

Written Ministerial Statement

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Department for Infrastructure

BALLYNAHINCH BYPASS — PUBLICATION OF FORMAL ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT — NOTICE TO PROCEED AND MAKING OF THE DIRECTION ORDER

Published at 12.00 noon on Tuesday 13 December 2016.

Mr Hazzard (The Minister for Infrastructure): I wish to inform Members of my decision to accept the outcomes of the Public Inquiry for the A24 Ballynahinch Bypass scheme and to proceed to progress the scheme in readiness of funding becoming available.

The scheme will address a bottleneck on the strategic road network, through the provision of a bypass of Ballynahinch town centre. It will also separate strategic traffic from local traffic movements.

The Inspector, appointed to the inquiry to examine the case for and against the scheme, concluded that the Department has developed the proposed scheme for the Ballynahinch Bypass with due regard to the effects it will have on local residents, landowners and farmers and that all possible adverse impacts have been assessed and where those assessments have been challenged as a result of the Inquiry, the Department has justified its approach to his satisfaction.

The Inspector therefore recommended that having considered all of the submissions, objections and undertakings entered into by the Department to accommodate objectors, the proposal for the A24 Ballynahinch Bypass should proceed.

In considering the Inspector's Report, the Department carried out a thorough examination of the Inspector's comments and recommendations and concluded that the scheme should proceed to be progressed, subject to recommendations relating to mitigation measures.

Part V of the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 sets out the statutory requirements for the assessment of environmental impacts of road schemes. With regard to Habitats Assessment, having caused an Appropriate Assessment to be carried out and having considered the Environmental Statement and the consultation responses to it, I am satisfied the likely significant environmental effects of the proposed scheme have been properly assessed and have been sufficient to inform judgements on the scheme. Accordingly, in light of the Appropriate Assessment process undertaken and the information presented within the Statement to Inform the Appropriate Assessment and the Environmental Statement, I accept the Department's conclusion (as the Competent Authority) that the construction and operation of the A24 Ballynahinch Bypass would not, by itself or in combination with other known plans or projects, adversely affect the integrity of Strangford Lough Special Area of Conservation, or indeed any other Natura 2000 site, or their ability to meet their conservation objectives.

I have carefully considered the Department's Statement on the Public Inquiry and agree with its conclusions. I have therefore decided to proceed to progress the scheme subject to the availability of future funding. In doing so, I commit my Department to carrying out the necessary actions to facilitate the Inspector's recommendations and the mitigation measures described in the Department's Statement and the Environmental Statement.

I am keen to deliver Ballynahinch Bypass as it would provide significant benefits in terms of alleviating traffic congestion and improving journey times along the A24. The project will remain on my agenda as projects are considered in line with resources available from the forthcoming budget process (scheme expected to cost in the region of £35 million).

The release of the Inspector's report and making of the necessary statutory orders will permit the scheme to be progressed in readiness for funding.

Consequently, I have asked my Department to publish the formal "Environmental Statement - Notice to Proceed" and to make the Direction Order for the scheme. The associated Vesting Order will be made when finance becomes available to build the bypass.