

A11 Fiveways to Thetford Improvement

Environmental Statement: Non Technical Summary

INTRODUCTION

This leaflet is the Non-Technical Summary of the Environmental Statement for the Scheme known as the A11 Fiveways to Thetford Improvement.

An Environmental Statement is a detailed report of the findings of an Environmental Impact Assessment for a proposed development; it describes the existing conditions and predicts the effects that the Scheme would have on both the man-made and natural environment.

The Environmental Statement also includes the measures proposed to reduce or remove the identified adverse effects of the Scheme on the environment. The complete document can be viewed free of charge at several locations listed at the end of this brochure.

The A11 Trunk Road runs from the M11 to Norwich; it is a major route presently carrying 25,000 vehicles per day. Barton Mills to Thetford is the last remaining stretch of single carriageway. The limited capacity, many accesses onto the trunk road and lack of overtaking opportunities result in regular congestion and accidents.

Upgrading the A11 to a dual carriageway was first considered in 1989 and became a Government priority in 1999, although a bypass to Elveden village was first considered back in the 1950's. There is wide support for the improvement particularly from Suffolk and Norfolk County Councils.

THE SCHEME

The main objectives of the Scheme are to complete the dualling between the M11 and Norwich and reduce congestion. The proposed improvement comprises a 15km (9 miles) dual carriageway between the Fiveways roundabout at Barton Mills and the Thetford bypass southern roundabout.

The road would generally follow the existing route of the A11 except for a short section through Mildenhall Woods and a new 5km (3 miles) bypass to the north of Elveden village. Improvements would be made to the Fiveways roundabout to improve its capacity and safety. An underpass would be built for the B1112 and the A11 would no longer be accessible from the side roads; during construction the B1112 may be closed for up to six months by agreement with Suffolk County Council, or alternatively a temporary road may be built. The B1106 would go over the dual carriageway with a two level junction allowing access between the two roads.

The new dual carriageway would not be lit but there would be improvements to the existing lighting at Fiveways and Thetford roundabouts, which would include full cut-off lanterns to reduce light pollution.

The proposed route follows the existing A11 across the Cut Off Channel, then moves very slightly off-line through Mildenhall Woods, taking the road further away from the Rex Graham Reserve. In addition, this section is in a cutting to improve forward visibility for motorists.

At Canada Drive, (an important route into the Elveden Estate and crossing point for farm vehicles), a new bridge would be provided over the A11, only for estate use.

Through Weather and Horn Heaths the verge widths would be reduced so that the new carriageway would be retained within the existing highway boundary.

The 5km (3 miles) bypass of Elveden starts near Chalk Hall before curving north past Chalk Hall Farm and the village playing field then crossing beneath the B1106 east of Center Parcs Holiday Village. Access from the present A11 road to Chalk Hall Farm would be maintained by a bridge.

At Elveden Gap a southbound slip road would be provided for traffic heading for Bury St Edmunds. Where the slip road meets the two-way existing A11 a turning area would be provided for northbound local traffic.

A new access would be provided from the Thetford roundabout in to the forestry land to the southwest and to the Ministry of Defence firing range.

We are aware of the importance of managing the environmental impacts of our work. To help us do this, we have written an Environmental Statement. This has the full details of all the likely environmental impacts. The production of this Environmental Statement is a requirement of European Directive 85/337/EEC as implemented by Section 105A of the Highways Act 1980.

OBJECTIVES OF THE SCHEME

- Complete the dualling of the A11 between M11 and Norwich.
- Reduce congestion and provide additional capacity.
- Restrict access onto the trunk road.
- Improve road safety.
- Provide a bypass for the village of Elveden.
- Improve journey time reliability.
- Minimise the impact of the improved road on the surrounding Breckland - a designated area of Important Landscape Quality and a Special Landscape Area.

- Develop a scheme which is well engineered and economically viable.

SCHEME HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

A public consultation was held in February 2001 followed by a 'Preferred Route Announcement' in November 2001. Since this time, further design and assessment work has been conducted in preparation for the publication of the Environmental Statement and Statutory Orders.

