

A303

Sparkford to Ilchester Dualling Scheme

Statutory Public Consultation



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Foreword

Thank you for taking an interest in our proposal to upgrade the A303 between Sparkford and Ilchester to high quality dual carriageway. This is part of the Government's programme of schemes to improve connectivity between the south west and London and the south east. The purpose of the scheme is to improve safety, relieve congestion and support economic growth.

In February last year we conducted a route options consultation on our proposals for dualling the A303 between Sparkford and Ilchester. Based on the feedback you provided we announced a preferred route on 24 October 2017.

This consultation is your opportunity to express your views on the design of the proposed scheme in advance of our application for a Development Consent Order (DCO) to authorise construction of the project. Businesses, local authorities, public bodies, road users and the communities and neighbouring areas can all play an important part in the development of the scheme. Your feedback is therefore essential to this consultation as it will enable us to improve the proposal before we submit our planning application.

This booklet summarises our proposal, explains where you can find more detail and how you can let us know what you think about our plans.

The consultation runs from Friday 26 January until Friday 9 March 2018. Further information on our proposal, including a link to the preliminary environmental information as well as the online consultation questionnaire, can be found on our scheme website:

www.highways.gov.uk/Sparkford-to-Ilchester

Nick Aldworth
Regional Delivery Director (south west)

About Highways England – what we do

Highways England operates, maintains and improves England’s motorways and major A-roads, the strategic road network. Our network totals around 4,300 miles, and while 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.

England’s strategic road network forms the economic backbone of the country, is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and is relied on by communities and businesses to get from A to B.

We aim to ensure that all our major roads are dependable, durable and most importantly, safe. In pursuit of that aim, we are delivering a £15 billion investment programme in our network as described in the Government’s **Road Investment Strategy** (RIS), see www.gov.uk/government/collections/road-investment-strategy.

This A303 Sparkford to Ilchester Dualling Scheme is part of this investment programme.



The consultation process

The proposed scheme is categorised as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) under the Planning Act 2008. As such, we are required to make an application for a Development Consent Order (DCO) in order to obtain planning permission to construct the scheme.

This consultation exercise is a prescribed process as set out in the Planning Act 2008. It requires the developer of a proposal – in this case Highways England – to consult with statutory bodies, local authorities, landowners, those significantly affected by the proposal and the wider community. Consultation is intended to provide everybody with the opportunity to comment in detail on our proposal - including the route, engineering, environmental, construction and land-take impacts of the proposal – before we submit our DCO application.

All feedback received from this consultation exercise will be used to help shape our proposal ahead of a DCO application.

We have worked closely with local authorities in the area to define how we will undertake consultation with local communities, including hard to reach groups, and this is set out in our Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC). In addition to the SoCC, we have published a statutory notice under Section 47 and Section 48 of the Planning Act 2008, which was published in local and national papers to notify the wider public about the proposal.



Background

The A303/A358 corridor provides vital connectivity between the south west with London and the south east for people, communities and businesses, including the tourism industry which is so important to the south west. But there are problems along the route.

In particular there are 6 single carriageway sections where road users can suffer congestion and long delays. The problems are even worse at peak holiday times during the summer months and on weekends. These problems on this strategic road overspill onto the local road network and impact on the communities in the area.

In recognition of this and the harmful effects this has on the south west's economy, the Government's **Road Investment Strategy (RIS)** sets out the intention to transform connectivity by upgrading the A303/A358 corridor to a high quality dual carriageway from the M3 motorway to the M5 motorway at Taunton.

A high quality dual carriageway is a road with typically limited local road access and no right-turning movements across it, thereby providing a level of service approaching that which is found on a motorway, where mile-a-minute journeys are the norm. To support this, we are developing the first of 3 major road improvement schemes along the A303/A358 corridor:

1. A358 Taunton to Southfields
2. A303 Sparkford to Ilchester
3. A303 Stonehenge, Amesbury to Berwick Down

You can find out more about the A303/A358 corridor plans by reading our booklet **'Creating an expressway to the south west - The case for the A303/A358 Corridor'**, available on our webpage and at our consultation events.

