

A358

Taunton to Southfields Dualling Scheme

Preferred Route Announcement





Investing in your roads

At Highways England 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.

We want to make sure all our major roads are more dependable, durable and, most importantly, safe. That's why we're delivering £15 billion of investment on our network – the largest investment in a generation. The A358 Taunton to Southfields Dualling is a critical part of this investment and will improve journeys between the south east and south west, which is great news for the local and regional economy.

In this brochure we explain the preferred route for the A358 Taunton to Southfields Dualling scheme, how we have assessed the options and carried out public consultation. We also give details of what will happen next.

Background to the scheme

The A358 Taunton to Southfields Dualling scheme is a proposal to upgrade the A358 to a high quality dual carriageway between Southfields Roundabout on the A303 and the M5 at Taunton. It's one of three schemes identified in the Government's first Road Investment Strategy (RIS1) as a priority for improving connections between the south east and the south west.

Currently most of the road is a single lane and has many local roads and private accesses joining directly with it. It's regularly congested and is frustrating for people travelling to school and work. Many drivers/road users try to avoid the traffic by diverting onto smaller local roads which increases the level of traffic in surrounding villages.

We've consulted twice on our options for upgrading the road – once in 2017, and again in 2018. We've carefully considered all feedback from both rounds of consultation which has been considered alongside our technical assessments to select our preferred route.

Our proposal aims to address the traffic issues and long delays currently experienced along the route and the negative impact this has on the south west economy.

Scheme objectives

The Road Investment Strategy outlines an overall ambition to improve connectivity between the south east and south west. As part of this, we have set the following objectives for the A358 Taunton to Southfields Dualling scheme:

- **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
- **Resilience** – improve journey time reliability and resilience, and provide extra capacity to make it easier to manage traffic when incidents occur
- **Connectivity** – improve the connectivity of the south west to the rest of the UK and improve business and growth prospects
- **Local communities** – reduce community severance and promote opportunities for improving their quality of life
- **Safety** – improve safety for all, including pedestrians, cyclists and other non-motorised users
- **Environment** – avoid unacceptable impacts on the surrounding landscape, natural historic environment while exploring opportunities for enhancement
- **Capacity** – reduce delays and queues that occur during peak hours and at seasonal times of the year

