of detailed plans of proposed roundabout and road layout due to anxiety about local impact of junctions and side road changes.	SCC's response notes that HE design proposals are still at a very early stage in the design process and requests early sight of proposed layouts to enable all parties to fully understand the implications and potential impacts.
Concern about lack of detailed plans for proposed junction.	
Exact location of J25a should be confirmed to enable comment and understanding of impact.	
Proposed route	
In- principle support for the scheme.	SCC's response strongly supports the need for the A358 to be upgraded to dual carriageway as part of an end-end whole route improvement of the A303/A358/A30 corridor.
Not clear what the scheme is for or how it will benefit Taunton.	
Concern that the scheme completely bypasses Taunton	SCCs response notes that further clarification and justification for choice of route is required and that

Concern that the scheme will not achieve the objectives of congestion reduction, economic growth and improved safety.	there are a number of important issues which will require resolution. SCCs response notes that if designed appropriately the scheme has the potential to deliver the desired benefits.
Concern that most beneficiaries are holiday makers travelling to the South West Peninsula.	
Concern that majority of traffic will still pass through existing J25 via the 'old' A358	SCCs response notes our ambition to reduce traffic travelling through Henlade to the greatest degree possible, and urges HE to develop a scheme that improves upon the current forecast traffic reductions.
Need to remove heavy traffic from Henlade.	
Concern that the proposed scheme removes the least amount of traffic from Henlade	
Scheme does not meet both the objectives of providing an additional strategic route and relieving congestion/ pollution in Henlade.	
Other options described in the TAR appear to better meet the objectives	SCCs response highlights this and urges further consideration of options which appear to perform better under the assessment presented in the TAR.
Concern that without a 'spur' to the existing J25, the development of Taunton will be damaged.	SCC's response urges HE to further assess and consult upon the potential benefits and implications of a link between the proposed expressway and Junction 25 prior to selecting the preferred route.
Not clear why a 'spur' to J25 is not favoured.	
Scheme needs to join up with the existing Junction 25.	
Improvements to Southfields junction are also needed.	SCC's response requests interim improvements to the Southfields junction prior to the full junction improvement planned within the South Petherton to Southfields improvement.
Alternative proposal put forward for Junction B which would not be an all-movement junction on the basis that less through traffic would travel through local roads.	SCCs response requests HE to consider measures which encourage traffic to use the new road rather than the current A358 through Henlade.
Proposal to simply build a Henlade bypass with no new junction on the M5	SCCs response supports the principle of a new junction on the M5 close to Taunton.
Need for the scheme to be considered in the round with improvements to the A303/A30 route across the Blackdown Hills.	SCCs response notes that it has for a number of years promoted the upgrading of the A358 as part of an end to end improvement of the A303/A358/A30 corridor.
Improvements to A303/ A30 route need to be funded.	
An alternative route parallel to and separate from the M5 is now needed to link the M3/A303/A30 to the South West Peninsula rather than improving the A358	
Impacts	
Concern about increase in traffic accidents and noise on neighbouring routes.	SCC's response highlights these issues.
Need for traffic modelling to look at the impacts on the surrounding villages.	
Concern that the proposed scheme will increase accidents	
Concern about the proposed number of traffic lanes and traffic at J25a with associated impacts (noise, light, pollution etc).	
Concern about impact of proposed J25a on residential area in Killams.	
Concern that the proposed scheme gives the worst economic benefit of the four options described in the TAR	
Scheme needs to create an economic benefit for Taunton.	
Concern regarding the impact on the environment, countryside, and greenhouse gases	
Concern that agriculture will be adversely affected.	
Concern that the scheme will increase traffic on the M5.	

	a strategic improvement to a route accessing the South West.
Concern that Taunton should not be required to accommodate diversion of heavy holiday traffic away from the A303/A30 route.	SCC's response notes that HE needs to identify and mitigate adverse local impacts.
Detailed concerns about specific crossing places, junction accesses, impact of structures.	SCC's response requests that HE engage with affected communities to identify and mitigate local impacts.
Comprehensive programme of safety works needed in advance of the scheme e.g. village gateways, 20mph zones, footway and cycleway provision.	
Other comments	
Need for closer working between the parties promoting various related schemes.	SCC notes this.
Would prefer SCC to retain control of the A358 project.	SCC notes that the scheme is a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project contained within a roads programme that has been approved by an act of parliament for delivery by Highways England. The scheme is not simply an improvement to the existing local authority road; it is the creation of a new link in the national strategic road network which will be managed and operated by Highways England and they are best placed to deliver it. SCC will retain control of the sections of the A358 that remain part of the local network.
Request for the Council to retain local control of the A358.	
Concern about HE's 'ambiguous' statement that the proposal enables development opportunities to the South of Taunton and that TDBC's views on this are needed.	SCC's response highlights this concern.
Concerns about detailed errors in the TAR	SCC notes that the party raising these concerns has included them in their response to HE.
Concern about traffic and rat-running impact if the new junction 25a were to be opened up to all traffic from the local network.	SCCs response highlights these concerns.
Oppose any connection between the new A358 and the B3170.	SCC notes that this is not proposed and that the party raising these concerns has included them in their response to HE.
Request for the response to balance economic benefit against environmental, highways and community issues.	SCCs response covers the full range of issues.

