

A47/A11 Thickthorn Junction

Preliminary environmental information report

Non- technical summary

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1. Non-technical summary

1.1. Introduction

- 1.1.1. Highways England is improving the A47/A11 Thickthorn Junction, by providing two free flow link roads in each direction between the A47 and A11, and a new link road connecting Cantley Lane South with the B1172, as the existing access from Cantley Lane South will be severed. There will also be some improvements to the Thickthorn roundabout.
- 1.1.2. The Proposed Scheme will help unlock economic growth in the East of England by improving journey reliability, increasing safety and improving connectivity.
- 1.1.3. This Proposed Scheme is a “Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project” under the Planning Act 2008, which means that an application will need to be made for permission to build and operate the Proposed Scheme. The permission is called a Development Consent Order (DCO) and requires Highways England to make an application to the Secretary of State for development consent to build and operate the Proposed Scheme.
- 1.1.4. Development consent is granted by the Secretary of State through a Development Consent Order (DCO) which sets out the powers to construct and operate the Proposed Scheme.
- 1.1.5. Before an application for a DCO is submitted, the local community and other stakeholders must be formally consulted on the proposals, including a description of the Proposed Scheme, the likely significant environmental effects based on the preliminary environmental information available at the time, measures to avoid or reduce such effects and the alternatives considered. This is to support consultees in developing an informed view of the likely significant environmental effects of the Proposed Scheme.
- 1.1.6. Environmental information continues to be collected; identifying the potential impacts of the Proposed Scheme and developing measures to avoid or reduce adverse impacts – a process known as an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).
- 1.1.7. While the EIA is ongoing, Highways England have prepared a Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR) to describe the environmental setting and currently anticipated impacts of the Proposed Scheme on the environment. The PEIR has been developed for the purposes of the above consultation and presents currently available information from the ongoing EIA. This document provides a summary of the PEIR in non-technical language.

- 1.1.8. The information contained within the PEIR is preliminary and the findings will be developed further in the Environmental Statement (ES) to reflect the evolution of the design of the Proposed Scheme, informed by the feedback from the consultation and the ongoing EIA process. The ES, presenting the full results of the EIA, will be submitted with the application for the DCO.
- 1.1.9. This report is a non-technical summary of the Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR) for the Proposed Scheme. It provides a summary of the project, why it is necessary, the potential effect on the environment and the proposals to minimise these effects.

1.2. The applicant

- 1.2.1. Highways England is the Applicant, and the Strategic Highways Company as defined in the Infrastructure Act 2015 and is charged with modernising and maintaining England's strategic road network, as well as running the network and keeping traffic moving.

1.3. The proposed scheme

- 1.3.1. The project is referred to as the 'Proposed Scheme'.
- 1.3.2. The A47 trunk road provides for a variety of local, medium and long-distance trips between the A1 and the east coast. The A47 Road connects the cities of Norwich and Peterborough, the towns of Wisbech, King's Lynn, Dereham, Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft and a succession of villages in what is largely a rural area.
- 1.3.3. The A47/A11 Thickthorn Junction is located on the south-western edge of Norwich and provides access to the A47 via the A11 and B1172 Norwich Road for Eaton, Cringleford, Hethersett and Wymondham. It is an integral junction for communities and commuters travelling in and out of Norwich, connecting Norwich with Great Yarmouth to the east, and Peterborough via King's Lynn and Wisbech to the west.
- 1.3.4. The A47/A11 Thickthorn Junction experiences high levels of congestion during peak hours, acting as a bottleneck and leading to longer and more unreliable journey times. If nothing is done to improve capacity and connectivity, these delays are forecast to get worse in future years with proposed growth in residential development.
- 1.3.5. In developing the Proposed Scheme, Highways England aim to address these issues by improving the traffic flow, reducing journey times on the route, increasing the route safety and reliability and improve the environment.

1.3.6. The Proposed Scheme consists of the following key elements:

- Two new single lane link roads will be constructed from the A11 to A47 and A47 to A11 directing traffic away from Thickthorn Junction. These link roads will allow traffic to move between the A11 and A47 without the need to stop. Four new underpasses will be constructed on the link roads between the A47 and A11.
- The existing access to the A47 Thickthorn Junction from Cantley Lane South will be severed and a new link road constructed to join the B1172, allowing continued access to Thickthorn Junction. The Cantley Lane South link road will see the construction of two new overbridges across the A11.
- The Cringleford railway bridge will be widened on the west side only to accommodate the A11-A47 link road.
- Cantley Stream will be realigned along approximately 550m due to construction of the Cantley Lane South link road and a new culvert will be constructed to allow Cantley Stream to pass beneath Cantley Lane South.
- A new bridge across the A47 will be constructed that will be suitable for walkers, cyclists and horse riders and then the existing Cantley Lane footbridge will be demolished.
- The southern half of Thickthorn roundabout will be altered to provide four lanes, and existing road lighting will be replaced.
- New road drainage will be constructed and where possible, existing drainage systems will be retained or modified.