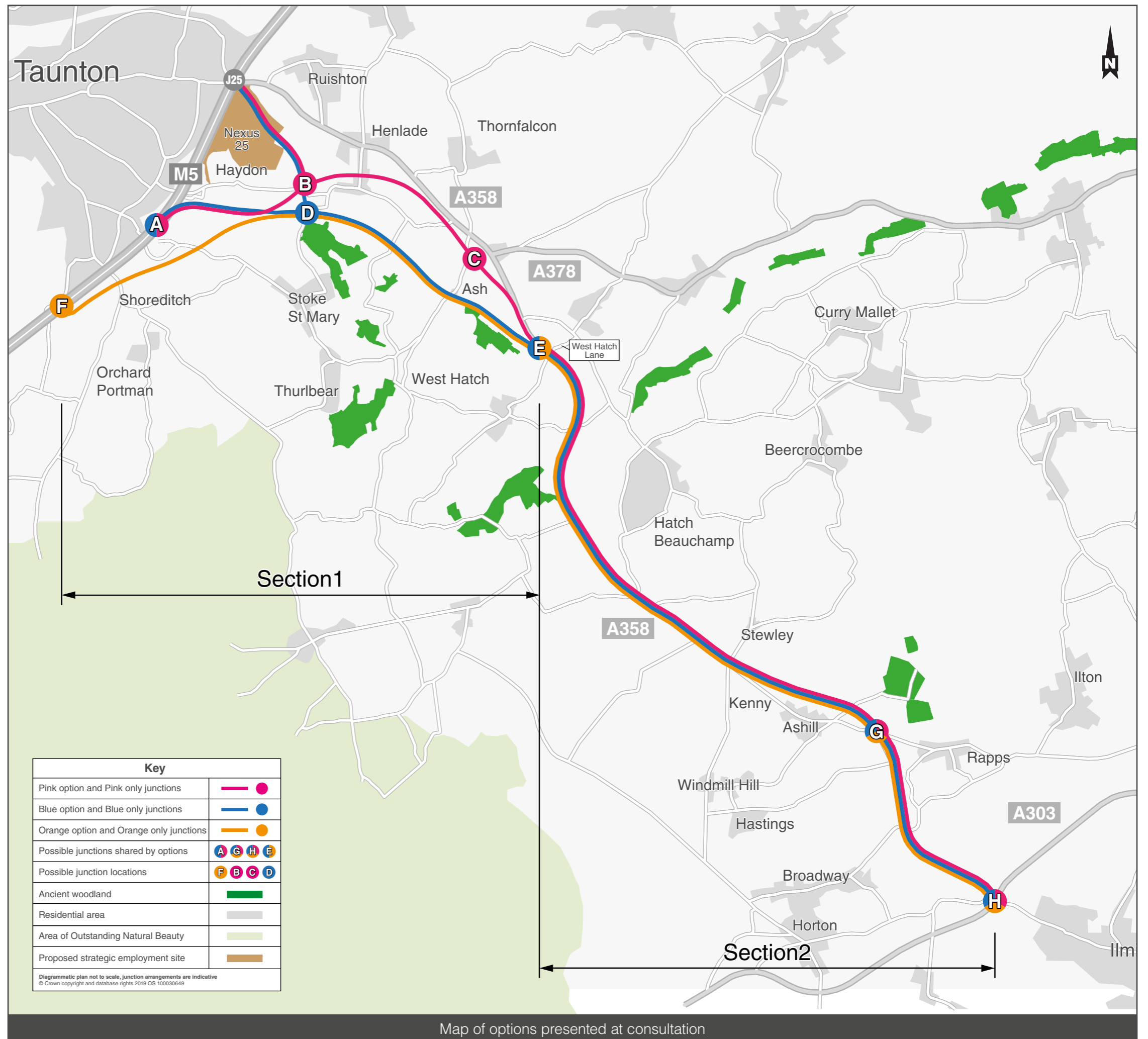


There were initially **28** route options assessed against economic, social and environmental criteria based on the scheme objectives and benefits. This detailed process enabled us to identify the options which we presented at two rounds of public consultation.

Consultation options

In 2018, we consulted on three route options for the scheme – the Orange option, the Blue option and the Pink option. We also indicated that the preferred route could contain elements from any of the three routes (ie a possible mix and match), should further assessment and your feedback support this. The Orange option was identical to the route taken to consultation in 2017, during which the local community and wider stakeholders called for more options to be presented. The Blue and Pink options offered the possibility of linking to junction 25 of the M5.

You can find more information about the options we presented for consultation on the scheme webpage: www.highwaysengland.co.uk/Taunton-to-Southfields



Map of options presented at consultation

The preferred route

We've chosen a modified version of the Pink option as our preferred route.

We carefully considered a number of factors when selecting this option including affordability, capacity, safety, connectivity, resilience, environmental impact, consultation feedback and economic benefits.

Since our last consultation, we updated the cost estimates for the scheme which showed that the cost of each of the options had increased. As a result, we had to revisit our options to see how they could be modified to balance the scheme's objectives, cost, value for money and public feedback.

To improve the affordability of the scheme we used the previously published Pink option as a basis to develop a modified option, as this had performed the best across our previous assessments.

Our assessments show that removing junctions A and B, as well as the dual carriageway link between these junctions, from the Pink option will deliver the right balance between scheme objectives and cost. This modification also provides the benefit of removing the impact these junctions would have on homes, public open space and the countryside which was an issue you raised at consultation.