Figure 1: A303 /A358 route corridor schemes in RIS period 2015-2020



A303/A358 route corridor schemes

Why we need the scheme

The section of the A303 between Sparkford and Ilchester comprises of a mix of dual and single lane carriageway. This leads to localised congestion, impacting adversely on journey times and journey time reliability.

On a normal day, up to 23,500 vehicles use this single carriageway section. Due to higher volumes of traffic during the summer months and in particular at weekends, average travel times increase on a Friday in August, making it impossible to predict the time a journey will take.

This traffic is forecast to further increase as local authorities along the length of the corridor seek to deliver economic growth and new development.

The mixture of single and dual carriageway on the section of the A303 between Sparkford and Ilchester presents the following issues:

- poor junction visibility
- slow moving agricultural vehicles
- limited opportunities for overtaking
- increasing traffic levels outgrowing the capacity of the existing road design during peak periods

The consequences of these issues are:

- congestion and longer journey times during peak times and the summer months
- unreliable journey times
- queueing at the junctions due to the interaction between local and strategic traffic
- increased risk of incidents causing delays to surrounding local routes



Scheme objectives

Highways England is developing a scheme to address the need for improvement to this section of the A303, which has been clearly identified as part of the Government's Road Investment Strategy for improving connectivity to the south west.

Within that context, we have set ourselves a number of objectives for the scheme, which are:

- **Capacity:** Reduce delays and queues that occur during peak hours and at seasonal times of the year
- **Safety:** Improve the safety of the network by providing additional capacity, reducing driver stress and enabling safer access to and from the motorway. It will also improve the non-motorised user (NMU) routes in the area
- **Environment:** Avoid unacceptable impacts on the surrounding natural and historic environment and landscape and optimise opportunities for enhancement
- **Local communities:** Reduce community severance and promote opportunities for improving their quality of life
- **Support economic growth:** Facilitate growth in jobs and housing by providing a free-flowing and reliable connection between the south east and the south west
- **Connectivity:** Improve the connectivity of the south west to the rest of the UK and improve business and growth prospects
- **Resilience:** Improve journey time reliability and resilience, and provide extra capacity to make it easier to manage traffic when incidents occur



Developing the scheme

During our route options consultation, we asked for your views on 2 shortlisted options for improving this section of the A303 between Sparkford and Ilchester:

- **Option 1:** A dual carriageway that follows the existing A303 from east of Podimore Roundabout to Downhead. At this point, the road moves north before reverting to follow the route of the existing A303 in the direction of Hazlegrove
- **Option 2:** A dual carriageway that starts east of Podimore Roundabout before leaving the existing A303 to pass south of Annis Hill and then north of Steart Hill. It re-joins the existing A303 near Sparkford. The single carriageway section of the existing A303 would be retained as a local route

As well as listening to the consultation feedback, we continued to refine and further develop the design and undertake more surveys, including examination of the ground conditions, measuring the topography of the land, archaeological surveys and various environmental surveys. These included studies into the landscape and ecological impacts of each option.

We considered a number of factors in deciding between the options, including:

- scheme objectives
- safety
- economic benefits
- public consultation feedback
- costs
- environmental effects
- construction

Our assessment and feedback from the consultation demonstrated that Option 1 would on balance provide the better performing route, by reducing new construction in rural countryside, having a lesser environmental impact and providing the better journey time.