1.3.7. Subject to successfully passing through the DCO process, the key timescales for the Proposed Scheme are as follows;

- Start of construction work – 2021
- Open for traffic – 2023

1.4. Alternatives

1.4.1. In seeking to resolve the transport problem at Thickthorn Junction, 26 potential options were developed and assessed to identify their performance against safety, environmental, engineering, transportation and economic criteria so that they could be compared and contrasted. These options can be reviewed in the Scheme Assessment Report (SAR) at the following link;

<https://highwaysengland.citizenspace.com/he/a47-a11-thickthorn-junction-improvement/results/schemeassessmentreport2018.pdf>

1.4.2. Following extensive review, the 26 options were reduced to three:

- option 13: A11 to A11 offline link road east of Thickthorn Junction
- option 21: A11 east to A47 south through-about
- option 22: A11 east to A47 south offline bi-directional link roads

1.4.3. Although all three options solved the transport problem, on further review, it was decided that Option 22 would be taken forward for more detailed design and assessment and non-statutory public consultation. The preliminary environmental assessment of this design is presented in the PEIR.

1.5. Environmental impact assessment

1.5.1. Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is a process that identifies the likely environmental effects (both adverse and beneficial) of a proposed development. Environmental effects are assessed through understanding of the potential impacts and the sensitivity of the receptors for a given scheme. It ensures that the importance of effects are properly considered and that the opportunity for reducing any adverse effects are taken into account as part of the design development process.

1.5.2. EIA also ensures effects considered during the design, competent authorities, statutory authorities and other interested parties. The EIA is undertaken in accordance with up to date legislation and guidance and includes a spatial and temporal scope for its assessment.

1.5.3. Further work continues to be undertaken as part of the EIA process to confirm the preliminary findings in the PEIR. The final assessment of environmental effects will be presented in the ES that will be submitted with the DCO application.

1.6. Environmental topics

1.6.1. Each environmental topic chapter of the PEIR describes the local environment and identifies any sensitive receptors such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest, people living in the vicinity of the Proposed Scheme and local environment management areas such as Air Quality Management Areas or Noise Important Areas.

1.6.2. Further work will be undertaken in all chapters to develop design interventions to limit or reduce impacts and promote opportunities for the environment wherever possible. Design development and potential mitigation will be reported in the ES as well as further detailing of baseline conditions and likely changes during both construction and operation for all identified receptors.

1.7. Air quality

- 1.7.1. Highways England have collected air quality information from South Norfolk District Council, Norwich City Council, Defra and Highways England.
- 1.7.2. There are no Air Quality Management Areas within the South Norfolk District Council administrative area.
- 1.7.3. A review of existing monitoring data, and the likely changes in traffic flows as a result of the Proposed Scheme suggests that there is the potential for both positive and negative air quality impacts. However, the annual mean air quality objective for NO₂ will not be exceeded.
- 1.7.4. A range of potentially affected sensitive receptors have been identified within the A47/A11 Thickthorn Junction study area. Following the finalisation of the traffic data and confirmation of the affected road network, these receptors are to be included in the ES as required.
- 1.7.5. There are currently no declared Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) within the South Norfolk District Council administrative area. The closest AQMA is located over 4km to the northeast within Norwich city centre declared by Norwich City Council for exceedances of the annual mean nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) objective.
- 1.7.6. No additional mitigation measures during the construction phase other than those in accordance with the Best Practicable Means, as described in Section 79 (9) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 are likely to be required.
- 1.7.7. Operational air quality specific mitigation measures will be reported in the ES.

1.8. Cultural heritage

- 1.8.1. Cultural Heritage includes archaeology, historic buildings / structures and historic landscapes including parks and gardens.
- 1.8.2. The historic landscape in the area is considered to be a combination of ancient, post medieval and modern in origin ranging from prehistoric funerary monuments, Roman field systems, medieval settlement, post-medieval historic parkland and modern industrial activities.
- 1.8.3. There are a number of designated assets, including a scheduled monument, that are likely to be affected by the Proposed Scheme and may experience permanent visual and / or noise intrusion which will adversely impact their settings.

- 1.8.4. Further work is being undertaken to reduce impacts and promote opportunities for the environment within the vicinity of the junction where possible. Highways England have undertaken a geophysical field investigation, the results of which will be included within the Environmental Statement.

