

M54 to M6 Link Road
Proposed changes consultation
From 24 August to 21 September 2020



The scheme

The M54 to M6 Link Road will provide an improved link between the M54 and the M6.

Currently, there is no direct motorway link from the M54 to the M6 north. Road users wanting to access the M6 north or M6 Toll must use local roads such as the A460, A449 and A5. This means high volumes of both long-distance and local traffic use the local roads to travel this route.

The M54 to M6 Link Road will reduce the current levels of congestion and its impacts on local residents and motorists. The scheme will support the local and regional economy by improving traffic flow and enhancing east-west and north-south routes.

Development Consent Order

Large road projects, such as the M54 to M6 Link Road, are classed as nationally significant infrastructure projects, which means that we need to apply for a Development Consent Order (DCO) to gain consent to build the scheme.

The Examining Authority manages the examination of applications and decides which main issues it will examine. The application is in the pre-examination period and the Examination will start later this year.

We submitted our application for development consent to the Planning Inspectorate earlier this year. The Planning Inspectorate has accepted our application and appointed an independent Examining Authority to carry out the examination.

Since submission of our application, we have had further discussions with stakeholders and landowners about how we can improve the scheme and have identified certain changes to how we could build the scheme.



About this consultation

We're proposing to make seven changes, which aim to reduce the impacts of the scheme on the environment and the local community.

We're only consulting on the changes we're proposing, not on the need for any further changes or the scheme as a whole.

The consultation runs from **24 August 2020 to 23:59 on 21 September 2020**.

Please respond by 23:59 on 21 September 2020 using one of the following methods:

- complete the response form online:
www.highwaysengland.co.uk/M54-M6linkroad
- Email the response form to:
M54toM6linkroad@highwaysengland.co.uk
- Post a printed copy of the response form to: **Freepost M54 TO M6 LINK ROAD**

