

**Cllr John Williams  
Leader of the Council**

The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton TA1 1HE  
Tel 01823 356555 Fax 01823 356329  
email: [cllr.j.williams@tauntondeane.gov.uk](mailto:cllr.j.williams@tauntondeane.gov.uk)

Our Ref: JRW/NP  
Your Ref:

11 July 2017

Andrew Page-Dove  
Highways England

Dear Mr Page-Dove

### **A358 Taunton to Southfields Dualling Scheme**

Please find enclosed Taunton Deane Borough Councils formal response to Highways England's non-statutory consultation on the A358 Taunton to Southfields Dualling Scheme.

As you are aware, the Council is a strong and long-standing advocate of the strategic improvements between the M3 and M5 providing resilience to South East / South West journeys. Our in principle support of the upgrade to the A358 to an Expressway as part of these wider improvements remains firmly in place.

That said, the non-statutory consultation is for a number of reasons very disappointing and we question whether or not it accords with Government and Highways England strategy, the single option promoted certainly does not accord with our local policies.

Our community has with considerable justification raised concerns with the fact that Highways England has only consulted on one option and the very limited material presented to support that one option. Your colleagues have said that "this is the only option which Highways England is willing and able to deliver" when questioned during recent meetings. You will see that our response highlights our concerns in light of the Planning Inspectorates guidance which highlights that "*Although optional, developers are encouraged to undertake initial consultation as soon as there is sufficient detail to allow local communities a real opportunity to influence the proposed development*". The Council supports the view that the consultation could well be flawed.

The public rightly expect Highways England, Somerset County Council and Taunton Deane Borough Council to not only work together but to collaborate on delivering coordinated, efficient and effective schemes in the public interest. You are well aware of the improvements planned to J25 being promoted by Somerset County Council and our own proposals for a Strategic Employment Site, Nexus 25. Notwithstanding the proposal set out in the non-statutory consultation, we urge you to re-engage with the County Council and ourselves to ensure we deliver a joined up, sustainable and sensible solution.

You will see that we have jointly written to you with Somerset County Council and that our responses to the non-statutory consultation are largely compatible. We wish to work with you on this vitally important project for our area and believe that as three public bodies it is essential that the public have confidence in the solutions which we are all seeking to deliver.

Whilst we are committed to working collaboratively with you, it is right that we highlight the need to discuss the provision of resources with you as part of our formal response to the consultation. You will be aware that the Council will not receive any fee income in relation to the proposal and resources directed towards responding to this project will have to be redirected from other projects.

Highways England staff have been approached to see if resources could be made available to the Council via a Planning Performance Agreement but thus far have stated that they have no ability to enter into such an arrangement – we do not believe that to be the case. Given the importance of the project to the Council and our community it is in our view important that the Council is able to properly shape the proposal and to ensure that the residents and interests of the Council are properly represented.

In our view there has clearly been a lack of coordination and governance applied to our engagement with your team. Going forward we would welcome an early meeting with you to discuss the following:

- Resources for the Council to properly and effectively participate;
- The establishment of a clear vision and set of jointly agreed objectives for the project (between Highways England, the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership, Somerset County Council and Taunton Deane Borough Council) which are based on a holistic review of Government, Highways England and local Policy / Strategy; and
- A review and agreement of arrangements in relation to the governance of the project going forwards.

Yours sincerely



Cllr John Williams  
Leader of the Council



Cllr Roger Habgood  
Portfolio Holder for Planning Policy and Transportation



Andrew Goodchild  
Assistant Director for Place and Energy Infrastructure