Since the 'Preferred Route Announcement' a number of amendments have been made:

- The alignment through Mildenhall Woods has been moved closer to the existing road to reduce the need to remove large amounts of soil, severance and loss of trees;
- The proposed local diversion of the C616 to join the B1112 has been removed due to predicted low use. Instead, the C616 is to be closed at its junction with the A11. This change has the added benefit of reducing the impact on the Elveden Estate.
- The two level all-movements junction at the B1112 has been removed due to predicted low use. Instead, the side road would pass beneath the A11 through an underpass.
- The proposed junction at Elveden Gap has been removed from the Scheme and replaced with a southbound off-slip. This would maintain an existing southern route around the lorry ban through Thetford.

ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS OF THE SCHEME

The Scheme has been developed to minimise its effects on the environment and a range of measures have been designed to reduce adverse impacts.

Consideration has been given to those who live and work in the area by ensuring that agricultural operations, Public Rights of Way and views are safeguarded where possible.

Planting would be included as part of the Scheme, which over time would help integrate

the new road into the surrounding landscape. This would also have benefits to wildlife as valuable habitats would be retained and nature conservation features protected.

AIR QUALITY

Most of the residential properties within the area will experience a decrease in air pollution and an improvement in local air quality. The village of Elveden in particular will benefit because the proposed bypass would remove traffic from the centre of the village.

Regionally, pollutant emissions from vehicles are predicted to increase due to longer vehicle journeys and increased traffic speeds. In the national and international context, the increase in pollutant emissions is considered to be low and it is unlikely that these increases would adversely impact humans or wildlife.

Specific measures would aim to reduce the effects of emissions on adjacent woodlands and important sites such as Weather and Horn Heaths Site of Special Scientific Interest.

CULTURAL HERITAGE

In total there are twelve important cultural heritage sites close to the Scheme. How Hill Tumulus is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and all of Elveden village is a designated Conservation Area containing several Listed Buildings. The setting of all of these features would benefit from the Scheme due to the road being moved further away. However, the views of the War Memorial, a Listed Structure at Weather Heath, would be slightly adversely affected.

Sites of Known Archaeological Interest that are in close proximity to the Scheme would be investigated before and during the course of construction; this would be to ensure that any possible adverse effects from the road being built are effectively dealt with. If any features of archaeological interest are found they would be identified and recorded as part of this exercise.

ECOLOGY AND NATURE CONSERVATION

The A11 passes through areas of international and national nature conservation status including European 'Natura 2000' sites and national Sites of Special Scientific Interest. The Scheme has been designed to minimise impacts on these protected habitats.

The heathlands and blocks of woodland (such as Weather and Horn Heaths and Mildenhall Woods), as well as the distinctive farmlands and grass verges, all contribute to a significant mosaic of habitats for a great diversity of species including the rare and protected woodlark, stone curlew and nightjar.

Other protected species in the area include birds, badger, adder, great crested newt and bats. Additionally Breckland is home to four species of deer.

