

SOMERSET COUNTY COUNCIL

**CONSTRUCTION OF NORTHERN INNER DISTRIBUTOR ROAD (NIDR) LINKING STAPLEGROVE ROAD TO PRIORY AVENUE INCLUDING A NEW BRIDGE AT CHIP LANE FOR PEDESTRIANS AND CYCLES, NEW ROAD BRIDGE AT STATION ROAD AND A ROAD BRIDGE ACROSS THE RIVER TONE AT PRIORY PARK, TAUNTON**

322702/125355REG 3/4:OBSERVATIONS - SOMERSET COUNTY COUNCIL DECISION

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**1. RECOMMENDATION**

That Somerset County Council be advised that Taunton Deane Borough Council raise no objection to the application for the Northern Inner Distributor Road, subject to:

- A. The matters of concern raised by the Planning Policy Officer are reconsidered, and further discussions take place as a matter of urgency to resolve these issues, with a further update to this Committee in due course if appropriate.
- B. Conditions that landscaping as shown be carried out within the first planting season following completion; that the mitigation identified in the various accompanying reports/studies is incorporated into the contracts; that the archaeological remains are subject to proper recording as required by the County Archaeologist.
- C. That full details of the following be submitted to and agreed by Taunton Deane Borough Council prior to commencement of any part of the scheme:-
  - Further tree planting in areas identified by the Landscape Officer
  - Full details of the proposed lighting of the pedestrian/cycle bridges and their approach
  - Full details of the noise mitigation barriers
  - Further consideration be given to the design of the approaches to and the structures of the two pedestrian/cycle bridges
  - Further surveys be carried out to ascertain whether badgers have moved back onto the site.

**2. APPLICANTS**

Somerset County Council

### **3. THE SITE**

The site extends from Staplegrove Road to Prior Avenue, running alongside the railway line from Staplegrove Road to Station Road, where there will be a new junction and thence eastwards towards the Firepool/Abbey Manor Development where that scheme will provide a link, to the remainder of the application site which then runs approximately north-south towards the existing roundabout at Priory Avenue. There is a cycle/footpath link alongside the canal towards Firepool Lock.

### **4. PROPOSAL**

The scheme involves:

- Construction of new bridge over the River Tone and the canal in the vicinity of Priory Fields Business Park
- Construction of new footbridge connecting Firepool Bridge to the Greenfield area between the canal and the river
- Replacement of the former rail bridge (Kingston Loop Bridge) over Station Road to the north of Whitehall
- Replacement of existing footbridge over the railway at Chip Lane
- Construction of approximately 1.6km of new carriageway together with the realignment of a further 150m of carriageway
- Construction of a new junction at the intersection of Chip Lane and Staplegrove Road
- Demolition of retail property
- Construction of traffic signal controlled junction at the entrance to Taunton railway station
- Improvements to the existing Priory Bridge Road/Priory Avenue/Priory Park roundabout
- Retaining walls and fences in appropriate locations
- The provision of pedestrian and cycle facilities.
- A comprehensive landscaping scheme will form an integral part of the proposals with particular attention paid to those areas with adjacent residential property.

The area covered by the scheme is approximately 3 hectares comprising existing highway, retail park, operational Network Rail land, Greenfield open space and brownfield development land with planning consent.

The road rises by approximately 7m from existing levels at the Priory Avenue roundabout to the south abutment of Firepool Bridge. This allows access for heavy goods vehicles into the retail outlets' delivery yard. The surrounding ground over the remainder of the length of the scheme is reasonable level.

The new Firepool Bridge will rise, in a reasonably gentle curve, such that the soffit level is around 10m above river level and about 4.5m above the canal towpath. Pedestrians and cyclists use the riverside and canalside paths as leisure and commuter routes.

The road generally comprises a standard 7.3m wide carriageway with a 3m wide off-road segregated footway/cycleway and a verge of varying width of between around 1m and 2m. the verge is at it's narrowest between Kingston Loop Bridge and Chip Lane, over which length Network Rail operations constrain the amount of land available. The carriageway is slightly narrowed to fit over the refurbished Kingston Loop Bridge.

The proposal for the main structure at Firepool is a 3 span steel composite structure with concrete abutments and central piers along with access steps on its eastern side.

Firepool footbridge, which lies on the western side of the main structure comprises a cable stay type structure with a single, raking pylon and a viewing platform facing towards the town centre.

Kingston Loop Bridge is of significant local historic interest, but not listed, and the external beams will be reused as a façade to the new structure, thus preserving the existing street scene. The replacement structure will be of pre-stressed concrete beams.