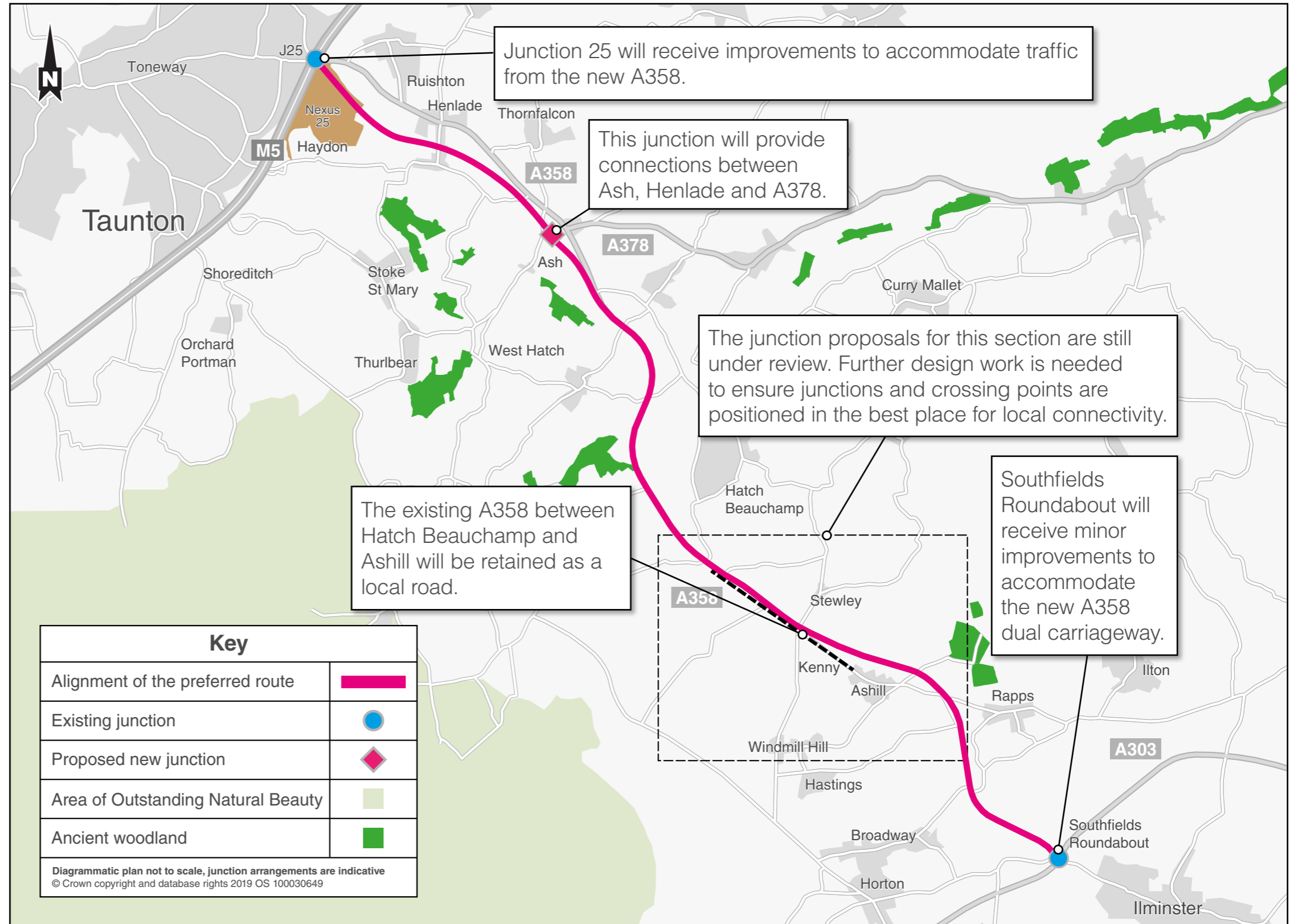
Benefits of the preferred route are that:

- We'll be substantially reducing traffic flows through Henlade from 33,500 without the scheme to 4,000 vehicles with the scheme in 2038
- We'll be providing a connection to the A378 which will relieve traffic through Henlade helping to improve the air quality
- We'll be improving the environment by reducing pollution from queuing traffic, particularly through Henlade and allow Somerset West and Taunton Council to potentially remove the Air Quality Management Area
- We'll make journeys safer by closing existing road junctions and private accesses helping us to reduce the number of people killed and seriously injured on the road network

- Your local journeys into Taunton will be made better by making your journey times more predictable and reducing the cost and inconvenience of unexpected delays you currently experience

- This route has the least impact on existing homes, public open space and the countryside including avoiding the ancient woodlands at Huish Copse and Stoke Wood

- It will make it easier for you to grow your businesses in and around Taunton by improving connectivity and providing a direct link to the Nexus 25 employment site
- This scheme is the best use of public money as we can deliver a scheme closest to the budget allocated while still meeting the scheme objectives.



Response to the public consultation

Thank you to everyone who shared their comments with us during consultation. We've taken your suggestions and feedback into account in the selection of the preferred route. Where appropriate we've logged some comments, particularly those related to specific scheme design details, and these will feed in to the ongoing development of the scheme.

In this section you'll find an overview of the main areas of feedback we received on the proposals and how we have considered these in the selection of our preferred route. If you'd like to see more detailed information you can find this in our A358 Report on Public Consultation which is available on the scheme webpage or at the Public Information Points.

Section 1

Section 1 of the proposed route runs from the M5 at Taunton to West Hatch. We asked you which of the route options would best serve your regular journeys as well as offering you the space to include any further comments.

What you told us:

- Most people, 61%, said that the Pink route would best serve their regular journeys
- Some people said that the Pink option seemed to be the best option for being less intrusive to the countryside
- Some people said that junction A, which was a new junction on the M5 shared by the Pink and Blue route, wasn't needed. Feedback told us some people felt junction A was beyond what the scheme needs, and money could be better spent elsewhere
- Others said that it was important that Henlade is bypassed to reduce the impact on local traffic and residents
- Some people were concerned about the impact the Pink route would have on splitting the settlements of Henlade and Lower Henlade
- There were some concerns around the impact on local residents and the environment from the Orange option
- There were concerns raised about the public open space which would be impacted by both the Pink and Blue options.



Our response:

We note the high levels of support for the Pink route which was taken into account when selecting our preferred route.

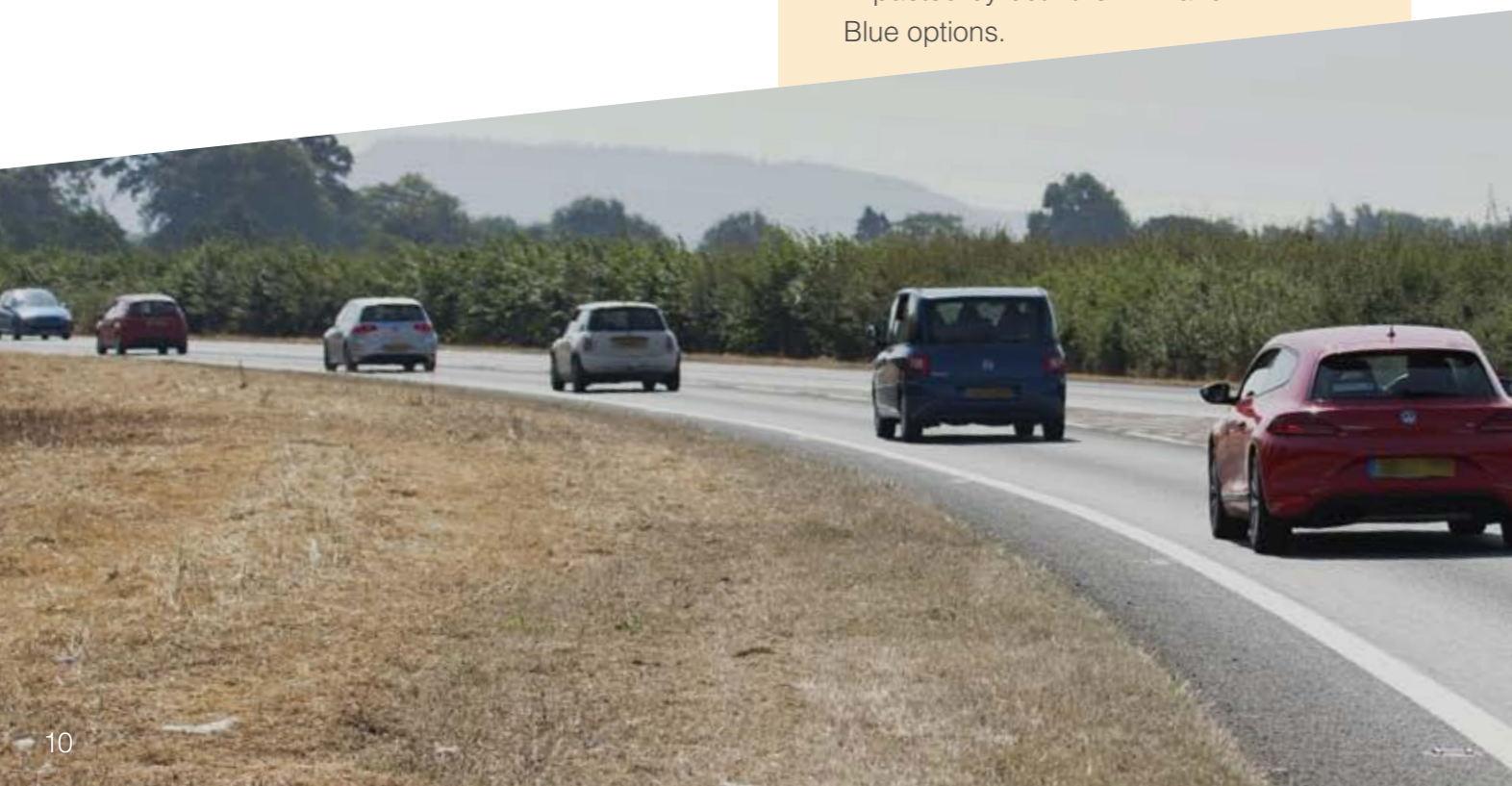
The preferred route is a modified version of the Pink route and we've removed junction A which will lessen the impact on the environment and local residents.

