

Member briefing note on the introduction of 20mph schemes in East Sussex

1. Introduction

1.1 The purpose of this briefing note is to set out the rationale underlying the County Council's approach to the introduction of 20mph schemes and the current state of progress on the various 20mph schemes that are in the process of being introduced.

2. Background

2.1 The County Council receives many requests for 20mph speed limits and speed limit reductions in view of the of the potential road safety, environmental, community and quality of life benefits that people feel that the introduction of a 20mph speed limit will deliver. In the recent past Notices of Motion have been presented at County Council meetings requesting the blanket introduction of 20mph schemes in all residential areas and outside all schools in the County.

2.2 In January 2013, the Department for Transport issued a new Circular on setting local speed limits to encourage local authorities to introduce more 20mph schemes. Area-wide 20 mph schemes have been introduced in Portsmouth and more recently Brighton and Hove and other towns and cities across the country are currently considering the introduction of area wide schemes.

2.3 In view of the increased pressure for the introduction of 20mph schemes, the challenge for the County Council is how it prioritises the requests for 20mph schemes against all of the other requests it receives for local transport improvements.

3. Government Guidance on the Introduction of 20mph schemes

3.1 The Departments for Transport's Circular on setting local Speed limits (Circular 01/2013) sets out the factors that local authorities should take into account when deciding whether to introduce speed limit reductions. A reduction in vehicle speeds can reduce collisions and casualties but these benefits can only be realised where there is an existing crash history involving personal injury. An examination of the crash history in an area should therefore be a key factor in determining whether a scheme should be introduced.

3.2 The Guidance suggests that the local traffic authority should work closely with the police and that in order to be successful 20 mph schemes should be self-enforcing, i.e. the existing conditions of the road together with any measures such as traffic calming, signing, or publicity should lead to a mean traffic speed compliant with the speed limit. The Guidance states that in order to achieve compliance there should be no expectation on the police to provide additional enforcement beyond their routine activity, unless this has been explicitly agreed.

3.3 The Department for Transport has also relaxed some of the requirements relating to the signing of 20mph schemes to make it easier for local authorities to introduce them.

4. Characteristics of 20mph Zones and 20mph Speed Limits

4.1 There are two ways in which 20mph schemes can be introduced; either as a 20mph speed limit or a 20mph Zone.

- **20mph limits** are areas where the speed limit has been reduced to 20 mph but there are no physical measures to reduce vehicle speeds within the area. Drivers are alerted to the speed limit with 20mph speed limit repeater signs and roundels painted in the road. The national Guidance suggests that 20mph limits are most appropriate for roads where average speeds are already below 24mph.
- **20 mph zones** introduced where speeds are above 24mph and use traffic calming measures at 100 metre intervals to slow vehicles down to speeds below the limit and ensure the zones is “self-enforcing”.

4.2 A considerable amount of research has been undertaken on the impact of 20mph limit and zones. This has demonstrated that the implementation of a signed 20 mph limit typically only results in a 1 mph reduction in average speed. This is not surprising given that the limits have usually been introduced in areas where speeds were already low and the 20mph speed limit is simply formalising something that was already happening informally. By contrast, the introduction of 20mph zones has generally resulted in greater reductions in average speeds, which is not surprising given that they involve the introduction of traffic calming features.

4.3 The County Council’s own experience through its rural speed limit review programme is consistent with the findings of national research in that significant reductions in speed have only been achieved in locations where physical features have been introduced as part of the speed limit reductions. The reductions in speeds where only signs and lines have been introduced have been much less.

5. Prioritising the introduction of 20mph Schemes

5.1 The key challenge for the County Council is how to prioritise the requests it receives for the introduction of 20mph schemes. As has been highlighted above, the introduction of a 20mph limit using signs alone is likely to have very limited speed reduction benefits. Although they can be relatively inexpensive to introduce, it is still difficult to justify the use of County Council funding to introduce them, except in a situation where it can be demonstrated that the scheme is likely to deliver road safety benefits or where there is the prospect of funding from an external source. By contrast, 20mph zones are more successful at delivering speed reduction but are far more expensive to introduce, which means they have to demonstrate that significant road safety benefits will be achieved to justify the level of expenditure required.

5.2 Given the limited amount of resources available to the County Council to develop and implement local transport improvements (which includes the introduction of 20mph speed limits), a two stage scheme prioritisation process is

used to assess the requests that the County Council receives . The objective of the process is to identify which schemes should be funded through the capital programme . The first stage of the process assesses the extent to which the scheme would further the objectives of the County Councils Local Transport Plan including potential road safety benefits. Those schemes which achieve more than an identified benchmark score are then put through a more detailed assessment where additional factors including the scheme's value for money, the risks associated with its delivery and the potential availability of external funding are included. The outcome of the process is a score which can be used to compare and prioritise schemes against one another. The scores achieved through the detailed assessment process are then compared and are used to help determine which schemes should be included in the capital programme for local transport improvements.

5.3 Obviously each scheme request is assessed on its merits but typically requests for 20mph schemes do not tend to score highly unless there is a history of personal injury crashes where vehicle speed has been identified as being a contributory factor or there is the prospect of funding from an external source.

6. Conclusions

The County Council will continue to receive requests for the introduction of 20mph schemes. However, there are insufficient resources to deliver comprehensive 20mph speed limits covering all residential areas or outside schools in the County. The County Council will continue to use an evidence based approach to identify where 20mph schemes would be most appropriate. Requests for 20mph schemes have to be prioritised against all of the other requests that are received for local transport improvements. The County Council will also continue to seek additional external sources of funding to help deliver additional 20mph schemes as appropriate.