The connection of the Chip Lane Right of Way with Staplegrove Road is improved by the installation of a traffic signal controlled crossing while the replacement Chip Lane footbridge has improved facilities for pedestrians and cyclists. The riverside path and canalside bridleway are unaffected or enhanced by the scheme as the new Firepool Bridge passes overhead with sufficient headroom clearance and the new Firepool Footbridge connects with NIDR to the bridleway. The improvements to the existing highway at Priory Park include provision to incorporate the existing Rights of Way.

## **5. PLANNING HISTORY**

No history is supplied as in this instance history of uses/permissions is not considered to be material to the consideration of this application.

## **6. RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES**

Regional Planning Guidance/Regional Transport Strategy; Draft Regional Spatial Strategy. These identify Taunton as an area of growth.

### Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review Policies

STR1	Sustainable Development
STR2	Towns
STR4	Development in Towns -New development should be focussed on the Towns where provision for such development should be made in accordance with their role and function, individual characteristics and constraints. Priority should be given to the re-use of previously developed land and to the encouragement of mixed use development.
Policy 1	Nature Conservation

Policy 8	Outstanding Heritage Settlements
Policy 9	The Built Historic Environment
Policy 17	Mixed –Use Developments
Policy 39	Transport and Development
Policy 40	Town Strategies - In Towns a range of measures should be implemented to facilitate more sustainable modes of transport and reduce reliance on the private car in order to improve the living and working environment. Such transport measures should complement development proposals.
Policy 41	Corridor Strategies – Taunton (Bridgwater to Minehead) ..... transport will be managed in order to achieve transfer to more sustainable modes, improve safety and environmental conditions.
Policy 42	Walking - Facilities for pedestrians should be improved by maintaining and extending the footpath network, particularly between residential areas, shops, community facilities, workplaces and schools and by ensuring that improvements to the highway provide for safe use.
Policy 43	Access for people with disabilities - Facilities for people who are mobility impaired should be improved by maintaining and extending the network of suitable footpaths, bridleways and cycle routes and by facilitating ease of access to other transport infrastructure and new development.
Policy 44	Cycling - Urban and longer distance facilities for cyclists should be improved by maintaining and extending the cycle network between residential areas and schools, shops, community facilities and workplaces, and by making the best use of existing highway infrastructure. Improvements to the highway should provide for safe use by cyclists.
Policy 54	Transport Proposals and the Environment - New transport proposals and improvements, particularly road schemes must take into account the need to:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• minimise the impact of proposals through mitigation and compensation measures, improve or conserve the natural and built environment,</li> <li>• avoid the risk of pollution to the water environment, including water resources,</li> <li>• minimise the consumption of resources both in construction and operation,</li> <li>• minimise conflict with adjoining land uses.</li> </ul>

#### Taunton Deane Local Plan

Policy S1	General Requirements
Policy S2	Design
Policy S9	Taunton Town Centre
Policy EC9	Loss of Employment Land - Proposals which lead to the loss of existing or identified business, industrial or warehousing land to other uses, including retailing, will not be permitted unless the

	overall benefit of the proposal outweighs the disadvantages of the loss of employment or potential employment on the site.
Policy M5	Cycling - A comprehensive, convenient and safe cycle network is proposed through a combination of measures and works, including the following main elements: (A) on- and off-road cycleways as shown on the Proposals Map; (B) traffic calming, traffic management and junction redesign; and (C) convenient and secure cycle parking facilities.
Policy C8	Proposals which would affect disused railway tracks or canals will only be permitted where a corridor to retain the potential use of the track or canal for footpath/cycleways is provided or the proposals would reinstate these railways or canals for their original purposes.
EN3	Local Wildlife Geological Interests
EN6	Development which would harm trees, woodlands, orchards, historic parklands and hedgerows of value to the area's landscape, character or wildlife will not be permitted unless adequate provision is made for tree cover to compensate for this loss. The good management of such tree cover for nature conservation purposes will be sought.
EN22	Development affecting sites of County Archaeological importance.
EN23	Areas of High Archaeological Potential
EN25	Development which would harm the landscape, character, wildlife and recreational potential of the water environment will not be permitted. Development proposals near rivers, canals, still waters and watercourses must respect, enhance and maximise the benefits of a waterside location.
EN28	Development and Flood Risk
EN34	Control of External Lighting
T3	Major Site Allocation – Firepool

The line of the proposed road includes sections which are shown as County Archaeological Site (canal and railway tracks), County Wildlife Site (river and canal), proposed cycle route, with a small section on land within the 1 in 100 year flood plain and some areas within the T3 allocation.

#### Proposals for change in Taunton town centre (October 2007)

The roadline is shown on the Taunton Town Centre Action Area Plan as proposed new road (Tr 7).

#### Vision Statement:

Vision and Objectives 6 – A town centre that is well connected and less congested ..... delivery of the Northern Inner Distribution Road.

