

## **Sevenoaks JTB (November 2023) – Highway Improvement Plans Briefing Note**

Prepared by: Gregory McNicoll

Approved by: Ryan Shiel

### Introduction

The purpose of this briefing note is to provide some clarity surrounding the Highway Improvement Plan (HIP) process following questions being raised by some elected representatives. It is hoped that this document will explain the purpose of the HIP process, and how it can be utilised.

### Recommendation

Members of the Board are asked to note the contents of the report.

### Background

A number of years ago some parish councils raised concerns with Kent County Council (KCC) as they felt rural areas did not have a formal method of requesting changes to the highway network that they believe are important to their communities, and as such were under-represented. There was also a history of advice being given to parishes, with no records of any such advice and with staff changes it was felt communities would benefit from keeping requests and related advice in a single record. Consequently, the Highway Improvement Plan (HIP) was introduced as a way for parish councils to promote, prioritise and seek advice on their priorities, it can also be used by Parishes to decide if they wish to put their own funding to schemes on KCC's roads, with those projects being designed and delivered by KCC officers.

### Purpose of the Highway Improvement Plan

The HIP is a document template that town/parish councils can use to prioritise highway changes they wish to promote and fund from their own budget, and there are occasions where KCC can contribute or help fund smaller schemes. KCC has committed to supporting parish councils in the delivery of their priority schemes, which will be agreed at an annual meeting between the relevant KCC officer and the parish/town council.

The HIP process has been introduced by the Highway Improvements Team within the Transportation Division and is not something that is input into by our Operational Colleagues. Therefore, it is important to note that the HIP should not be used to communicate urgent operational matters, or those which relate to an issue the parish is not looking to address themselves; in these cases, the Parish Portal should continue to be used, whereby KCC will respond as appropriate.

Highway Improvement Plans are not used to log maintenance concerns / requests. Maintenance matters (including potholes, blocked gullies, overgrown vegetation and worn road markings) should be reported using the fault reporting tool or raised with the Highway Manager for the district.

### HIP Review Process

Once a HIP has been submitted to the Highway Improvements Team, a Community Engagement Officer will review all requests and meet with the parish/ town council to discuss the requested changes and gather more information. It is important for the issue being raised to be fully understood, for officers to be able to consider all options. This stage is also used to determine which projects may be feasible and which may not be possible due to cost, physical, legal or technical restrictions. The funding sources for any potential projects are also identified at this stage. The remaining requests are then reviewed in detail by the technical staff within the Highways Improvement Team (we refer to them internally as our HIT Planning and Advice team), who will provide a final proposal to each request, where possible. An alternative solution to what was originally requested may be proposed by officers, if there is a more suitable project/solution available.

Further discussions are then held between the Community Engagement Officers and the parish/ town council over which proposals to implement. Officers will be able to suggest if further assessments or surveys may be required, and outline if there are any items which may need to be progressed via other means such as a larger scale funding bid. There may be a design fee payable by the parish at this stage, which can cover but is not limited to:

- Site visits
- Preparation of designs / plans
- Drawing of sign designs, including a schedule as appropriate
- Stage 1 road safety audit
- Acquisition of plans from all utilities companies to check for any services that may impact the design
- Liaison with other KCC teams who will adopt and maintain new assets

A final design and cost of implementation will then be produced for the parish/ town council, who on agreement will then be invoiced. The order for the agreed project can then be raised with the contractors for implementation, the turnaround time on the orders raised is 90 days. If a Traffic Regulation Order is required for the project (for example a speed limit change or new parking restriction), this will need to be processed before raising an order. TRO's typically take around 3-6 months to progress from the point the public consultation begins.