The preferred route will substantially reduce traffic flow through Henlade, compared to doing nothing. We estimate that in 2038 the number of vehicles will have reduced to approximately 4,000 per day from a predicted 33,500 which will have a hugely positive impact on the local community.

We note the concerns about the severance to Henlade and Lower Henlade and will work with the local community through the Community Forum to alleviate severance as best we can.

We note the feedback about the Orange option in terms of the impact on local residents and the environment. The route we have selected to take forward and develop has less impact on the environment and local residents than the other options proposed.

We note the concerns about the public open space that would have been impacted by the Pink and Blue options. The modified Pink option, which is the preferred route, avoids the public open space.



Response to the public consultation

Section 2

Section 2 runs from West Hatch to Southfields Roundabout on the A303. We asked you to what extent you agreed with our proposals for Section 2 and if you had any further comments.

What you told us:

- 59% of people who responded either selected strongly agree or agree to our proposals
- Other comments we received said that it was a dangerous stretch of road and that you thought the proposals will improve road safety and traffic flow

- Some people said the existing alignment provides the best option for improvement while being minimally intrusive on the environment
- Others commented that they didn't feel this section of the road needed upgrading at all
- There were some concerns raised about the access arrangements to Hatch Beauchamp.



Our response:

We are pleased that most people agree with our proposal for Section 2 of the route. We're committed to improving road safety and reducing the number of those killed and/or seriously injured who travel on our road network.

While Section 2 is perceived by some as being minimally intrusive to the environment we'll still be working to make sure we have the least impact possible, and where some impact is unavoidable we'll put suitable mitigation measures in place.

We note the concerns about access to Hatch Beauchamp and other local access arrangements. These comments have been logged and will be explored further as we develop the design.

Alternative options suggested through the public consultation

In the feedback received during the consultation, two hybrid options were suggested. These were made up of a mix and match of the options presented at consultation. As well as these suggestions, a parish council proposed an alternative alignment.

These three alternative routes were also assessed against the routes presented at public consultation. Following the assessments, these alternatives were discounted. Further detail on these assessments is available both in the A358 Report on Public Consultation and the A358 Scheme Assessment Report.

Discounted options

In making our preferred route selection, we've decided to discount the Orange and Blue options. Here are a few reasons why the Orange and Blue routes aren't being taken forward. Further detail can be found in the A358 Scheme Assessment Report.

Orange option

- 16% of respondents said that the Orange option would best serve their regular journeys, compared with 61% for the Pink option
- The Orange option would cause adverse environmental impacts on ancient woodland at Huish Copse and Stoke Wood
- The Orange option would have a greater impact on existing homes than our preferred option
- The Orange option would have a greater impact on the countryside than our preferred option
- The Orange option would deliver less of a reduction in congestion through Henlade than our preferred option
- The Orange option does not provide a connection to Nexus 25. This was a key theme identified in stakeholder feedback

Blue option

- 13% of respondents said that the Blue option would best serve their regular journeys, compared with 61% for the Pink option
- The Blue option would cause adverse environmental impacts on ancient woodland at Huish Copse and Stoke Wood
- The Blue option would have a greater impact on existing homes than our preferred option
- The Blue option would have a greater impact on the countryside than our preferred option

Next steps

Now our preferred route has been announced we'll begin to refine the scheme design ahead of a further consultation. To help us develop the design we'll undertake further surveys looking at the local area in greater detail. The announcement of our preferred route will also allow land required for the construction of the scheme to be protected from development.

The scheme is classified as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) under the Planning Act 2008. This means we will need to make an application for a special type of planning permission called a Development Consent Order (DCO) to gain authorisation to construct the scheme. Before we can submit our application, we will do a further consultation where you will have the opportunity to comment on our proposals again.

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

How to find out more

For more information about the scheme, or to read The Report on Public Consultation or the Scheme Assessment Report, please visit our webpage at www.highwaysengland.co.uk/Taunton-to-Southfields

The Report on Public Consultation sets out the consultation process and how we have responded to feedback, and the Scheme Assessment Report sets out all of the factors that we have considered in making the decision, alongside some of the supporting technical information.

For more general information about the scheme you can also visit our webpage (where you can also sign up for email alerts whenever the web page is updated):

www.highwaysengland.co.uk/Taunton-to-Southfields

Or contact us:

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 **0300 123 5000**

Notes



The timeline above shows what will happen at each stage of the scheme.

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