Firepool policies paragraph 4.12 – high quality pedestrian and cycle routes will be needed alongside and across the River Tone and to other parts of the town, including Taunton East and (by means of a future bridge over the railway line) North Taunton.

Firepool Policy Fp 4 – a high quality pedestrian and cycle crossing of the Northern Inner Distributor Road.

Transport Policy Tr7 – Highway scheme the following schemes are programmed for construction between 2006 and 2011 a) the Third Way Relief Road; b) Northern Inner Distribution Road

## **7. RELEVANT CENTRAL GOVERNMENT ADVICE.**

PPS1	Delivering sustain the development
PPS9	Biodiversity and geological conservation
PPG13	Transport
PPG15	Planning and the Historic Environment
PPG16	Archaeology and Planning
PPS23	Pollution Control
PPS25	Development and Flood Risk

## **8. CONSULTATIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS**

The application is made by Somerset County Council so that authority will have consulted the statutory consultees. Taunton Deane Borough Council is one of the consultees, and this authority has consulted internal departments only.

LANDSCAPE OFFICER - "There will be major landscape impacts from the construction of the NIDR. There are proposals to protect the retained trees during construction and where land is available there will be scope for replanting. However, there are situations where trees and shrubs will be removed but nothing provided to reduce or mitigate their impacts such as at the junction of the road with Priory Bridge Road where the retail park will be left open to passing traffic. There is a similar situation just to the north west where the new housing estate will lose its tree and bank mitigation but little offered in compensation. The ramp and bridge link to the Children's Wood area between the river and B&T Canal area is an important amenity area that will need further landscape mitigation if it is to be successfully integrated into the riverine landscape. The route of the road follows in part the historic route of the Grand Western Canal. Any archaeology should be carefully monitored as there is great interest in its history locally and regionally".

NATURE CONSERVATION AND RESERVES OFFICER – "Flora: The conservation and management for Somerset notable species such as flowering rush and common Club rush identified in CC's report and the control of alien species such as Himalayan balsam and giant hogweed must be managed through the landscape management plan.

Badgers: CC's report of surveys July 06 – Oct 07 concluded that badgers are not a material consideration 4.3.3 as setts on site were closed under licence and a new sett established off site. However, I advise that up to date checks should be made to make sure that badgers have not moved back onto the site. I support recommendations that during construction all trenches have a means of escape.

Otters: Otters are considered to use the Tone and Canal and lighting must be carefully designed to avoid lighting of the waterways. I support CC's report conclusions and recommendations 5.3 and 5.4. Details of the lighting of the bridge and details of how otters can safely move under the bridges should now be submitted.

Water Voles: No evidence of water voles was found along the sections of the Tone or Canal and are not a material consideration in this case. However, I support report recommendations 6.4 for careful working and enhancement of habitat for the species.

Bats: Same comment as above for bats. At least four species known to use the waterways for foraging and commuting. Daubentons bats are particularly susceptible to increased light levels and details of the lighting should now be submitted. I support the report recommendations 7.4

Birds: There will be great disturbance of an important nesting area for a range of bird species, including sedge warbler, which is a species of conservation concern in Somerset. Consideration should be given to maintaining suitable habitat for this species. I advise that a condition should be made to prevent works during the main nesting season March 1<sup>st</sup> to July 30<sup>th</sup>.

There are opportunities to improve habitats and I support recommendations in the landscape plan for habitat creation and management”.

PLANNING POLICY – “The main points of concern with the scheme as submitted are in:

- Provision of with-flow cycle lanes in both directions
- Provision of footways 405m wide
- Replacement of the roundabout at Staplegrove Road by a signal controlled junction with appropriate pedestrian and cycle facilities.
- Incorporation of ‘passive provision’ for future setting back of the abutments of the overbridge across Station Road by 6m to allow for bus lane(s), continuous cycle lanes and wider footways.
- Revision of the Station Road overbridge design to create a more contemporary appearance compatible with future changes to street width and alignment.
- A vertical alignment at the junction with the station approach and the ‘Station Boulevard’ access to Firepool that provides for a continuous north-south descent and an unbroken line of sight for people approaching the Firepool development from the railway station.
- Reconsideration of the Priory Avenue roundabout to reduce pedestrian and cycle severance of taunton East from Priory Bridge Road and the Firepool area, including the potential for a signalised junction at this point.”

RIGHTS OF WAY OFFICER - "I have not visited the site however I can confirm that there are public rights of way (PROW) recorded on the Definitive Map that cross the area of the proposed development/area highlighted on your plan at the present time (T 33/15, T 33/14, T 33/21, T 33/22 and T 33/22A), I have enclosed a plan showing these footpaths and bridleway for your information. It is also not known to what extent any other ways are used by the public at large, and any right of way gained in the process. My colleague Esther Harbour has responded to a consultation from Mrs Rebecca Comyns dated 8 May 2008. Comments from memo below."