Potential construction impacts

- temporary and permanent land-take
- demolition and site clearance
- excavation, ground disturbance and compaction
- use of plant and machinery
- building up site levels with made-ground
- construction of new or modification of existing infrastructure
- visual intrusion and disruption to access during construction
- alteration of existing services or installation of new services
- landscaping and planting

Potential operation impacts

- increased visual intrusion both to and from sites / buildings of national or regional importance
- alteration to the historic setting / character of a designated site or undesignated site of national or regional significance
- increase or decrease in noise, vibration or dust such that the amenity or physical fabric of a nationally or regionally important site is either adversely impacted or improved
- opportunities to enhance the character and setting of a designated site or undesignated site of national or regional significance
- opportunities for heritage related education and tourism

1.9. Landscape

- 1.9.1. The broadly flat, rural landscape is an ancient countryside with a long settled agricultural character. There are river valleys to the west of Norwich which create a more intricate landscape relative to the typically flat, glacial till plateau; the patchwork of fields with sinuous lanes and mixed hedges with hedgerow oaks; and the fragmented mixed deciduous and pasture woodlands.
- 1.9.2. The study area lies within the South Norfolk Landscape Character Assessment 'Yare Tributary Farmland with Parkland' and 'Yare Valley Urban Fringe' Landscape Character Areas.

- 1.9.3. The removal of some existing vegetation, earthworks and presence of construction plant, materials, machinery, compounds and lighting would potentially result in local landscape and visual impacts during construction.
- 1.9.4. As part of the mitigation, a detailed planting design will be produced to integrate the design into the surrounding landscape. This includes numerous considerations for amenity like visual screening and biodiversity.
- 1.9.5. The landscape and visual impact assessment considers the Proposed Scheme during the first year of operation (year one) and at the 15th year of operation. This allows for proposed planting (e.g. trees) to grow and screen particular elements of the Proposed Scheme as part of the mitigation.
- 1.9.6. Visual impacts on occupiers of residential properties and recreational users of public rights of way are likely during both the construction and operational phases. Visual impacts during construction would be associated with the removal of existing vegetation, earthworks and construction activity. Visual impacts during operation would be associated with views of the road, infrastructure and vehicles.
- 1.9.7. There would potentially be impacts on landscape character due to the relative prominence of Proposed Scheme infrastructure (including overbridges) prior to the establishment of proposed planting. Impacts on local landscape character are likely during both the construction and operational phases as a result of the enlarged junctions and overbridges within a relatively flat and open landscape.

1.10. Biodiversity

- 1.10.1. There are valuable habitats and species of nature conservation importance which could be impacted by the Proposed Scheme. The results of the ecological surveys will help to identify mitigation measures, with a view to safeguard the conservation status of populations through both the construction and operational phases. Impacts include:
 - loss or damage to natural habitats, including hedgerows and arable field margins
 - temporary impact of natural habitats through construction of site compounds and access tracks
 - break up and isolation of habitat links and travel routes used by wildlife
 - risk of killing, injury and disturbance of protected and notable species during construction works from plant and machinery. Disturbance could affect the breeding success of these protected and notable species
 - loss of bat foraging habitat with loss of existing trees

- potential loss of habitat connectivity due to the Proposed Scheme land take, and, in addition, some species finding it more dangerous to cross the new roads (birds, hedgehogs).

1.10.2. The Proposed Scheme would result in small, localised losses of habitats and potentially some severance of connecting habitats (hedgerows, tree lines) on the verges where the greater losses would be experienced. This may impact more mobile species such as bats and birds. However, as no areas are expected to have an overall reduction of the habitat at any point on the Proposed Scheme, long-term impacts on most species are not expected.

1.11. Geology and soils

- 1.11.1. The land to surrounding the Proposed Scheme is predominantly agricultural and much of this is used for arable production. The quality of the agricultural land will be determined and reported in the ES.
- 1.11.2. There are no designated sites, for example Sites of Special Scientific Interest or Geological Conservation Review Sites, within the study area that are designated for their geological or geomorphological importance.
- 1.11.3. An historical landfill site (Cantley Lane landfill) is recorded on old Ordnance Survey (OS) plans and by the Environment Agency north of Cantley Stream close to where it is culverted below the A11. Cantley Lane landfill was operated between 1961 and 1969 receiving inert, industrial, commercial and household wastes.
- 1.11.4. The potential impacts during construction, due to the nature of the works, include soil compaction adjacent to the new road corridor and contamination of site soils. Land take required, as part of the Proposed Scheme would result in permanent impacts on agricultural land. The extent and significance of the impacts will be reported in the ES.
- 1.11.5. The Construction Environmental Management Plan would include a Soil Management Plan, incorporating guidance provided by the Code of Practice for the Sustainable Use of Soils on Construction Sites, to ensure the use of best practice measures for soil handling.