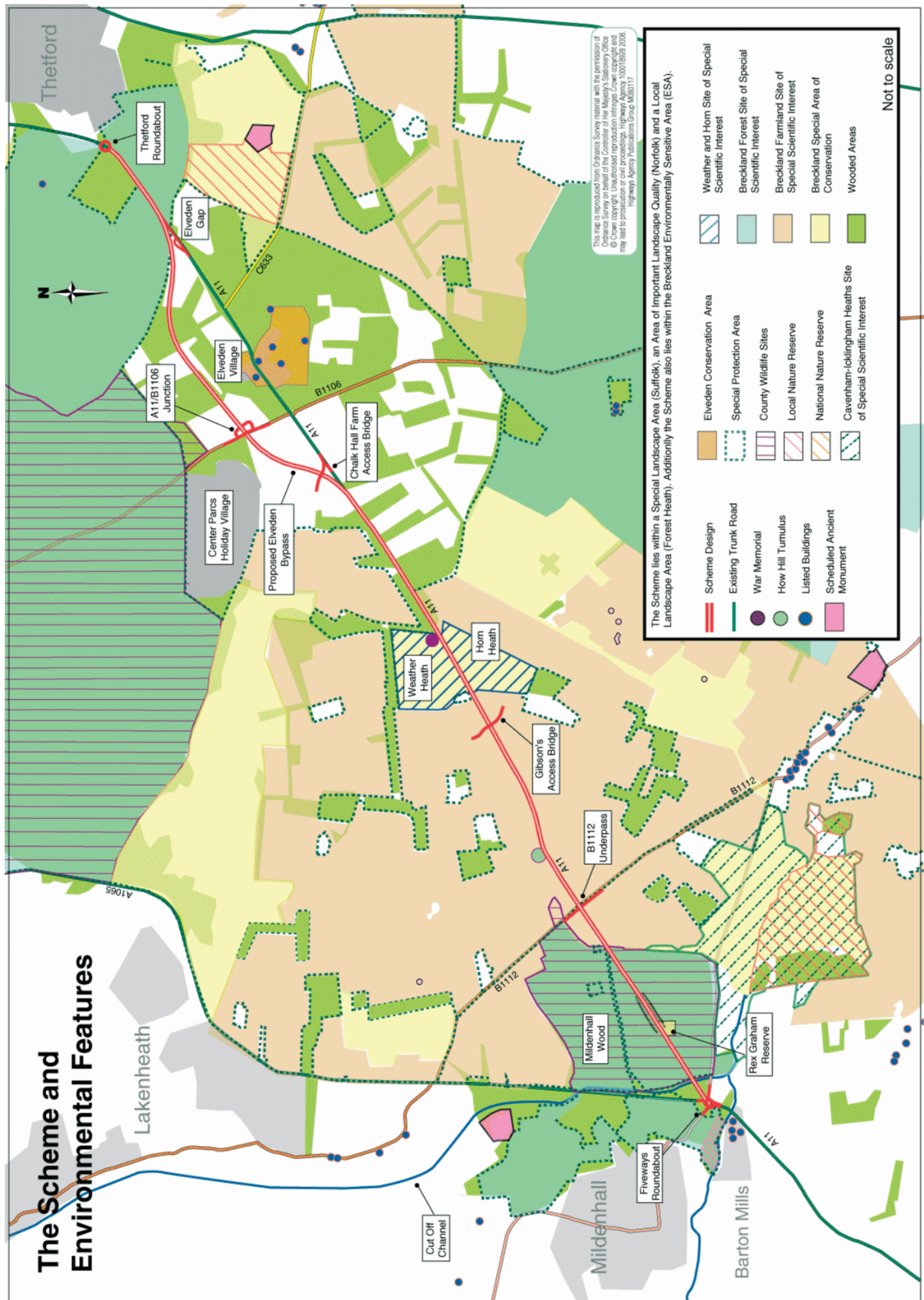
Although some habitat would be lost to the Scheme, it would provide an opportunity to include new areas for certain protected species, and also to use some roadside areas to protect habitats and species such as bats and deer.

Some protective ecological work would be carried out before construction work starts. Other work would be carried out during or on completion of the Scheme and with consideration to the bird nesting season, as well as the hibernation periods for reptiles and amphibians.

At Weeting Heath 54 hectares of land has been purchased for woodlark, nightjar and stone curlew; suitable breeding grassland and woodland habitat would be created especially for these birds. Management and monitoring would be carried out by the Highways Agency for the first five years and by Forest Enterprise thereafter.

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL EFFECTS

The Scheme passes through both Suffolk and Norfolk and lies within the distinctive Breckland region known locally as 'The Brecks'. The land through which the route passes includes a Special Landscape Area and Environmentally



Sensitive Area.

The region is generally flat with prominent areas of heathland and lines of gnarled Scots pine trees, (known as Deal Rows), as well as intensively farmed land, deciduous woodland and conifer plantations.

New woodland edges, linear tree belts and pine hedges would be planted to replace vegetation that is removed. At Weather Heath the pine hedgerow would, in time, screen the road from the heath and assist in buffering the effects of air pollution on the heathland habitat.

The landscape works would be maintained by a managing agent (on behalf of the Highways Agency), to ensure that the objectives detailed in the Environmental Statement are achieved.

The Scheme would have some unavoidable impacts including the removal of vegetation, the alteration to landform, the introduction of some large structures and the increased size of the road corridor. Planting using characteristic Breckland species would, in time, assist in integrating the Scheme into the surrounding landscape, but there would be some erosion of the attractive rural character.

LAND USE

The Scheme passes through countryside that is intensively managed; forestry and farming are dominant and are carried out by Forest Enterprise and Elveden Estates. Both have a number of accesses onto the existing A11 which would be closed under the proposals. However, the viability of existing farm businesses would not be compromised nor require significant changes in farming practices, as a result of the new road.