My colleague, Pete Hoble, has previously responded to two memos from Bob McWilliams (Transport Development) regarding Chip Lane Bridge and Firepool Bridge. Copies of these memos are also attached for your information. In addition to Pete's comments we would ask that footpath T 33/22A is considered for diversion or preferably extinguishment, whilst ensuring that suitable pedestrian access is catered for along Priory Park north to the proposed bridge, as well as maintaining a pedestrian link to footpath T33/22. I am still researching the exact alignment of T 33/22A and will confirm ASAP. If it is considered that the development and access to the site would result in any of the outcomes listed below, then authorisation for these works must be sought from Somerset County Council Rights of Way Group.

- A PROW being made less convenient for continued public use.
- New furniture being needed along a PROW
- Changes to the surface of a PROW being needed.
- Changes to the existing drainage arrangements associated with the PROW

If the work involved in carrying out this proposed development would make a PROW less convenient for continued public use (or) create a hazard to users of a PROW then a temporary closure order will be necessary and a suitable alternative route must be provided. A temporary closure can be obtained from Sarah Hooper on (01823) 483091".

STREET LIGHTING OFFICER - "I examined the proposed scheme in depth with the following recommendations:

- (A) Please could I have a copy of the lighting design for the footpath and Cycleway link from Cyril Street to Chip Lane.
- (B) The lighting design for the footbridge over the railway must be submitted to Network Rail for their approval.
- (C) The raised structure of the attractive proposed footbridge across both The River Tone and the Bridgwater and Taunton Canal should be either floodlit or preferably illuminated with very long life luminaries".

ARTS OFFICER - "From a Public Art and Design perspective, I have concerns about the design of the raised bridges, particularly of the South Elevation Footbridge off the east Elevation Road Bridge and the Chip Lane Foot/Cycle Bridge. I question the necessity for such a large structure as a 4 –



4.5 metre South Elevation footbridge which will drastically alter the view from the Abbey Manor Firepool Lock residential development as well as the view across the Tone and the Canal. The nature of the sides of the bridge will be important, as to whether people feel safe or too enclosed. Railings would be better than concrete sides. It is also a potentially dangerous junction as this slip ramp will lead from a lit strategic arterial route and plunge into darkness in between two water routes. From a cyclists' and pedestrian view point, this would be an uncomfortable journey which is unlikely to be used in the dark and the winter, and which is likely to be circumvented through other desire lines. If the Chip Lane footbridge is to be improved then consideration must be given to make it easier for people with buggies, wheelchairs and bikes to use it, as well as how to improve the visual design which at the moment is very unattractive".

BRITISH WATERWAYS – “British Waterways is a public body set up to maintain and develop the network of canals and other inland waterways in a sustainable manner so that they fulfill their full economic, social and environmental potential. In addition to statutory navigation and safety functions, British Waterways has to:

Conserve our waterway heritage and environment

- Promote and enable rural and urban regeneration
- Maintain and enhance leisure, recreation, tourism and education opportunities for the general public and
- Facilitate waterway transport

After due consideration of the application details, British Waterway has the following general comments to make:

British Waterways has been in discussions with Somerset County Council for some time regarding the various proposed bridge crossings and improvements for the Taunton area. We are disappointed that the application was submitted before we have concluded discussions with the County Council as several matters remain unresolved. The requirement for a stoppage of the navigation during main lifting/construction operations needs further consideration. In this instance it may be possible to close the navigation for an extended period and BW are willing to work with the County, our partners and customers of the canal in this respect. However it is noted that the bridge/main lifts could also be undertaken under a series of short duration stoppages and past experience has shown that once the main bridge elements have been lifted it is possible for Contractors to develop safe systems of work that allow the navigation to open during ‘second fix’ operations. However this issue has not yet been resolved. Prior to formally closing a navigation a formal consultation exercise is required with national and local user groups. This has not yet been undertaken. The final bridge soffit level above the canal and towpath must still be confirmed with British Waterways. The towpath at this point is located on the southern side of the canal further agreement confirming the headroom details above the navigation and the southern towpath must be agreed. Environmental Impacts of the bridge crossing should be considered. It had been agreed that all pre-works investigations with respect to the canal and its environs should be submitted to British Waterways for review prior to the submission of the

application however this does not appear to have happened. The treatment of the canal edge in the vicinity of the structure and of the towpath itself adjacent to the proposed bridge and 'tie in' of the new link to the towpath requires consideration. The wider refurbishment of the towpath between Firepool and Obridge requires consideration and it is felt can be carried out as part of this project. Details of the access points onto the towpath will require careful detailing including surface treatments and security and must be agreed by British Waterways prior to any work commencing. We would suggest that this is dealt with by condition or by a S106 agreement.