### Delivery of Schemes

Any schemes agreed through the HIP process, in discussion with the Community Engagement Officers, that a parish council wishes to promote and fund will be prioritised and delivered to the same standards, rules and regulations as those funded by KCC directly. This will include for example, but not limited to, only permitting the use of standard palette materials, all appropriate conditions/thresholds being met, and being designed in accordance with Department for Transport (DfT) standards as outlined in documents such as the Traffic Signs Manual (TSM) and Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions (TSRGD). As the Highway Authority, KCC needs to be content that any changes implemented on the highway, including those funded by external parties (such as parish councils) are safe, appropriate and adhere to best practice.

There will be examples of requests from third parties, including parish councils, where delivery of that scheme would mean KCC officers are unable to fulfil their obligations under Construction, Design and Management (CDM) Regulations 2015 (CDM). In these circumstances it is incumbent upon that officer to advise that the scheme cannot be

delivered, but of course alternative options will always be sought, if possible. There may be times when a request cannot be accommodated but given the Principal Designer (PD) has the required skills and experience to make this decision it would not be acceptable to deliver something that the PD does not believe is appropriate.

Since April this year the Highway Improvements Team have delivered and/or are in the process of delivering 56 schemes in West Kent through the HIP process. This is addition to offering ongoing technical advice, speed limit toolkits, speed surveys and other investigative works.

### Annual HIP Review

KCC has been asked why parishes are not able to request a HIP review more frequently than on an annual basis. The reasons for this are due to resourcing the officer time required to administer the HIPs and deliver the schemes when agreed, and secondly to ensure that the Parish Councils and Members have time to clearly agree their current priorities for the year ahead. For example, in Sevenoaks (the district for which this briefing note has been prepared) there are 31 parish/town councils, of which 19 have active HIPs. Following the restructure of the Highway Improvements Team there is now a dedicated group of Community Engagement Officers within KCC whose primary function is to work alongside parish / town councils and County Members but we must stress it is a very small team. Each Community Engagement Officer works with around 40 parishes (across 1 or more districts / boroughs). The Highway Improvements Team is also responsible for delivering a number of functions including:

- Crash data analysis
- Design and delivery of the Crash Remedial Measures programme
- Design and delivery of the Local Transport Plan programme
- Design and delivery of Combined Member Grant schemes
- Responding to all public, County Member, Borough Member and MP enquiries, and complaints, relating to changes to the highway
- Preparation of JTB reports and highway works updates
- Providing technical advice relating to developer planning applications
- Design and delivery of private signing requests (such as tourism signage)
- Ordering of work (including the individual pricing of all schemes)
- All contractor liaison relating to these schemes
- Assisting the KCC Operations Team with sign designs when replacements are needed

### To conclude

All parish councils can request a review of their HIP once per year, which will be resourced by the community engagement lead for the area.

Parish councils must use the HIP template (see appendix A) in conjunction with the highway information pack (see appendix B) provided by KCC officers to ensure continuity across the county. The information pack provides detailed guidance as to what is involved with each of the most common highway changes, along with some outline costs and delivery timescales.

We would like to thank all of the parishes and town councils that have already engaged with us on their HIP. The list below shows the current status of active HIP's in Sevenoaks District, and the date the last HIPs were received by KCC.

## Current HIP Status (as at 10/10/23)

Parish Council	Last HIP Received
Swanley TC	17 October 2022
Fawkham	20 October 2022
Penshurst	28 November 2022
Weald	01 December 2022
Hever	10 January 2023
Eynsford	06 February 2023
Seal	07 February 2023
Edenbridge TC	15 February 2023
Riverhead	15 March 2023
Kemsing	23 March 2023
Chevening	31 May 2023
West Kingsdown	20 July 2023
Hartley	25 July 2023
Badgers Mount	20 August 2023
Halstead	20 August 2023
Sevenoaks TC	30 August 2023
Knockholt	04 September 2023
Sundridge with Ide	01 October 2023
Westerham TC	04 October 2023

## Appendix 1 – Highway Information Works Pack

A document containing a number of information sheets that have been produced detailing the estimated costs and site requirements of some of the more commonly requested items.

## Appendix 2 – Blank HIP Template Sheet

The template provided to all Town/Parish Councils for them to fill out with their highway improvement requests.