

**Somerset County Council's M5 J25 Improvement Scheme
Planning application.**

Stoke St. Mary Parish Council's response

We were supplied with some but not all of the planning documents regarding the proposed improvement scheme at Junction 25 of the M5 motorway. The Parish of Stoke St. Mary wish to make the following observations:

Given that the recently completed Highways England consultation for the development of the A358, the Parish Council maintain considerable and serious doubts that this proposed "standalone" scheme remains viable. Were it not for the proposed business park, "Nexus25", it is still our opinion that these plans would not exist in this form.

We believe that traffic congestion in Taunton cannot improve until work is undertaken to the Creech Castle junction, The Hankridge Business Park access and ingress, Toneway and the Obridge roundabouts. Nothing about this planning application will alleviate, Taunton's, ongoing traffic issues.

We have no faith that the laudable suggestion that cyclists and pedestrians will be well catered for. Whilst the proposals are welcome we seriously doubt that they will be incorporated into the proposed scheme. As the cost of provision of this scheme rises cuts will inevitably have to be made and the first thing to go will undoubtedly be provision for walkers and cyclists.

As mentioned previously we have environmental concerns regarding flooding and air pollution. At the time of writing we have seen nothing from the Environment Agency and there is currently no environmental sustainability report.

Comments on the documents supplied:

1 Planning support statement and Design and Access Statement.
MJ004045/001 & 2:

Generally we accept what has been consolidated into the two documents but we have some doubts over the benefits described in these documents. We also have concerns regarding the culverting of Henlade stream. If the current Highways England plans for the A358 go ahead, the preferred route will impact heavily upon this sensitive watercourse, which will have serious ramifications for Lower Henlade a known flood risk area.

2. Proposed Drainage Strategy for Planning dated 13 04-17 Report no: 70025259-001 & 2

Again, these reports do very little to ease our concerns that replacing water retaining ground with concrete and tarmac is going to ease flooding issues for other parts of the recognised local floodplain. The conclusions of all three documents is that substantial water management will be required to ameliorate flooding issues. In recent years no substantial maintenance work on local flood defence schemes has been carried out and we are concerned that these reports do not reflect the true nature of the flooding problems within Taunton Deane, which will be exacerbated by implementing this road scheme. We also note there is no confirmation from the Environment Agency and we deem this omission as an error, which needs addressing before proceeding.

3. Traffic and Transport Assessments Ref: MJ004045 & Report No287584AE-PTE/02

We are most concerned that the traffic figures quoted are inaccurate and do not actually reflect what actually happens "on the ground" We already know by admission, that this scheme "stacks" stationary traffic in a more efficient manner and we seriously doubt that the traffic movements in and out of the "Nexus 25" business park and the possibility of a Henlade by-pass, linking in with the Highways England proposed A358 upgrade will allow this scheme to operate efficiently. We believe that until the Highways England's proposed route becomes their preferred route, planning permission for this site should be deferred. We currently cannot see any additional benefit for the motorist, cyclist or pedestrian.

4. Air Quality Assessment:

As this part of the A358 at Henlade is currently one of the most polluted areas of Taunton Deane, as shown by the recent data supplied to Ruishton and Thornfalcon Parish Council, we have grave concerns that the conclusion of this report is far too optimistic and misleading. The increased capacity of more stationary and slow moving traffic during the operational period plus the inevitable slow moving vehicles will do nothing to enhance air quality. There was no report available indicating air quality post construction.

5. Noise Assessment:

We have no comment to make regarding this report.

6. Archaeological Geophysical Survey and Desk-Based Assessment.
70025259-006 Geophysical Survey Summary & Archaeological Written
Scheme of Investigation & Archaeological Monitoring & Recording Report.

We are aware from previous work around this site that there is a likelihood that archaeological artefacts may be discovered whilst excavating this site we would ask that should this happen then our heritage be dealt with diligently and professionally.

7. Arboricultural Report: 70025259-012

We appreciate that there will have to be some tree and shrub removal but would ask that this be carried out sensitively and that in accordance with removal like for like replacements are planted.

8. Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment: 70025259-007

As with the previous report we would ask that this work also be carried out sensitively and that the impact upon the immediate vicinity be kept to a minimum with impact locally also being minimised by use of whatever means necessary.

9. Biodiversity - Ecology Ref: SCC/MJ004045/004

We sincerely hope that these investigations are carried out in accordance with Government guidelines. It is unfortunate that a full report was unavailable.

10. Landfill Statement Ref: SCC/MJ004045/005

Our only comment is that this should be carried as ecologically prudent as possible.

In Conclusion:

Stoke St. Mary Parish Council consider that the current proposal should be put on hold for the time being until the Highways England route plans are confirmed. As we know from our enquires from the L.E.P. this plan is not as time sensitive as previously thought.

If, for instance, the current suggestion of building a new motorway junction at Killams Lane is confirmed then we have to question the veracity of going ahead with the Junction 25 improvement scheme in its present form. Moreover, as the Highways England proposal claims to substantially relieve traffic issues on the existing A358 and at Junction 25 why is this current proposal necessary in its current and over complicated format? We consider that the Junction 25 traffic scheme needs completely remodelling to simplify traffic flow, to offer value for money and to promote the realistic movement of people both vehicular, on foot and by bicycle.

We are also very concerned that the line of Highways England's proposed route will bring very real flooding issues to Lower Henlade, which will have a knock on effect to the Henlade stream. It would appear from the Proposed Drainage Strategy for Planning Report that culverting Henlade stream maybe insufficient in extremely wet conditions.

Finally, Somerset County Council's recent track record on delivering road schemes on time, to budget and to the satisfaction of those affected by the work is at best poor. Stoke St. Mary Parish Council has grave concerns that yet again, the tax payers of Somerset will be not receiving value for money and wish we to obtain from Somerset Highways a guarantee that their choice of contractor on this occasion not guided by cost only.

Stoke St. Mary Parish Council

20 July 2017