Confirmation on the intended disposal route for the discharge of surface water arising from the road, structure and back of abutment drainage should be confirmed and must be agreed by British Waterways who will need to issue a License for the disposal of surface water. The facing on the abutments should be consistent with the character of the waterway. Landscaping proposals along the waterway boundary should be developed in conjunction with BW and further landscaping is required in the vicinity of Childrens' wood, Piling and deep excavations in the vicinity of the canal may be detrimental to the integrity of the canal liner. In particular vibrations from piling operations may be sufficient to cause damage to the canal liner and a method statement for such work should be agreed with British Waterways prior to work commencing. The waterway and its bank is potentially home to several protected species included Bats, otters and Water voles. Not only is the timing of the work therefore important but the positioning and luminescence of any lighting is important to ensure that rare and protected species are not discouraged from either inhabiting or traveling through the area. Care must also be taken to ensure that no contaminants are allowed to enter the watercourse during construction works. Cement in particular is very damaging to aquatic life and great care is needed to ensure that no materials are washed or blown into the watercourse during construction. Certain species such as Japanese Knotweed, Giant Hogweed and Himalayan Balsam is easily transported via the watercourse and can quickly invade a much larger area. Contractors need to be aware of the ease in which such plants can invade and ensure that precautions are taken. Further details of the above issues can be found in the British Waterways Code of Practice document. All works of this nature must be undertaken in accordance with the Code of Practice for Works affecting British Waterways (BW) which is available via the link below.

[http://www.britishwaterways.co.uk/images/Code of Practice for Works Affecting BW.](http://www.britishwaterways.co.uk/images/Code%20of%20Practice%20for%20Works%20Affecting%20BW.pdf)

If the Council is minded to grant planning permission, it is requested that the following informative is attached to the decision notice:

"The applicant/developer is advised to contact John York and Tina Martin in order to ensure that any necessary consents are obtained and that the works comply with British Waterways' "Code of Practice for Works affecting British Waterways". In addition, we would ask that members consider imposing a condition or 8106 to seek improvements to the Canal towpath in the wider area to allow better accessibility to the whole area. We would suggest that

improved surfacing, better signage and seating would be appropriate in this location following the general improvement of the area”.

1 NEIGHBOUR HAS RESPONDED directly to Taunton Deane Borough Council. The redesign of the pedestrian and cycle bridge at Chip Lane across the railway and new road will mean less privacy in our back garden. Please could you consider using solid fencing at the northern end of the footbridge so that the view into the gardens is restricted. Please also ensure that the footpath is securely fenced in order to stop people gaining access to the back gardens as this was a problem in the past before Railtrack replaced the boundary fence around the northern steps. We also have concerns about the noise levels from the new road which will be constant during the daytime at least. Consideration should be given to adequate fencing and landscaping around the road to help with noise reduction.

## **9. LIKELY IMPACTS AND PROPOSED MITIGATION MEASURES**

Given the range of supporting studies and statements accompanying the application, the following section outlines the main study areas and proposed mitigation. This section is based directly on the written material supporting the application.

### Transport Assessment

This concludes that the NIDR is a scheme that is included in relevant local policies and is derived from regional and national policies and it will be funded by Department of Transport with contributions from Somerset County Council and relevant adjacent developers. This assessment considers the potential to improve the environment and reduce vehicular traffic on some of the town's roads. The scheme should offer significant traffic relief to Staplegrove Road south of the NIDR, Priory Bridge Road, Greenway Road, Priorswood Road and Obridge Viaduct, it would reduce congestion in the town centre and increase flows on Castle Street, Third Way, Bridge Street and Staplegrove Road (S). The assessment concludes that there would be an overall reduction in travel times, an overall increase in network speeds, enhanced cycle facilities, increase in the provision of pedestrian facilities, enhanced road safety, overall benefits to Somerset's economy and beneficial overall changes in air quality.

### Road Capacity

The Road Capacity Assessment concludes inter alia that for the design year of 2018, assuming the third way and the NIDR are in place, that there will be a predicted queue length of 24.8 vehicles in the morning peak at the Staplegrove Road west arm, which may block the pedestrian crossing on this arm; the new Station Road junction is likely to be at capacity during the 2018 morning peak, with queuing specifically on the southern arm and right turn from the western arm of the NIDR, such queuing could block the traffic turning right into the proposed multi-storey car park to the east of the station. The assessment indicates that at the Priory Avenue/Priory Park Junction the

morning and afternoon peak will result in overcapacity and long queue lengths, consideration was given in the model to the closure of Priory Avenue South, but this would not improve the operation or the capacity of the roundabout, it would result in an increase in delays at the junction. The model tests various alterations to the junctions, including the removal of the 'all-red pedestrian' stage ie; removal of the pedestrian phase. This appears to show at the new station junction all arms operate within capacity for all time periods. This option would have implications for pedestrian crossing movements in the vicinity.