What happens after the consultation

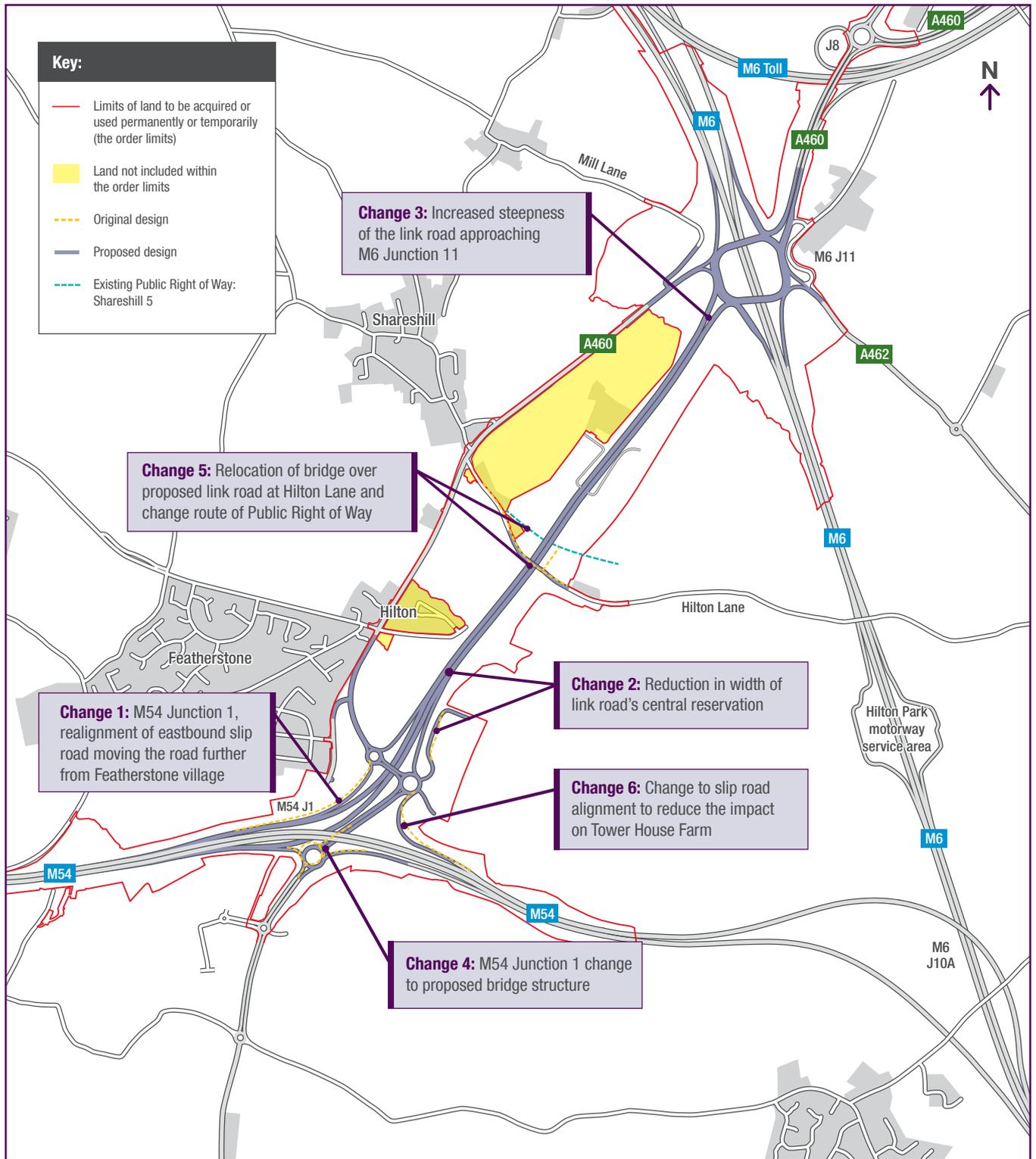


After, the consultation, we'll take all feedback into consideration and we'll then decide which changes we want to make to the scheme and send a formal request to make the changes to the Examining Authority. If we decide to submit any changes, we'll publish an updated Consultation Report along with an update to the Environmental Statement. This will show the environmental effects of the proposed changes to the scheme and what we will do to reduce them. We've carried out an initial assessment of the impact of the changes on the Environmental Statement, the results of this are on pages 11 and 12.

The Examining Authority will then decide whether to accept or reject the requested changes.

If the Examining Authority reject these changes, they will continue with the Examination of the original proposed scheme we submitted for DCO earlier this year.

The proposed changes



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Change	Description
1	Realignment of the eastbound slip road from the M54 at Junction 1 towards Featherstone, moving it further from Featherstone village.
2	Reducing the width of the link road's central reservation and placing the drainage in the verge, rather than next to it.
3	Increase to the steepness of the section of the link road approaching M6 Junction 11.
4	Change to the bridge design and construction method at M54 Junction 1.
5	Relocation of the new bridge over the proposed link road at Hilton Lane and change to route of nearby Public Right of Way.
6	Change in alignment of the slip road at the revised M54 Junction 1 leading on to M54 eastbound.
7	Reduction in land required for environmental mitigation.

Change 1: Realignment of the eastbound slip road from the M54 at Junction 1 towards Featherstone, moving it further from Featherstone village.

As part of the scheme, we plan to replace the M54 Junction 1 to provide free-flow links between the M54 and the new link road. Access to existing local roads will be via a new dumb-bell junction, north east of the current location of M54 Junction 1.

We're proposing a minor realignment of the eastbound exit slip road to Featherstone, reducing the length of the slip road to the dumb-bell junction. This will bring the road closer to the junction and reduce the overall size of the junction.

Benefits and impacts

- The eastbound exit slip road at the M54 Junction 1 will be approximately 10 metres further from the village of Featherstone.
- Less existing embankment and woodland planting will be removed.
- Local ecological, landscape and visual benefits associated with removing less of the existing woodland.
- Reduction in the maximum height of the proposed retaining wall from approximately 5 metres to approximately 2.5 metres.