The Scheme includes improvements to the Elveden Estate track network. These, together with new bridges over the improved road at Canada Drive and Chalk Hall Farm would compensate for restricted access to the trunk road.

Some land take and field fragmentation would occur particularly in the area surrounding the Elveden Bypass. Additionally, there would be

some loss of heathland and woodland. No properties would be demolished and no Common Land or Public Open Space would be acquired for the Scheme.

At the War Memorial, a lay-by is proposed on the northbound carriageway of the A11; a footway setback from the road behind a wide verge would be provided to enable pedestrians to access the War Memorial without walking at the edge of the carriageway.

NOISE AND VIBRATION

The Scheme would reduce road traffic noise, particularly for residential properties, as well as Elveden School and the village church. A few properties along the northern edge of Elveden would face the new route and would experience minor increases in road traffic noise. The Center Parcs Holiday Village is located outside of the area considered for the noise assessment.

Construction noise levels would be addressed in the Construction Environmental Management Plan and would comply with local Environmental Officer requirements. Low noise surfacing would also be used throughout the entire route.

PEDESTRIANS, CYCLISTS, EQUESTRIANS AND COMMUNITY EFFECTS

The existing high volumes of traffic on the A11 can make pedestrian access around Elveden village difficult and dangerous. It is anticipated that the new bypass to the north would be of considerable benefit to the village.

Apart from Elveden village and at the Fiveways and Thetford roundabouts, the area is sparsely populated and as a result pedestrian use is low. There are a number of Public Footpaths and Bridleways nearby, although horse riders generally keep to private tracks.

Some Public Rights of Way may be temporarily affected during construction. Agricultural and forestry operations would be maintained by improvements to the Elveden Estate's internal track system, as well as the proposed bridges

over the A11 at Canada Drive and Chalk Hall Farm. By restricting access to the main road the Scheme would ultimately improve road safety.

VEHICLE TRAVELLERS

Views from the road would be altered by the introduction of the bypass around Elveden village; road users would have open views of farmland alternating with enclosed views of forest plantation. The proposed bridges, earthworks and planting would all be new visible features; however, views of the unique Breckland landscape would be retained.

Driver stress is expected to decrease due to a reduction in congestion and improved driving conditions. Some verges would be widened and be more open, this would improve deer visibility and have an added benefit of improving road safety.

GEOLOGY AND SOILS

The local geology consists of chalk, sands and gravels, clay and alluvium; the chalk is a principal aquifer with an extensive catchment area.

The study area contains three geological Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), but no Regionally Important Geological Sites. The geological SSSI are at High Lodge (Mildenhall Woods), Warren Hill, and Thetford Heath; however, all of the sites are far enough away from the road corridor to not be directly or indirectly affected by the Scheme.

The Scheme design includes measures for avoiding unnecessary disturbance of soils, such as, dampening in areas susceptible to wind erosion, appropriate roadside drainage and vegetation buffer zones.

In some locations, particularly at Weather and Horn Heaths, spray from the road containing heavy metals and salt could contaminate the surrounding soil. The secondary effects of nitrogen deposition could also impact on the heaths. However, these impacts would be partially reduced through structural planting near woodland edges and screening hedgerows along

Weather and Horn Heaths. It is considered that the impact upon soils during the construction would be minimal.

ROAD DRAINAGE AND THE WATER ENVIRONMENT

The River Lark, the Cut Off Channel and the Little Ouse River are the main watercourses within the area. The River Lark flows across Suffolk, northwest into Cambridgeshire. The Cut Off Channel is a man-made canal built to reduce the risk of flooding from the River Lark and the surrounding watercourses. The Little Ouse flows through Thetford but is unlikely to be affected by the Scheme.

The A11 lies on a principal aquifer and drains into groundwater Source Protection Zones which are potentially very sensitive to pollution. Currently, water from the road surface drains directly into the roadside verges; the dual carriageway would be designed to accommodate the increased surface run-off throughout the length of the Scheme.

The Scheme includes measures to ensure that the impact on the water environment would be neutral. Due to a lack of available watercourses along the route, the drainage design includes features such as soakaways, vegetated infiltration areas and vegetated treatment ponds which treat run-off for pollutants, before filtering into the ground. The drainage near sensitive habitats has been designed to minimise any adverse effects to these sites; as a result the assessment concludes that there would be no impact from road drainage on the water environment.