### Noise

The noise and vibration assessment indicates that inter alia, there would be the greatest increases in noise at residential properties closest to the scheme, with increases in noise levels greater than 10 dB(A) occurring at 2 residential properties in Canal Road. Mitigation has been proposed to minimise increases in noise wherever practical. Overall there are increases in noise predicted at 631 dwellings with decreases predicted at 237. If the scheme is not constructed there would be increases in noise at approximately 177 dwellings and decreases in noise at approximately 81. In respect of the wider area, the greatest increase would occur on Castle Street, to the NHS Clinic (Millstream House) and 2 properties which would experience a perceptible increase in noise levels due to the scheme.

Detailed comments include that the Abbey Manor and Firepool developments may require that internal and external noise levels are controlled and such measures would need to be incorporated into the detailed design. Mitigation would include measures to aim to reduce all predicted noise increase at residential properties to less than 10 dB (considered to be 'substantial effect') and to minimise the number of increases greater than 5 dB ('moderate effect'). In addition a quieter road surface could reduce scheme impacts further – this is dependant on traffic speeds (the higher the speed the greater the possible reduction in noise). Mitigation is suggested as a 2m high reflective barrier, some 0.5m north of the scheme, along a section from Cyril Street West to Thomas Street. No barriers are proposed to the southern side of this section, mainly due to the screening offered by the existing industrial buildings on Chip Lane. In the section with properties on Whitehall, Station Road, Prospect Terrace and Canal Road, there would be two separate barriers on the south side of the scheme road. A 0.6m high reflective noise barrier on top of the proposed 1.4m retaining wall opposite Whitehall, and a 2m tall reflective noise barrier behind Prospect Terrace. In the area of Priory Avenue, no barrier is shown as whilst recommended to reduce predicted noise increases, the barrier is subject to further assessment due to visual impact and structural feasibility.

### Environmental Impact

This considers the likely direct and indirect impact of the implementation of the scheme. For instance there will be disruption during construction, Fairwater Terrace, Whitehall and Priory Park being most affected. There

would be visual impact mainly to Priory Park. On the positive side, the new Chip Lane footbridge would be accessible to wheelchair users and be more bike friendly, and there would be less traffic travelling through the town centre, with easier travel between east and west of town, and shorter overall distance travelled. There is a predicted reduction in accidents on Greenway Road and Priorswood Road. There will be a direct impact on cultural and natural environments which will require mitigation. Mitigation will have regard to the requirement to protect badgers, otters, water voles, bats and breeding birds.

### Flooding/Drainage

The EA floodplain map indicates that the southern part of the proposed road lies within the area with a 1% chance of flooding; this is the new Priory Avenue roundabout. SCC has concluded that this is not an issue due to Project Taunton flood mitigation measures upstream. The NIDR is considered to be 'essential infrastructure' based on guidance in PPS25, in terms of the exception test, it will provide a clear wider sustainability benefit to the community, it will be on previously developed land and remain safe in times of flood.

The study of drainage issues gives details of requirements to provide for the new road, these include petrol interceptors, connections into existing systems, drainage into the canal, (subject to British Waterway's approval) and further investigations in some areas to confirm storage capacity and existing sewers/drainage systems.

### Street lighting

The application is accompanied by a schedule of proposed lighting details for the road itself. There are no details of the lighting of the footbridge – such details are considered to be essential in order to assess the impact of nearby residents.

### Ecological surveys

These have been carried out to identify plant species and communities, to assess their intrinsic ecological value, to identify species of local or national importance. Three locally notable species are present – the yellow-wort (in the railway and yard north of the Canal), the Common Club-Rush and Flowering Rush on the River Tone margins. Otherwise the ecological value of the vegetation is low. Giant Hogweed, which is controlled as an invasive alien and it is illegal to cause it to be spread in the wild, soil that may contain its seed is restricted waste may only be disposed of to licensed landfill sites. Both the River Tone and the Taunton and Bridgwater Canal are designated as Local Wildlife Sites and the local notables Common Club-Rush and Flowering Rush are present on the river margins. Both water courses are known to be used as corridors by otters, their value in this junction is limited by urban land use and intensive management practices such as moving the adjoining grassland areas.

As regards other species, there was a badger sett in the area within the railway sidings to the north of the canal. This has now been destroyed under licence from Natural England to enable the Abbey Manor development to proceed, and an artificial sett has been constructed. Any trenches should be covered or means of escape provided for badgers during the construction. Otters have been sighted and the recommendations of the report include that road construction should include design of bridges to incorporate mitigation for otters, any artificial lighting should be placed and directed to avoid spillage which illuminates the water courses, and planting schemes and bank reinstatements should provide cover and connectivity for otters to follow potential established and protected routes.

