### SEMMMS – A6 to Manchester Airport Relief Road

**Key Issues –**
The Relief Road will intersect open space and countryside where land use is primarily agricultural, with recreational and sports areas, residential, and industrial and commercial. It also cuts across three Local Planning Authority areas with different planning policies and mandates. The proposed road will bring traffic closer to some residential areas resulting in an increase in noise levels. It will also result in the loss of ancient woodland and a number of other ecological, cultural, community and recreational resources will also be affected. The scheme enjoys overwhelming support but a minority of those affected will receive significant dis-benefits whilst the majority of receptors would realise benefits ranging from slight to large. In undertaking the Environmental Impact Assessment, Mouchel had to find a balance between key potential environmental effects and the sensitive issues raised by members of the public during the public consultation exercises. Ecological mitigation was designed to address habitat continuity and provide wildlife corridors post scheme construction. A comprehensive landscaping strategy was developed to balance the requirements of ecological mitigation alongside the screening function provided by the establishment of planting. Planting was provided where possible to incorporate the road in the landscape as much as possible.

**Purpose of the project**
The objectives of the proposed scheme are to: Reduce the impact of traffic congestion on local businesses and communities; provide efficient access and improved connectivity to, from and between Manchester Airport and local, town and district centres; improve the efficiency and reliability of the highway network; reduce the conflict between local and strategic traffic and provide an improved route for freight and business travel; seek opportunities to provide improved facilities for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport; minimise and mitigate adverse environmental impacts during construction and operation of the scheme.

**Description of the project**
The proposed scheme comprises a new dual carriageway connecting the A6 to Manchester Airport including the existing A555. It runs adjacent to the settlements of Bramhall, Cheadle Hulme, Hazel Grove, Handforth, Poynton and Wythenshawe District Centres and Gatley and Heald Green Local Centres. A pedestrian and cycle route is proposed for the whole length of the scheme. The scheme requires two major accommodation works including the re-design of a golf course and the re-direction of an oil pipeline. Construction of the scheme, including accommodation works, is programmed to commence in August 2014 and conclude in September 2017.
Lessons learnt
Despite overwhelming support for the proposed scheme, a minority were predicted to experience significant dis-benefits due to its proximity to residences. Mouchel worked with the client during three public consultation phases which involved 2 ecological, 1 historical and 2 vulnerable user groups. Two environmental and 24 local liaisons were also organised to engage with key stakeholders. These early public engagement was invaluable in obtaining the public’s acceptance of controversial proposals. At the local liaison forums impacts of the scheme were described in detail (taken from the unpublished impact assessment) and presented to give those most significantly affected an ‘idea’ of the magnitude of effect. In addition to potential environmental effects, habitat compensation and enhancement measures were also discussed. The open engagement of stakeholders prompted two local enthusiasts to provide evidence of breeding bird sites, in particular kingfisher and barn owl through a public led site visit. These sites were not found in a previous study and were not referenced within biological records. These were subsequently included in the environmental assessment and additional barn owl mitigation included in the landscape design.

Lessons learnt cont. -
The development of a comprehensive and specific consultation strategy helped allay fears, giving those significantly affected increased input into the development of the scheme. It also allowed the Local Authority to communicate the extent to which adverse impacts of the scheme could be mitigated whilst promoting the benefits. In addition to community engagement, early liaison with Natural England in the formulation of a Great Crested Newt Masterplan secured support from the project team who allowed this to be discussed during consultation with interested parties. In particular, the structured approach to ‘masterplanning’ the GCN works provided assurances to the ecologists of the three Local Authority of the robustness of the approach. To gain the support of the three local planning authorities, where possible, discussions regarding scope, assessment, impacts and mitigation were held with representatives of all three authorities present or without prejudice. This was particularly important supporting reaching agreement on the ecology mitigation.

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