DISRUPTION DUE TO CONSTRUCTION

The road construction would take two years and would include archaeological excavations and alterations to farm tracks within the Elveden Estate. These works would also include habitat creation and the provision for moving protected species of wildlife to new habitats.

The A11 would remain open throughout the

works, with access maintained to all properties. Short-term local diversions may be required during the construction of some of the bridges. Construction traffic would be managed so as to minimise impacts on local residents, including having restricted access to the local road network.

A Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) would ensure that the road works are carried out to appropriate standards and in accordance with the Environmental Statement. Methods of reducing construction impacts such as increased noise and dust, as well as the precise location of haul routes, construction compounds and storage areas will all be included in the CEMP to be developed by the contractor after they have been appointed.

PUBLICATION OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT

The Draft Orders and the Environmental Statement can be viewed free of charge during normal office hours until 19 February 2009, at the following locations:

Suffolk County Council Offices,
Shire Hall, Bury St Edmunds IP33 1RX

Mildenhall Library,
Chestnut Close, Mildenhall IP28 7NL

Forest Heath District Council,
District Office, College Heath Road,
Mildenhall, Suffolk IP28 7EY

Norfolk County Council Offices,
County Hall, Martineau Lane,
Norwich NR1 2DH

Thetford Library,
Raymond Street, Thetford,
Norfolk IP24 2EA

Highways Agency,
Woodlands,
Manton Lane,
Bedford MK41 7LW

You can also buy a copy of the Environmental Statement from the Highways Agency at a cost of £100 or a CD is available free of charge.

A copy of the Environmental Statement is also available on-line at:

www.highways.gov.uk/roads/projects/4248.aspx

YOUR VIEWS

The Draft Orders and other documentation can be viewed at an exhibition which we will held at:

**Barton Mills Village Hall,
The Street, Barton Mills IP28 6AA
Friday 5 December 2008
10am to 8pm**

**Elveden Village Hall,
Elveden IP24 3TJ
Saturday 6 December 2008
10am to 4pm**

**The Guildhall,
Carnegie Room, Cage Lane,
Thetford IP24 2DS
Tuesday 9 December 2008
11am to 8pm**

If you wish to support, comment on, or object to the Draft Orders, or comment on the Environmental Statement you should write, to arrive no later than 19 February 2009, to the Highways Agency at the address below.

A11 Fiveways to Thetford
Improvement Team,
Highways Agency, Woodlands,
Manton Lane, Bedford MK41 7LW

Email: a11fivewaystotheftfordimprovement@highways.gsi.gov.uk

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Depending on the nature and number of objections received, a Public Inquiry may be held before an independent inspector. If an inquiry is to be held, all those who have responded will be notified of the date and the venue at least six weeks beforehand. Notices will also appear in the local press.

All comments received will be made available to the Inspector, who may decide to make them public. Should any alternative routes be proposed by objectors, they may be publicised in the local press so that anyone affected would have the opportunity to support, comment on or object to them.

The Secretary of State will consider the Inspector's report, together with any objections and representations made, before making a decision on the future of the Scheme.

Booklets explaining the statutory procedures and arrangements for rights of compensation can be obtained free of charge from the project team at the above address.

For real time traffic information:

08700 660 115

www.highways.gov.uk/trafficinfo

24 hours a day, 365 days a year

(Calls from BT landlines to 0870 numbers will cost no more than 8p per minute; mobile calls usually cost more)

For general Highways Agency information:

08457 50 40 30

email: ha_info@highways.gsi.gov.uk

24 hours a day, 365 days a year

(Calls from BT landlines to 0845 numbers will cost no more than 4p per minute; mobile calls usually cost more)

Safe driving at roadworks

Remember that tiredness can kill. Take regular breaks from driving.



During 2006 two workers were killed and 19 seriously injured in the course of their work on Highways Agency roads.

For the safety of all road users and roadworkers, when you are approaching roadworks:

- Keep within the speed limit – it is there for your safety.
- Get into the correct lane in good time – don't keep switching.
- Concentrate on the road ahead, not the roadworks.
- Be alert for works' traffic leaving or entering roadworks.
- Keep a safe distance – there could be queues in front.
- Observe all signs – they are there to help you.