Appendix C: Proposed Response to Non-Statutory Consultation on M5 to Southfields Improvement.

**** SEPARATE ATTACHMENT ****

Equality Impact Assessment Form and Action Table 2015

(Expand the boxes as appropriate, please see guidance
(www.somerset.gov.uk/impactassessment) to assist with completion)

"I shall try to explain what "due regard" means and how the courts interpret it. The courts have made it clear that having due regard is **more than having a cursory glance** at a document before arriving at a preconceived conclusion. Due regard requires public authorities, in formulating a policy, to give equality considerations the weight which is **proportionate in the circumstances**, given the potential impact of the policy on equality. It is not a question of box-ticking; it requires the equality impact to be **considered rigorously and with an open mind.**"

Baroness Thornton, March 2010

What are you completing the Impact Assessment on (which policy, service, MTFP reference, cluster etc)?

Non-statutory consultation response to highways Englands proposed M5 to Southfields Improvement Scheme

Version

1

Date

19/4/2017

Section 1 – Description of what is being impact assessed

Consultation response on a dual carriageway improvement linking the M5 to Southfields junction comprising a new all movement junction on the M5, a new road link between the M5 and West Hatch bypassing Henlade, and largely on-line widening between West Hatch and Southfields.

Section 2A – People or communities that are targeted or could be affected (taking particular note of the Protected Characteristic listed in action table)

Will affect all communities along the route and in particular the following groups with protected characteristics: Of note are the needs of people with poor mobility, people with disabilities, younger and older people who may be vulnerable road users.

Section 2B – People who are delivering the policy or service

The improvement will be delivered by Highways England and their engineering consultants and construction contractors.

Section 3 – Evidence and data used for the assessment (Attach documents where appropriate)

Highways England M5 to Southfields Improvement Technical Appraisal Report accessed from <https://highwaysengland.citizenspace.com/he/a358-taunton-to-southfields/>

Section 4 – Conclusions drawn about the equalities impact (positive or negative) of the proposed change or new service/policy (Please use **prompt sheet** in the guidance for help with what to consider):

Equality and Diversity: The consultation response should urge Highways England to take account of the needs of people with protected characteristics as part of the detailed design of the preferred route once identified. Of note are the needs of people with poor mobility, people with disabilities, younger and older people who may be vulnerable road users.

If you have identified any negative impacts you will need to consider how these can be mitigated to either reduce or remove them. In the table below let us know what mitigation you will take. (Please add rows where needed)			
Identified issue drawn from your conclusions	Actions needed – can you mitigate the impacts? If you can how will you mitigate the impacts?	Who is responsible for the actions? When will the action be completed?	How will it be monitored? What is the expected outcome from the action?
Age			
The scheme will need to take account of the needs of younger and older people who may be vulnerable road users.	Consultation response to urge HE to consider this issue.	Mike O'Dowd-Jones. June 2017 consultation response.	Monitored through engagement in the DCO and scheme design process. Scheme proposals to address these issues.
Disability			
The scheme will need to take account of the needs of people with disabilities.	Consultation response to urge HE to consider this issue.	Mike O'Dowd-Jones. June 2017 consultation response.	Monitored through engagement in the DCO and scheme design process. Scheme proposals to address these issues.
Gender Reassignment			
None identified.			
Marriage and Civil Partnership			
None identified.			
Pregnancy and Maternity			
None identified.			
Race (including ethnicity or national origin, colour, nationality and Gypsies and Travellers)			
None identified.			
Religion and Belief			
None identified.			
Sex			
None identified.			
Sexual Orientation			
None identified.			
Other (including caring responsibilities, rurality, low income, Military Status etc)			
None identified.			

Section 6 - How will the assessment, consultation and outcomes be published and communicated? E.g. reflected in final strategy, published. What steps are in place to review the Impact Assessment

Published as part of the non-key decision authorising the consultation response. Will be reviewed at further points in the scheme development process where SCC makes formal

submissions.	
Completed by:	Mike O'Dowd-Jones
Date	19/5/2017
Signed off by:	Mike O'Dowd-Jones
Date	19/5/2017
Compliance sign off Date	
To be reviewed by: (officer name)	
Review date:	