Change 2: Reducing the width of the link road's central reservation and placing the drainage in the verge, rather than next to it.

We've received feedback throughout the development of the scheme requesting that we minimise the habitat loss as a result of the scheme, particularly at the Lower Pool Site of Biological Importance (SBI). We're always looking at ways to achieve this as we work on the final design for construction.

The change will reduce the overall width of the link road by 4.2 metres and reduce the width of the slip roads at the junction to Featherstone.

Benefits and impacts

- Reduced habitat loss within the Lower Pool SBI by around 1 hectare.
- Reduced concrete area where water can run off, improving drainage.
- Small increase in the distance between the edge of the road and those properties closest to it.
- Reduced impact on the landowner through keeping more of the existing private access track.

Change 3: Increase to the steepness of the section of the link road approaching M6 Junction 11.

To the north of the scheme, the new link road will join an upgraded M6 Junction 11.

As we've continued to develop the design and construction plans, we've identified a change that would mean a small reduction in impact of the scheme on the ancient woodland to the south-east of M6 Junction 11.

The proposed change would reduce the height of the approach to M6 Junction 11 by approximately 0.7 metres where the road passes through an area of woodland near Latherford Brook.

Benefits and impacts

- Potential reduction in visual and landscape impacts through reducing the height of the embankment.
- Small reduction in the loss of Ancient Woodland.



Change 4: Change to bridge design and construction method at M54 Junction 1.

To provide free-flow links between the M54 and new link road, we'll need to build a new bridge to carry the roads through the redesigned M54 Junction 1.

Our current DCO proposal shows that it will take us a period of about two years to build the bridge in sections at its final location. This would need complex and long-term traffic management on the M54, over several phases, including contraflows, narrow lanes and lane closures as well as several overnight closures with night time working.

We're proposing an innovative construction solution that avoids the need for two years of traffic management.

We're planning to build the bridge as two simpler structures. We'll build them in a nearby site compound to the north-east of the junction and move them into position when ready.

To do this safely, we're proposing to close the M54 over Junction 1 and some of the slip roads 24/7 for up to three weeks.

We understand that road closures can be a source of frustration. We're weighing up the impact of closing the road against the benefit of reducing the total amount of time that the roadworks are in place.

By building the bridge as two simpler structures, we can move the road alignment by 20 metres, which will reduce the size of Junction 1.

Whilst the new junction will move slightly and look different because it will create two bridges rather than one, it would work in the same way as the design we submitted as part of the DCO application.

We'll work with key stakeholders, such as local authorities, freight industries and developers of other major schemes to develop a traffic

management plan, agree diversion routes and minimise the impact on local communities. We'll also discuss the timing of the closure to ensure that we close it when traffic flows are lighter.

We welcome your views on how we can reduce disruption during the three-week closure.