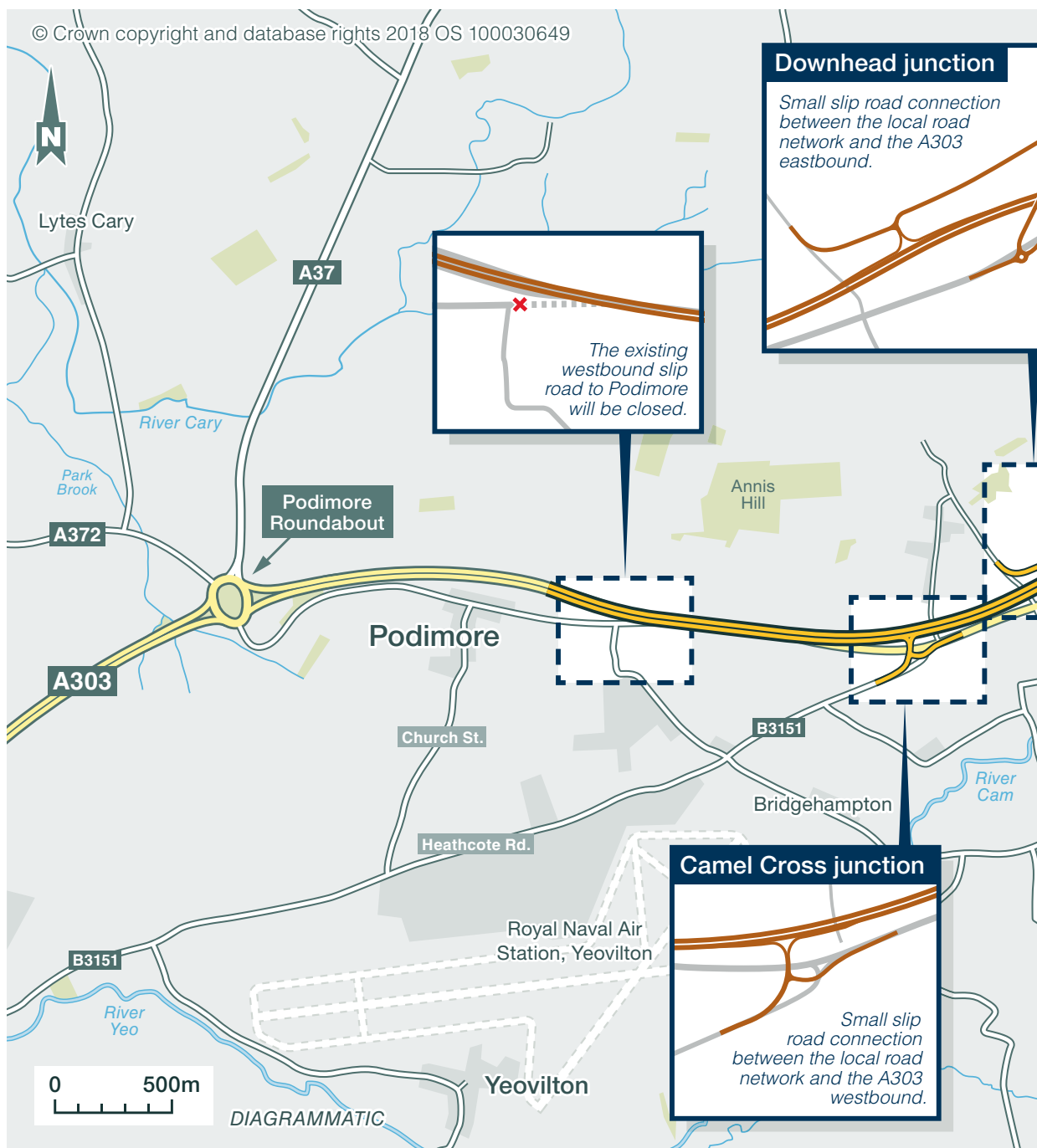
Details of our preferred route, which we announced on 24 October 2017, are available on our webpage.

Scheme proposal

Since announcing the preferred route, we have continued to develop our scheme proposal and we are now in a position to present this next stage of scheme development as part of a statutory consultation, in accordance with the Planning Act 2008.

Our proposal is for a dual carriageway that starts east of Podimore Roundabout and follows the alignment of the existing A303 to Downhead.