1.12. Materials

- 1.12.1. The assessment for materials considers potential impacts from the Proposed Scheme from the use of material resources and generation of waste.

- 1.12.2. There are no current estimates on material resource use and waste generation during the site remediation / preparation, demolition and construction phases. These shall be developed as the design is progressed.
- 1.12.3. For a road infrastructure project of this size there is the potential for adverse impacts during construction due to the anticipated use of materials and generation of waste. Operational impacts are considered to be unlikely.

1.13. Noise and vibration

- 1.13.1. Sensitive receptors, such as residential homes, in proximity to the Proposed Scheme have been identified. Receptors that are close to the A47 are already exposed to relatively high noise levels due to road traffic.
- 1.13.2. Noise impacts due to the construction of the Proposed Scheme are likely to occur at nearby sensitive receptors; particularly at frontline properties along the A47 and would be controlled by a Construction Environmental Management Plan.
- 1.13.3. Any changes in road traffic noise changes as part of the Proposed Scheme are calculated, assessed and modelled, which will be detailed for the ES. Any design interventions or proposed mitigation, such as noise barriers, will be reported as well.

1.14. People & communities – travellers

- 1.14.1. Driver stress on the A47 is considered to be high, particularly at junctions and during peak periods where high traffic volumes leads to queues and delays. Although driver stress could temporarily increase stress for motorised travellers and cause disruption for local communities, this would be managed with a traffic management plan.
- 1.14.2. Views from the road are considered as part of the assessment. During construction, road users would be negatively impacted as they would have views of construction activities including earthworks and construction vehicles but would otherwise retain intermittent views of the wider area. During operation, views from the road would initially include localised sections of open views but would revert to intermittent views comparable to the existing situation following the establishment of Proposed Scheme roadside vegetation.
- 1.14.3. During operation of the Proposed Scheme, driver stress would be reduced as a result of traffic movements away from the A47/A11 Thickthorn Junction leading to a reduction in peak hour congestion.

1.14.4. The Proposed Scheme would have a direct impact on travellers since it would provide a new overbridge spanning the A47 and connecting Cantley Lane to Cantley Lane South, suitable for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians. The new overbridge, which would carry Cringleford footpath FP4A, would maintain crossing movements. Although it will result in a minor increase in journey times and lengths, the new overbridge will have a potential beneficial impact on walkers, cyclists and horse riders.

1.15. People & communities – social

1.15.1. This topic presents assessment of the social elements of people, communities, the local economy and outlines proposed design measures to help mitigate potential impacts and relevant consultation.

1.15.2. Residential properties, local businesses, community facilities and development are identified in the study area. Broadland is an area of relative affluence and high employment.

1.15.3. No demolition of private property is planned as part of the Proposed Scheme. Permanent land-take would be required across the Proposed Scheme, the majority of which is agricultural land.

1.15.4. Impacts are likely during the construction phase as result of land-take and community severance, human health impacts associated with severance of walker, cyclist and horse rider routes and temporary employment generation. During the operational phase, there are likely to be impacts on community severance, development land and the economy.

1.16. Road drainage and water environment

1.16.1. The main water features within the vicinity of the Proposed Scheme are two protected surface water bodies (River Yare and Intwood Stream). The Proposed Scheme does not cross these water bodies. The Cantley Stream runs through the southern part of the site and requires to be realigned as part of the Proposed Scheme works. There is one source protection zone and nine licenced abstractions within the study area of the Proposed Scheme.

1.16.2. There are no designated sites within the study area.

1.16.3. Parts of the area in the vicinity of the Proposed Scheme are prone to surface water flooding. The scheme is predominantly located within flood zone 1, which is associated with a low risk of flooding from river and coastal sources. There are localised areas around Cantley Stream and to the east of the A47 which are located in flood zones 2 and 3, which are at higher risks of flooding. A Flood Risk Assessment is currently being prepared to demonstrate how flood risk to the

Proposed Scheme would be managed now, and when taking climate change into account.

1.16.4. Possible impacts from the Proposed Scheme on the water environment would be due to:

- contamination of groundwater and surface water during construction and operation
- changes to runoff, drainage and flood risk during construction and operation
- reduction in groundwater resource to abstractions and groundwater dependent surface water features
- Pollution of groundwater and surface water during operation due to routine road runoff or accidental spillages

1.16.5. Mitigation in the form of a suitably designed drainage system incorporating drainage ponds, where appropriate alongside best practice construction methods is recommended to reduce such impacts to levels not considered to be significant. Specific mitigation measures for protected species would be finalised within the road drainage and water environment chapter of the ES.