Benefits and impacts

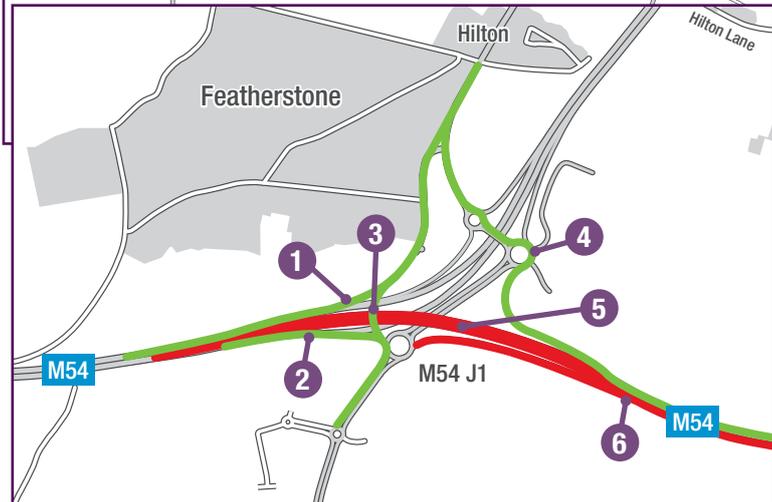
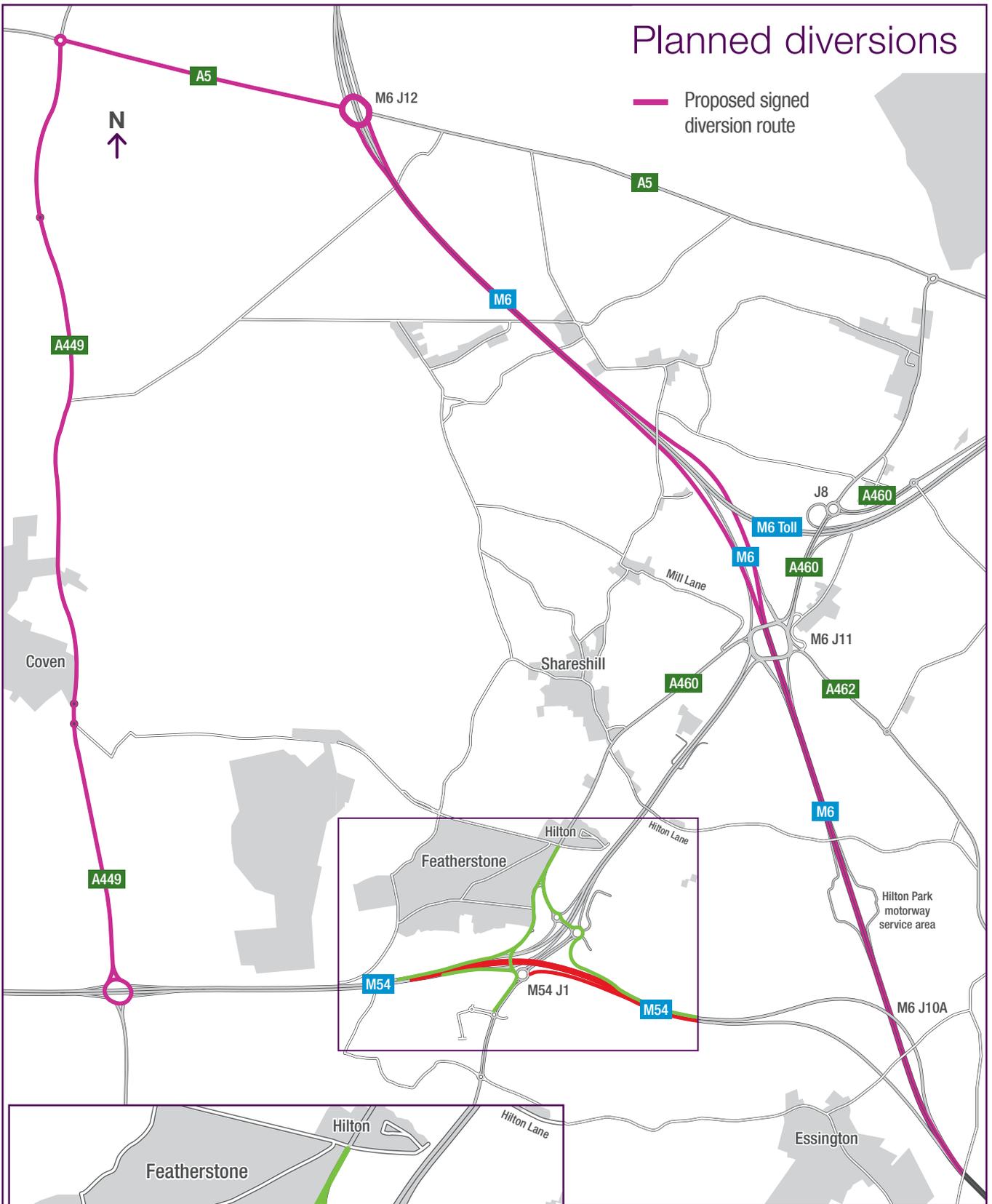
- Reduction in the construction programme of approximately 6 months, with the scheme opening earlier to traffic.
- Reduced period of disruption during construction for local people, including reductions in the period local people are affected by construction noise.
- Likely increase in traffic and associated noise and air pollution during the closure period, due to traffic re-routing onto surrounding local roads. This will be short-term for up to three weeks.
- Significant reduction in the period that traffic management is in place on the M54.
- Shorter construction period addresses concerns raised by stakeholders over the amount and impact of other major works in the local area, such as the construction of the West Midlands Interchange development.