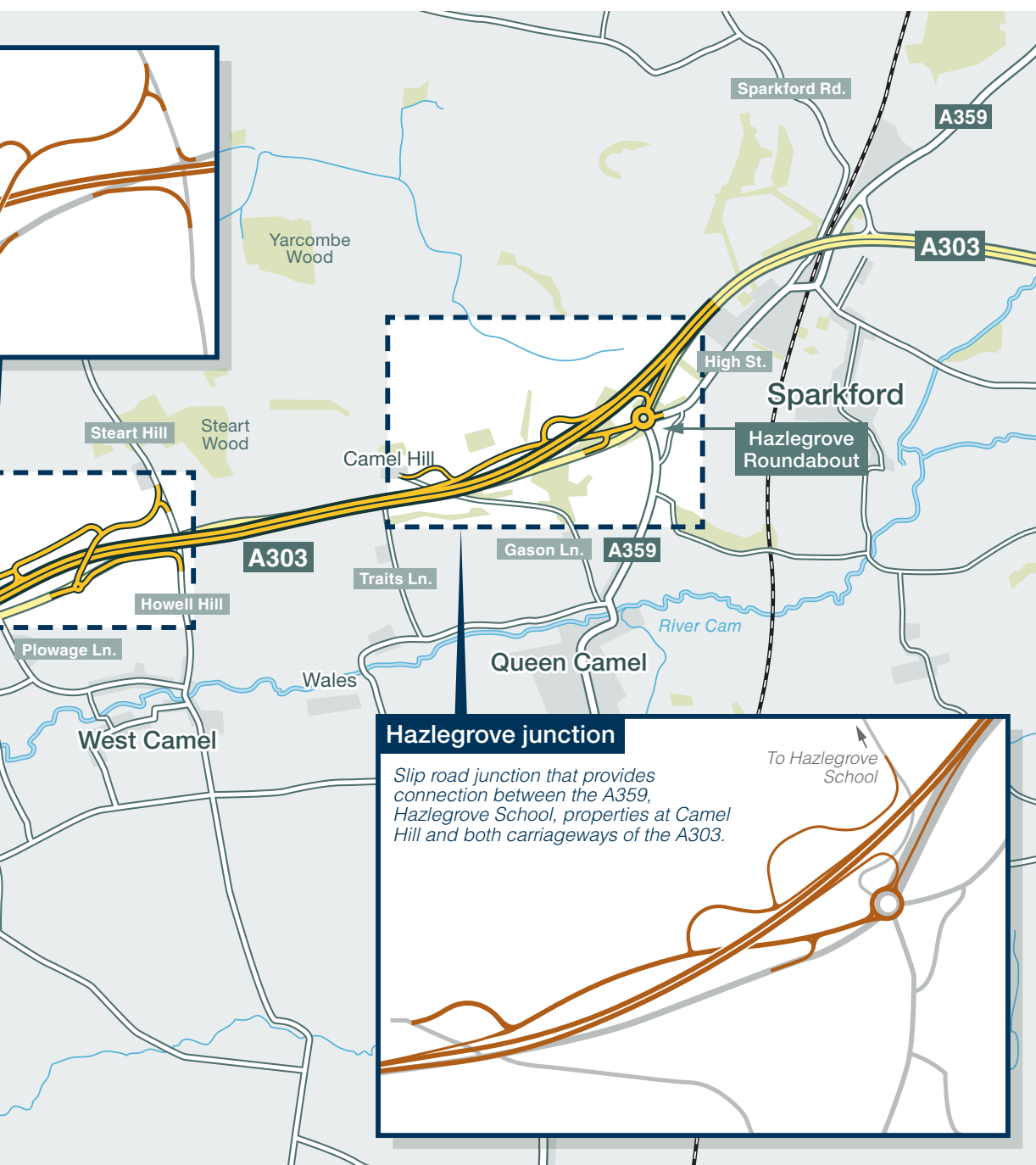
Travelling eastwards, the route moves north of the existing A303 single carriageway, allowing the existing road to be retained for use as a parallel local road in this section.



The route then rises up West Camel Hill before crossing over the existing A303 at the junction with Steart Hill/Howell Hill. The route then takes a southerly alignment briefly before meeting up with the existing road again to pass between Vale Farm and the MOD signal station at Eyewell/Traits Lane.

Finally, the route then bypasses the existing Hazlegrove Roundabout to the north through the Registered Park and Garden associated with Hazlegrove House, before tying into the existing A303 Sparkford Bypass.

Figure 2: The route



About the junctions

Hazlegrove

We are proposing a new split level junction at Hazlegrove, as shown in figure 3. The new junction design keeps the existing Hazlegrove roundabout to maintain access to the communities to the south and the A359. It includes a new bridge under the new A303 dual carriageway allowing access to Hazlegrove House and properties to the north at Camel Hill.

Our proposal for this junction takes into account the significant amount of feedback we received regarding this junction during the route options consultation.