1.17. Climate

1.17.1. The UK government has legally binding targets for reducing the carbon emissions by 80% by 2050, relative to a 1990 baseline. As part of the EIA, there is a requirement to assess the impacts of projects on climate and their vulnerability to climate change.

1.17.2. The carbon baseline has been taken as the current situation in which no proposed infrastructure is built and considers existing travel and traffic patterns.

1.17.3. The Proposed Scheme is anticipated to generate an increase in carbon emissions during both construction and operation. Changes in climate have the potential to impact Proposed Scheme assets and environmental receptors during operation and pose a potential risk.

1.18. Combined and cumulative effects

1.18.1. The term 'cumulative' in respect of impacts can be defined as:

- The environmental topic-specific impacts resulting from a single project upon a single receptor / resource
- The impact from different projects (with the project being assessed).

1.18.2. This chapter of the ES will bring together the principal findings of each topic chapters in order to identify and assess the combined and cumulative impacts of

the Proposed Scheme in association with other existing or future developments within the study area.

1.19. Preliminary assessment of other topics

1.19.1. The 2017 EIA Regulations require the assessment of additional technical topics, which are being addressed in the EIA and will be reported in full in the ES. The assessment of impacts on human health is being addressed in the noise, air quality and people and communities' chapters. No significant human health issues are anticipated.

1.20. How to have your say

1.20.1. This is your opportunity to give your views on our proposals. There are various ways that you can respond to the consultation.

1.20.2. Please respond using one of the following methods by 11:59pm on Thursday 11 July 2019.

- **Online:** <https://highwaysengland.co.uk/projects/a47-thickthorn-junction>
- **By post:** to FREEPOST A47 Thickthorn Junction
- **In person:** By visiting one of the public consultation exhibitions listed on the weblink above

1.20.3. Your feedback from the consultation will inform our continuing development of the Proposed Scheme. Once we have taken your feedback into consideration, we plan to submit our application for a Development Consent Order in spring 2019. We will also prepare a report on the consultation, recording the feedback and our response, which will be published with our application.

1.21. Next steps

1.21.1. This non-technical summary has been prepared to help those potentially affected or interested in the Proposed Scheme to understand the environmental setting and anticipated impacts of the Proposed Scheme on the environment. This will also allow individuals to take these considerations into account when responding to the consultation.

1.21.2. The consultation will close on 11 July 2019 when we will consider all feedback given during the consultation. We will take time to analyse and consider your comments when making further refinements to the proposed design and when developing our mitigation measures. We will set out a summary of responses and describe how our proposals have been influenced by them in our consultation report. The consultation report will form part of our application and will also be available to the public following our submission. We expect to submit

an application to the Planning Inspectorate late 2019 / early 2020. If it is granted, we anticipate that the Proposed Scheme will take approximately two years to build.

- 1.21.3. In addition to this consultation process, we will continue to engage with anyone interested in, or impacted by, the Proposed Scheme.
- 1.21.4. To help us shape the final design in preparation of our submission to the Planning Inspectorate, it is important you are involved now and submit your response by 11:59pm on Thursday 11 July 2019.
- 1.21.5. Once we submit our application, the Planning Inspectorate (acting on behalf of the Secretary of State) may examine the application in public hearings and then make a recommendation to the Secretary of State for Transport, who will decide on whether or not the Proposed Scheme will go ahead.

1.22. How to find out more

- 1.22.1. To find out more about our scheme proposals you can:
- 1.22.2. Join us at one of our public information events: members of our team will be on hand to answer your questions. To find out where and when the events are being held, visit our website or contact us by phone or email.

Visit our website at:

<https://highwaysengland.co.uk/projects/a47-thickthorn-junction/>

- 1.22.3. Here you will find background information on the Proposed Scheme plus information on the current consultation, including:
 - details on when and where our public information events are being held
 - details of information and deposit point locations at local libraries where information about the Proposed Scheme can be viewed
 - our Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC)
 - the consultation brochure and the response form
 - plans of the Proposed Scheme, including the 'red line' boundary that will form part of our DCO application
 - a Preliminary Environmental Information Report, as well as this accompanying non-technical summary
- 1.22.4. Phone us: Get in touch by calling 0300 123 5000
- 1.22.5. Email us: A47A11ThickthornJunctionRIS@highwaysengland.co.uk