There were no indications of water voles, however at least four bat species were detected in the surveys. Recommendations include the minimum necessary removal of all tree and vegetation to allow road and bridge construction, all planting schemes should be predominantly native species which provide food and refuge and construction should be at times when bats are inactive.

During the survey for nesting birds, 18 species were considered to be nesting, others were seen but not recorded as breeding. All were common species. The recommendations include the removal of trees, scrub and other vegetation should avoid the bird nesting season, and new planting include there to provide nesting and feeding opportunities.

No reptiles or amphibians were found in the study area. There were a number of Dragonfly species seen and identified and these are not the rare species. The loss of aquatic and marginal habitat is limited and mostly temporary so no specific mitigation is recommended. There were a good range of terrestrial invertebrates, one was considered notable – the Adonis Ladybird found in large numbers in north of Canal Road. There are no specific recommendations for mitigation, other than the provision of predominantly native species in the planning scheme.

In terms of Archaeological remains, SCC's archaeologist notes impact on industrial archaeological sites associated with the railway and canal and proper recording is recommended as part of the construction programme.

### Land Contamination

The study includes information in geology, hydrogeology, ground water abstraction, currently potentially contaminative uses, landfills, previous uses with possible potential contaminants eg: petrol station, oil tank, coal yard, a review of previous investigations and recent ground investigation.

As a result of surveys, it is noted that potential contamination is likely associated with former landuses, particularly the use of the land for railway sidings and for re-fuelling. Several contaminants were found, including arsenic, naphthalene, lead and benzoe (a) pyrene. The site can be classified as very low risk for commercial/industrial land use from gas. There appears

to be some contamination of the groundwater. It is recommended that gas monitoring take place during excavation of ditches and for services. Further studies are recommended in some areas in order to assess risk to human health.

Recommendations include careful re use of excavated materials in order to avoid unacceptable risk to controlled waters or human health.

### Ground investigation

This study was to establish inter alia, ground, ground water and ground gas conditions and information to determine design values for the engineering properties of the ground.

### Landscaping/Hardscape

The proposal includes the provision of a 1200-1500 high retaining wall with planted bund, to include trees, in the area of Fairwater Terrace in Staplegrove Road, with a service road giving direct access to Nos 109 – 125 and to the premises to the rear of Staplegrove Road. The roundabout is shown as having banks up then down to a wetland interior. This roundabout is to have tree planting and there will be more trees between the roundabout and the railway lines. Pedestrian crossing points are also shown.

The new pedestrian/cycle bridge at Chip Lane will include slopes and steps on both sides of the railway and it will be in a position just to the east of the existing bridge. The minimum width is shown as 3.5m wide. There will be a footpath/cycle path to the south of the NIDR linking to the new Station Road junction as well as back to Chip Lane to the West. Existing trees and shrubs alongside Whitehall and to the north of this section NIDR will be removed, but new planting will take place where space allows. Trees and shrubs in the area to the north of the Tone and to the south of the Canal will be removed to allow for the construction of the cycleway/footpath link from the canal up to the north/south arm of the NIDR. Trees to the east of Priory Park will be removed to provide the goods access to the Priory Fields retail units, with some new planting towards the Priory Avenue roundabout, and within the roundabout.

### Air Quality

In order to control dust during reclamation and construction, there would be recommendations specified in the contracts, these could include regular water spraying and sweeping of unpaved and paved roads, having wheel washers for vehicles leaving the site and storing dusty materials away from site boundaries. The study indicates that the implementation of the scheme should result in a deterioration overall in concentrations of nitrogen dioxide, mainly as a result of significant increases in concentrations at properties near the new road.

### Traffic modelling

This was to forecast and assess the traffic impact so the NIDR on the local road network in 2011 and 2018 am and pm peaks, for instance to identify problems, capacity constraints and to provide traffic information for noise and air quality assessment. One of the options included in the model is a bus only gate on Priory Bridge Road at its western end. In summary the road would attract 800-900 vehicles (2 way) in the am peak hour and 700-750 vehicles in pm peak hour, and would result in less traffic on Priory Bridge Road, Greenway Road, Priorswood Road and Obridge Viaduct, it would reduce congestion and probably improve road safety on the roads. It would increase traffic on northern section of Staplegrove Road, have little impact on Bindon Road, the traffic generated by the Firepool development in 2018 peak hour (pm) would exceed the capacity of the NIDR eastern roundabout and centralised signal junction, thus requiring additional improvements at junctions/signals.