In question 5 of the consultation questionnaire we ask for your views on this junction layout.

Figure 3: Proposed junction at Hazlegrove



Downhead Lane

Following feedback from the route options consultation, we have considered a number of different options for connecting with the local roads at Downhead, including:

- a split level all-movements junction allowing people to travel in any direction
- a limited access junction, which would be smaller but would only allow people to travel in certain directions
- no junction with the local roads

We have chosen a junction allowing access in any direction, as feedback from the last consultation

told us that this is how people are likely to find it most useful and it provided economic benefit.

Figure 4 shows the proposed layout for a junction at Downhead. The new junction will use a proposed bridge over the dual carriageway near Steart Hill, allowing vehicles to join and leave the A303 in all directions and to travel north and south across the proposed dual carriageway. The junctions at Downhead will also maintain access to the B3151 and the section of the existing A303 that will be kept for local access.

In question 6 of the consultation questionnaire we ask for your views on this junction.

Figure 4: Proposed junction at Downhead



Further design work

Since the route options consultation and preferred route announcement in 2017, we have also continued to develop our overall proposal and have made a number of changes. We have moved the proposed new dual carriageway section between Podimore and Downhead Lane to the south slightly to align more closely with the existing single carriageway section.

We have also removed a proposed underpass at Traits Lane which we had included as part of the route in the route options consultation. At the time, this was proposed for local road access, maintaining a link to the north of the A303 which would otherwise have been severed.

We have carried out more work to understand

what the underpass would involve, and found that:

- people living near the potential underpass did not feel it was required
- we are able to maintain local access to the north of the A303 via the new Hazlegrove junction, meaning this underpass is not needed
- we can provide more effective wildlife crossings elsewhere
- the cost and difficulty of building the underpass would not be justified by its limited benefit

For these reasons, we are no longer proposing an underpass at this location.



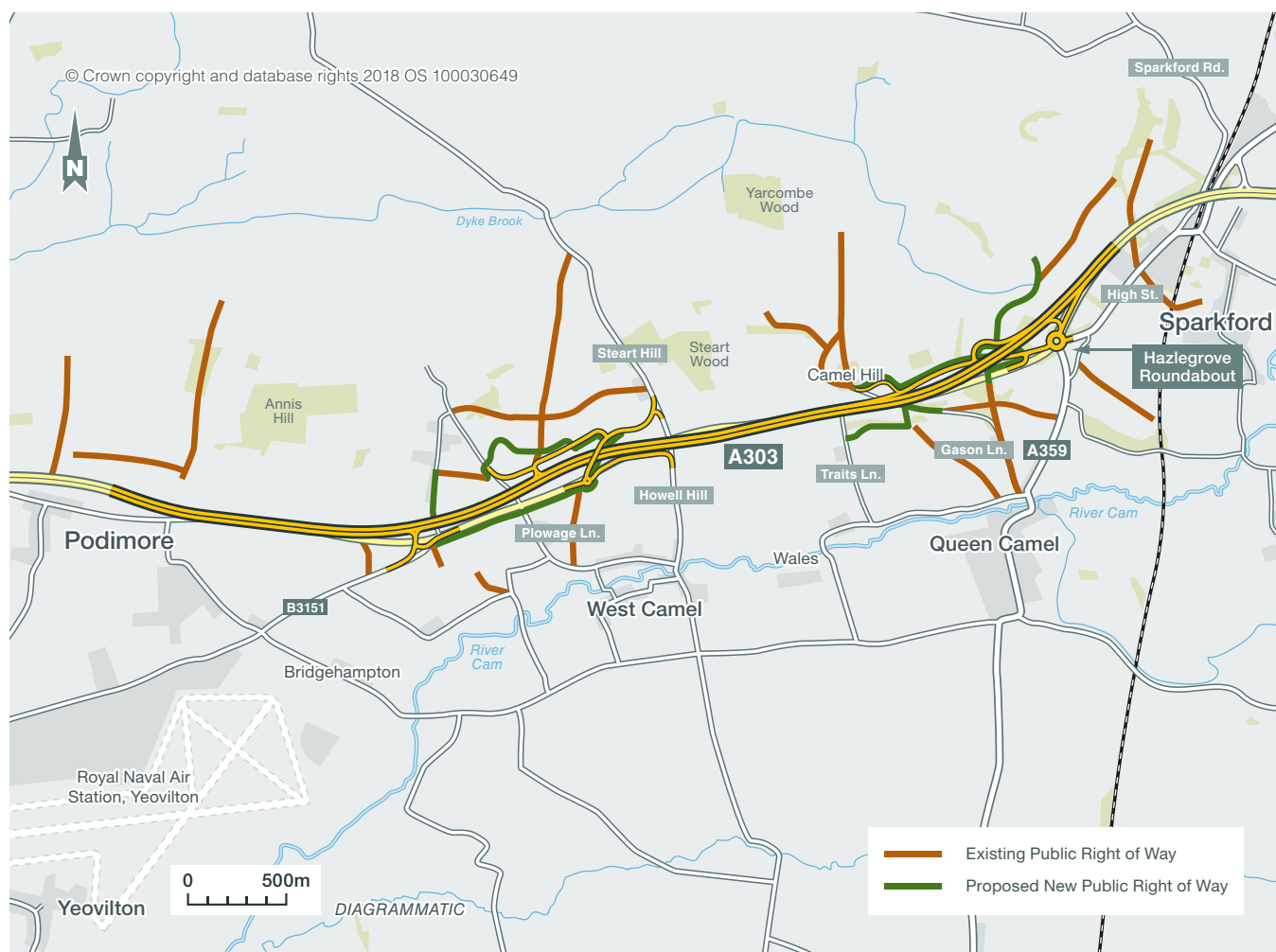
Provision for non-motorised users

We need to ensure that the design of the scheme allows people travelling on foot, bicycle or by horse to continue to get around the area. We have carried out surveys to identify the most frequently used routes that would be affected by the proposal. As part of this, we have considered how people with disabilities currently get around the area. We have engaged with a number of community groups to ensure we fully understand what is important to them and those that they represent. For safety reasons, pedestrians, cyclists or equestrians should not be allowed to directly cross the dual carriageway.

Based on this information, we have included in our proposal crossing points that use new bridges over the dual carriageway or underpasses beneath the dual carriageway to keep the access for these routes. These crossing points would be safer than the existing situation. This proposal is shown in figure 5.

Question 7 of the consultation questionnaire asks for your views on our proposal for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians.

Figure 5: Proposed crossings for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians



What our proposal means for you

We are committed to making sure our proposal brings long-term benefits for local communities, for regional growth and for national strategic traffic, at the same time as managing the impacts of development. This is supported by our continuing work with stakeholders including councils, statutory environmental bodies, businesses, specialist organisations, community representatives and user groups.

Transport

The scheme will have significant transport benefits, including:

- **Capacity:** The proposal will reduce congestion, by increasing the road's capacity for free-flowing traffic and making mile-a-minute travel the norm
- **Safety:** The proposal will boost road safety and ease driver stress. It will also make it safer and easier for cars, pedestrians and other local road users to reach facilities
- **Resilience:** There will be fewer road closures due to incidents or accidents



Economic growth

Economic benefits from the scheme include:

- enabling growth across the whole of the south west region, by making trips quicker and safer, and arrival times easier to predict
- making the south west more attractive for tourists and commerce, by making it an easier place to visit and do business
- raising the south west's productivity by creating world-class connections to other UK regions
- supporting the predicted growth in jobs and housing by increasing the capacity of the strategic road network

Caring for the environment

Understanding the impact on the environment and the community within the A303 corridor is very important to us. Our aim is to reduce any adverse effects while capturing the wider opportunities for improvement created by this scheme.

The area surrounding the A303 between Sparkford and Ilchester has a number of sensitive and valued environmental sites, as well as a number of dwellings and farm businesses. We have prepared a Preliminary Environmental Information (PEI) Report to help local people understand the potential environmental effects of our proposal. This is available on our website at www.highways.gov.uk/Sparkford-to-Ilchester

Impacts we have considered include:

- **Air quality:** We will put in place measures to mitigate potential impacts on air quality during construction and once the road is open to traffic. During construction, well established industry best practice controls will be implemented on site which would reduce the impact of emissions on residents

and the local area and prevent nuisance to residents. While we do not expect there to be significant impacts on air quality once the road is operational, we will carry out further assessment work including at Stockton Wood and Down Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

- **Noise and vibration:** The existing route currently passes adjacent to 2 Noise Important Areas. We will undertake noise surveys and continue to assess any potential noise and vibration impacts, to allow us to build in appropriate mitigation by design. During construction, mitigation may include the selection of the most appropriate method and machinery to reduce noise, adequate maintenance and storage of construction equipment and local noise screening. To help reduce noise levels from road traffic once the road is open, we will incorporate noise fences or bunds into the design. As a result, we do not expect the proposal to have a significant effect on noise and vibration.
- **Cultural heritage:** We are conducting archaeological surveys along the route to identify any risks that we may disturb significant remains during construction. The surveys will help us to determine what approach we need to take during construction to reduce risks to archaeological remains. We will produce a specific Conservation Management Plan to understand and mitigate our impact on the Hazlegrove House (Grade II Listed) Registered Park and Garden. The scheme has also been designed so that there is no encroachment of the Scheduled Monument located to the north of the existing A303 at Camel Hill.
- **Landscape and visual impacts:** Without mitigation the scheme would have an impact on a number of significant sites including the Hazlegrove House (Grade II

Listed) Registered Park and Garden and Conservation Areas in West Camel and Queen Camel, as well as other aspects of the local landscape. During construction mitigation measures such as keeping a well ordered and tidy site and limiting works to daylight hours will be included. To reduce the visual impact of the road once it is open to traffic we plan to drop the level of the road in a cutting. We will also create screening from native tree species to conceal the road, including areas in the southern third of the Hazlegrove House (Grade II Listed) Registered Park and Garden. Where the proposed road is on embankment, we will look to utilise a false cutting to reduce views of traffic on the road, particularly to the north of West Camel.

- **Nature conservation:** We have been carrying out ecology surveys and have identified the presence of bats, great crested newts, reptiles and badgers. Designated sites within the vicinity of the scheme include a number of Local Wildlife Sites, and habitats present include ancient woodland, broadleaved semi-natural woodland, species-rich hedgerows and calcareous grassland. We will use best practice mitigation measures to reduce the risk of impacts on designated sites, protected species and habitats. Measures during construction include the sensitive timing of work to avoid breeding seasons, directional and low-level lighting, and the sensitive location of construction machinery with all vehicles switching off their engines when stationary. Once operational, mitigation measures will include the creation of replacement habitat for great crested newts and reptiles, planting of new hedgerows, trees and scrub, and the provision of mammal underpasses.

- **Road drainage and the water environment:** To prevent pollution from surface water runoff, during construction we will use best practice mitigation measures including the storage of liquids, soils and powders appropriately away from the drains and waters, and in secondary containment.
- **Flooding:** To prevent an increase in flood risk, we will implement a sustainable drainage systems design. To support this, a flood risk assessment is being undertaken to inform the designs of the surface water drainage system that meets the requirements of the National Policy Statement for National Networks.
- **Geology and soils:** During construction, best practice mitigation measures will be implemented including measures to protect soil structure and quality, minimise waste generation, protect controlled waters from both general site works and foundation works, manage excavations and dewatering.
- **Materials:** We will reduce the amount of materials needed and waste produced by reusing soil materials onsite wherever possible. In addition, materials to be used onsite will, where possible, contain high proportions of recycled content. Our proposal will generate waste during construction which will need to be appropriately managed. To do this, a site waste management plan will be prepared in advance of construction, which will consider the sourcing, transport and use and disposal of waste materials in a sustainable manner.
- **Local communities:** We need to consider effects on local communities both during construction and once the new road is open to traffic. Before construction starts, we will develop a community relations strategy setting out how we will work alongside the local community to reduce disruption.

- Cumulative effects:** Cumulative effects can result from the impacts of multiple projects, or from a number of different impacts from a single project, accumulating to affect a single environmental resource or area. We are aware of the need to understand potential cumulative impacts from other schemes proposed for the A303/A358 corridor. We are working across the corridor to understand the joint impact and how this can be reduced.

Following this consultation, we will prepare an Environmental Statement setting out in full our assessment of the potential effects of the scheme on the environment, and our proposed mitigation and enhancement measures. We will also produce a Construction Environmental Management Plan of how the mitigation and enhancement measures will be incorporated into our construction stage. We will submit these as part of our Development Consent Order application.

Question 8 of the consultation questionnaire provides an opportunity to share your views on our approach to environmental impact.

Planning for construction

We understand that local people will want to know the likely impact that building the scheme will have on their daily life, particularly in relation to traffic re-routing through local villages. A traffic management plan will be drawn up once the scheme proposals are finalised, together with a construction phase plan, detailing exactly how the works will be undertaken and how A303 and local traffic will be managed.

Community and environmental impacts will be taken fully into account at all stages of the development, planning and decision-making process. That means working closely with local communities, local authorities, environmental

bodies and major employers as work progresses in continuing the development of the scheme into the construction phase.

Timing and phasing of construction works

If development consent for the proposed scheme is granted, construction of the main works would be expected to commence in spring 2020 and continue for a period of approximately 2.5 years.

Construction phasing arrangements would be developed to mitigate disruption to road users and the surrounding community during the period of construction. The safety of vulnerable road-user groups such as pedestrians and cyclists would be a particular consideration.

Site compounds and use of public roads

Working areas close to the proposed scheme would be required for site compounds, the storage of materials and equipment. The location of site compounds will be identified in our Development Consent Order application, together with proposed access and egress arrangements. Contractors will also need to use public roads to gain access to working areas. We will work closely with Somerset County Council to identify the routes that are appropriate and any restrictions that may apply.

Stakeholder engagement

Liaison officers will be appointed as a point of contact for the local community, businesses and other stakeholders during the period of construction to help address any concerns or issues as the scheme is built.

Regular scheme progress updates will be provided via the scheme website, social media, as well as regular updates via post and one-to-one meetings with interested parties.

What happens next

This is your opportunity to give your views on our proposal. If, after reading this booklet, you have further questions or would like to find out more, please come to one of our exhibition events, details of which are available on our website.

- **Visit our website at:** www.highways.gov.uk/Sparkford-to-Ilchester
- **Email us at:** A303SparkfordtoIlchesterdualling@highwaysengland.co.uk
- **Call us on:** 0300 123 5000

- **Write to us at:**

A303 Sparkford to Ilchester Project Team
Highways England
2/07K Temple Quay House
2 The Square
Temple Quay
Bristol BS1 6HA

Tell us what you think

When you are ready to give us your views please fill in and send us your completed consultation questionnaire. You can complete it online or download and print it from our website.

If you would like a hard copy, let us know and we can send one in the post to you. If you complete our questionnaire in paper format, please return it in the prepaid envelope provided or post it to:

Freepost HIGHWAYS CONSULTATION

The statutory consultation will run from Friday 26 January 2018 until 23:59 on Friday 9 March 2018 (inclusive). Please get involved and provide your responses by the closing date.

We will analyse your feedback, consider all suggestions made, and respond to it in the report we prepare on the consultation. Following the consultation, amendments can be made to the proposal. Your views will help the Secretary of State for Transport make a decision on our application.

Timeline and Development Consent Order process

This scheme is classified as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) under the Planning Act 2008. Because of its national significance, the scheme needs a Development Consent Order (DCO).

Following this statutory consultation, we will carefully consider all comments received before submitting our DCO application.

If the application is accepted by the Planning Inspectorate, there will then be an examination of the application in which the public can participate. This examination will take a maximum of 6 months. The Planning Inspectorate then has 3 months to make a recommendation to the Secretary of State, who then has a further 3 months to make a final decision. More information about the DCO process can be found on the Planning Inspectorate’s website:

<http://infrastructure.planningportal.gov.uk>



↑ Sparkford 2
Wincanton 9½
← Babcary 2¾
West Camel ½ →



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Highways England creative job number MCR18_0007

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Registered office Bridge House, 1 Walnut Tree Close, Guildford GU1 4LZ
Highways England Company Limited registered in England and Wales number 09346363