Our initial environmental assessments suggest there may be changes to the effects reported in the Environmental Statement because of this change. We're carrying out more assessments to understand the impacts so we can update the Environmental Statement. We're also carrying out traffic modelling to assess the likely impact of the M54 closure on the surrounding roads. This will help us understand the impact the closure will have on noise and air quality.

Please refer to the next page for a plan showing the closure points on the junction and the potential diversion routes.

Planned diversions

— Proposed signed diversion route



- 1 Vehicles travelling eastbound on the M54 will only be able to use the M54 eastbound exit sliproad to continue north on the A460.
- 2 The M54 J1 westbound onslip will remain open.
- 3 To maintain north-south traffic movements on the A460, the existing western underpass will remain open with temporary traffic management allowing two-way traffic flow. Vehicles travelling southbound will not be able to turn right to access the M54 J1 westbound onslip.
- 4 New junction will enable vehicles to use the M54 eastbound.
- 5 M54 eastbound through J1 will be closed during the work to enable partial demolition of structure and new structures to be moved into place.
- 6 M54 westbound from M6 J10A will be closed during the work.

Change 5: Relocation of the new bridge over the proposed link road at Hilton Lane and change to route of nearby Public Right of Way.

Near Hilton Lane, the new link road will be below existing ground level. Hilton Lane will cross the link road via a new bridge.

Following further work to review how we build the scheme, we're proposing to build the Hilton Lane bridge to the north of its current proposed location. This proposed change will enable us to keep more of the existing route of the Public Right of Way (PRoW) [Shareshill 5] across nearby land rather than route it alongside the link road as is currently proposed in the application.

The current application proposes moving Hilton Lane approximately 2 metres to the south, so a 2-metre-wide footway can be provided as an alternative route to the PRoW, which is cut-off by the new link.

The proposed change would keep the PRoW so it follows more of the existing route, before travelling south towards Hilton Lane, across the new bridge, then diverting north to tie into its existing alignment to the west of the new link, where it would continue westwards and link into Hilton Lane.

Benefits and impacts

- Avoids the removal of mature vegetation to the south of Hilton Lane for a length of approximately 200 metres.
- Avoids the need for the temporary closure of Hilton Lane while the road is relocated to build the footway and the bridge. Instead, there would only be very short closures when the road is connected to the bridge.
- Reduced concrete area where water can run off, improving drainage.
- Avoids the need for a temporary diversion of the PRoW and keeps more of the existing route away from the road.

Change 6: Change in alignment of the slip road at the revised M54 Junction 1 leading on to M54 eastbound.

As a consequence of proposed change 2 and following engagement with a local landowner, we're proposing to move the alignment of the slip road between the M54 Junction 1 eastern dumb-bell roundabout and the M54 eastbound to the west of the position shown in the DCO application. This change minimises the impact on occupiers and users of Tower House Farm.

Benefits and impacts

- Reduced impact on vehicle movements into and out of Tower House Farm.
- Movement of the slip road further away from properties at Tower House Farm.

Change 7: Reduction in land required for environmental mitigation.

We've continued to carry out environmental surveys in 2020. In response to the results, we've identified an opportunity to reduce the land we need for environmental mitigation in the locations of Hilton and to the south of the M6 Junction 11.

This means that we could amend the mitigation design in several locations to maximise the benefits to habitats and species following the review of 2020 survey results. We could also reduce the size of the site compound to allow us to keep and look after habitat and species.

This proposed change is also in response to comments from landowners and environmental groups around land we need for environmental mitigation.

Benefits and impacts

- Potentially reducing land acquisition from landowners.
- Reduction in overall habitat creation, due to reduced impact of the scheme.
- Reduced effects on high quality agricultural land.

Please refer to the Environmental Masterplan on the scheme webpage, for a plan of this change.



Environmental effects

We've assessed the proposed changes against the Environmental Statement (ES) to see how significantly they would affect the local community and the environment.

Where a change will result in a new significant effect, we'll carry out a full reassessment and submit this to the Planning Inspectorate.

Likely change to significant effects in ES key:

Major worsening	Minor worsening	No change	Minor improvement	Major improvement	Assessment ongoing
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Potential for changes to affect the ES:

ES chapter	Our proposed change							Description of assessment
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
5. Air quality								Minor improvements or worsenings may arise from these changes but they are not sufficient to change the overall conclusions of the assessment of air quality for the scheme.
6. Cultural heritage								No change to original assessment.
7. Landscape and visual								Landscape and visual improvements are likely as a result of changes 1, 2, 3, 5 and 7. This is due to reductions in habitat loss and the height of structures and embankments. However, these changes are unlikely to be sufficient enough to change the conclusions in the ES.
8. Biodiversity								Biodiversity improvements associated with changes 1, 2, 3 and 5 are unlikely to be sufficient to change the conclusions of the ES but will result in minor reductions in loss of habitats. This is particularly beneficial for change 3, which will reduce the loss of ancient woodland.
9. Geology and soils								No change to original assessment for changes 1-6. Change 7 may result in less high quality agricultural land needed.
10. Material assets and waste								Changes 1 to 5 will reduce quantities of required materials and waste generated but not to the extent that it would change the conclusions of the ES.

Likely change to significant effects in ES key:

Major worsening	Minor worsening	No change	Minor improvement	Major improvement	Assessment ongoing

ES chapter	Our proposed change							Description of assessment
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
11. Noise and vibration								Given the sensitivity of noise assessments to small changes in alignment, the operational traffic noise assessment has been updated to incorporate Changes 1-6. No new significant adverse operational traffic noise effects have been identified. The construction noise and vibration assessment has also been updated to incorporate Changes 1-6. Some additional short-term significant construction noise effects have been identified primarily due to Change 4. Change 4 will also result in significant traffic noise effects for the period of the closure of M54 Junction 1 due to the re-routing of traffic along alternative routes, but this will be a short-term effect for no more than three weeks. Change 7 will have no impact on noise and vibration.
12. Population and human health								Changes 1, 2 and 3 would have no effect on this topic. Change 4 would shorten the construction programme by approximately 6 months reducing the disruption experienced. Change 5 affects the route of the Public Right of Way however this is unlikely to be sufficient to change the conclusions of the ES. Change 6 will reduce the impact of the scheme on the resident, access and businesses at Tower House Farm. Change 7 could reduce the area of agricultural land needed.
13. Road drainage and water environment								Changes 2 and 5 would reduce the paved area created by the scheme, reducing drainage requirements. Changes are unlikely to be sufficient to change the conclusions of the ES.
14. Climate								Changes 1 to 5 will result in a slight reduction in scheme construction emissions but not to the extent that it would change the conclusions of the ES.
15. Cumulative Effects								We're still carrying out further assessments and will need to consider the cumulative effects once we complete these.

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Registered office Bridge House, 1 Walnut Tree Close, Guildford GU1 4LZ

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