### Visual impact

The proposed route is within the built environment main impacts will be in the more open Firepool area. Much of the road will be marked by existing buildings and structures, the bridges will have moderate visual impact as these are more visible, as will the new and revised roundabouts. There will be high adverse visual impact to Nos 1-7 Priory Park due to the new bridge. The removal of existing vegetation on the embankment in the Station Road areas will result in a moderate adverse impact on the surrounding residential areas. The study concludes an overall moderate adverse impact on townscape character.

## **10. PRINCIPAL ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION**

- A. Does the proposed development comply with the relevant Local and National Planning Policies? POLICY
- B. Is the design of the new road and associated structure appropriate? DESIGN
- C. Are the landscaping proposals acceptable? LANDSCAPING
- D. Have nature conservation interests been adequately taken into account? NATURE CONSERVATION
- E. Will the proposed development have an adverse impact on the residential amenity of adjacent properties? RESIDENTIAL AMENITY
- F. Is the proposed development sustainable? SUSTAINABILITY
- G. Other issues



A. POLICY

The site is within the settlement area for Taunton, is brownfield and is clearly shown in the Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan as a proposed road (including the Abbey Manor section which is not part of this application). Regional and Structure Plan Policies support the provision of some new roads when benefits can be achieved. Policies also provide for improvements for pedestrians, cyclists and disabled persons, to be able to travel more safely and into areas currently poorly served by footpaths/cycle paths. There are concerns however in respect of the amount of provision and how some features have been designed. Some significant alterations and amendments will be required to overcome these aspects, and further discussion is sought. The proposal is considered to generally accord with such policies for a new road; there are further specific policies which are considered below.

B. DESIGN

The design of the foot bridges is likely to be the most striking with the eastern bridge with its 'mast' being prominent and the long sections of cycle/disabled access slopes to the Chip Lane bridge being dominating in the local scene. The Taunton Deane Borough Council Arts Officer has concerns about both these bridges. It is considered that lighting the cycle path/footpaths along the canal would be contrary to Nature Conservation interests, and if cyclists/pedestrians wish to use a 'safer' route in terms of lighting, there are good alternatives. In reference to the Chip Lane bridge, it is functional, but perhaps more thoughts could go into the design of the sides of the bridge and approaches. As regards the road bridge over the river and canal, and the road over Station Road, these appear to be well designed for these locations. There appear to be no details given of the design of the noise barriers, such details are vital considerations and Taunton Deane Borough Council should be able to properly access such detail.

C. LANDSCAPING

There are several areas where trees and shrubs will be removed, with new planting in other areas, as well as close to areas of removal. In general such new planting is welcomed, along with retaining walls with planting bunds, however the Landscape Officer identifies some areas where little or no new planting is proposed. It is considered that additional planting be sought in these areas.

D. NATURE CONSERVATION

Many species were identified in the studies including several 'protected' species. These will need to have the various recommendations detailed in the surveys/mitigation measures implemented before, during and after the construction works. Such actions should protect the named species and along with the replacement planting should enable the 'corridors' to be continued.

## E. RESIDENTIAL AMENITY

It appears inevitable that additional properties will suffer from noise by the implementation of the scheme. Noise barriers will help in many cases, but not all. There will be moderate visual intrusion in some places, especially where the road/bridges are elevated. The air quality in general should be better, but again some people will be exposed to some poorer air quality. Accidents should reduce in Priorswood Road/Greenway Road and general accessibility is increased. Residential Amenity of a small number of properties will be adversely affected, a larger number of residents should see benefits. Overall there should be a general increase in benefits.

## F. SUSTAINABILITY

The location of the proposal takes account of the 'lie to the land' as regards removal of the minimum number of existing buildings/business, using a route over brownfield land and with as little disturbance to identified nature conservation interest as appears possible. The route includes cycle and pedestrian facilities along its length and a new crossing of the railway incorporating pedestrian, cycle and disabled users access, and new cycle/foot access to the canal. It therefore benefits a greater section of the local community than the 'do nothing' situation. This road has been identified as a key part of the Project Taunton. Its provision will enable more people to travel without congestion, resulting in less journey times, and will enhance access to the Firepool development area.

## G. OTHER ISSUES

There are archaeologically important routes for railway and canal within the scheme. There should be the subject of detailed appraisal during the construction process. Street lighting details of the two footpath/cycleway links have not been provided. Such details are crucial to residential amenity/nature conservation interests and should be forwarded to Taunton Deane Borough Council for comment.

## 11. **CONCLUSION**

In general the scheme is supported, as an essential element within Project Taunton and will provide a good link between communities within inner Taunton. There are a few details which require further consideration by Taunton Deane Borough Council officers in addition to the several detailed recommendations which should be taken into account by Somerset County Council in its formal consideration of the scheme.

**In preparing this report the Planning Officer has considered fully the implications and requirements of the Human Rights Act 1998.**

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NOTES:

