

Report to Councillor Joy Dennis, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport

October 2022

Review of the Highway Improvement Programme

Report by Assistant Director (Highways, Transport and Planning)

Electoral divisions: All

Summary

The Highway Improvement Programme, mainly funded by the Integrated Transport Block Allocation and developer contributions, is made up of several thematic programmes e.g., Community Highway Schemes, Strategic Transport Improvements, and Local Transport Improvements. Each of the thematic programmes are developed separately and collated into a countywide programme every autumn, before being approved by the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport for delivery over the following two financial years.

A project was commissioned in September 2021 to review how potential schemes are identified, prioritised, developed and delivered. The work specifically examined how the County Council ensures the Highway Improvement Programme delivers corporate priorities whilst responding to the needs of local communities in a timely manner. The work has resulted in the development of a new single Assessment Framework to assess and prioritise schemes and the creation of a programme of 'simple' Community Highway Schemes that can be delivered in one year.

Developing recommendations from the project were presented to the Communities, Highways and Environment Scrutiny Committee in March 2022. The Committee was supportive of the proposed new ways of working with communities and approach to prioritisation of schemes.

The new Assessment Framework has been piloted this year on the assessment and prioritisation of Community Highway Schemes and the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport is asked to approve the roll out of the new approach following review to the remainder of the Highways Improvement Programme for future years.

Recommendations

The Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport is asked to approve that -

- (1) subject to the successful completion of a pilot to assess and prioritise Community Highway Schemes for inclusion in the Highways Improvement Programme from 2023/24, the new Assessment Framework is used to assess

and prioritise all potential schemes for inclusion in the Programme from 2024/25 onwards

- (2) following a review of the pilot for Community Highway Schemes, the new Assessment Framework is used to assess and prioritise all potential schemes for inclusion in the Highways Improvement Programme from 2024/25 onwards.
 - (3) schemes in the Road Safety Programme are excluded from the assessment process approved under (a) above.
 - (4) a programme of 'simple' Community Highway Schemes that can be delivered in one year is developed on an annual basis.
 - (5) guidance is drafted and made available online to assist communities as they develop Community Highway Schemes for assessment through the new Framework.
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Proposal

1 Background and context

- 1.1 In March 2019, the Environment, Communities and Fire Select Committee considered the Highway Improvement Programme and several areas were identified for review or improvement.
- 1.2 Although the work to progress these improvements had been on hold given other priorities, a project was commissioned in September 2021 to take the review forward. This report outlines the work of the project and recommends how schemes should be assessed and prioritised in the future.
- 1.3 The Highway Improvement Programme, mainly funded by the capital Integrated Transport Block Allocation and developer contributions, is made up of several thematic programmes. These programmes are varied and comprise the Strategic Transport Improvements Programme, (STIP), Community Highway Schemes, (CHS), Local Transport Improvements Programme, (LTIP), Public Rights of Way, Walking and Cycling Schemes, Road Safety Schemes and Bus Infrastructure.
- 1.4 Alongside the Integrated Transport Block, external funding opportunities can arise, e.g. the Active Travel Fund, that require officers to develop programmes that specifically align to funding criteria. These may or may not include schemes that have already been developed for the Highway Improvement Programme.
- 1.5 At present, schemes identified through the thematic programmes are developed and assessed separately and then fed through in the autumn for inclusion in the Highways, Transport and Planning Delivery Programme, which is approved by the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport in January/February each year.
- 1.6 Initial scoping at the beginning of review concluded that work should focus on six key areas;
 - Prioritisation

- Working with Communities
- Funding
- Faster Delivery
- Internal Working Practices
- Programme/Project Management

1.7 This report seeks approval to implement new working practices regarding the Prioritisation, Working with Communities, and Faster Delivery workstreams.

2 Prioritisation

1.8 There are a variety of approaches to prioritising projects within the Highways Improvement Programme. This is, in part, due to the varying nature of the schemes and the existence of national guidance. However, it would be beneficial to be able to compare schemes against each other when they are being funded from the same budgets to ensure the County Council is delivering projects that maximise delivery against corporate objectives and priorities.

1.9 Assessment of schemes and subsequent prioritisation should ensure schemes are aligned with corporate priorities, including the West Sussex Transport Plan, deliver value for money, are deliverable and meet all necessary technical thresholds e.g. PV² (Pedestrian/Vehicle movements) for signalised crossings. Any schemes that are submitted as part of external funding bids should also meet the agreed thresholds to ensure that all work delivered on the ground is delivering corporate priorities.

1.10 Work has been completed to develop a new draft Assessment Framework that can be used to assess and prioritise all potential highways and transport schemes.

Working with Communities

1.11 Currently there are several ways that parties outside of the County Council can make requests for improvements on the highway. Understandably, this can cause confusion and frustration for the applicant and gives the appearance of the County Council not having a joined-up approach to highway improvements.

1.12 This work has provided an opportunity to examine the way we work with communities when they wish to deliver improvements in the local area. It has mapped out varying customer journeys and identified areas for improvement to enhance the customer experience. This is explained below.

Faster Delivery

1.13 There is a level of frustration that relatively simple schemes can take two to three years to deliver. Although work has been completed separately to improve the Community Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) process, there are other schemes that could be delivered in a shorter timeframe if the mechanisms were in place. For example, a batch of simple TROs or some small infrastructure improvements.

1.14 Although the majority of community highway schemes in the programme are designed in one year and built the following year, other schemes can take

longer, up to three years, due to the complexity of the work. However, it should be possible for some of the smaller, less complex schemes to be designed and delivered in one year, subject to contractual arrangements and availability of road space i.e., road space has to be booked to ensure traffic disruption is kept to a minimum.

3 Proposal details

Prioritisation

- 2.1 A new draft Assessment Framework has been developed for use across the whole of the Highways Improvement Programme. The introduction of a consistent approach to scheme assessment will mean schemes can be compared against one another more easily to ensure the County Council is investing in work that delivers maximum benefits.
- 2.2 As part of the work to develop the Assessment Framework, it was concluded that schemes in the Road Safety Programme should fall outside of this assessment process. The Road Safety Programme consists of schemes that have been identified solely to address known safety issues on the highway network and, as such, will always be a priority for the County Council, as Local Highway Authority.
- 2.3 The new Assessment Framework has two stages: an Initial Assessment to confirm the scheme is potentially viable and highlight any significant risks and issues; and a Detailed Assessment. The Initial Assessment provides an opportunity to filter out schemes that, for one reason or another, are very unlikely to be feasible. For example, the required land may not be available or the scheme is not technically possible.
- 2.4 The Detailed Assessment considers two areas: alignment with the West Sussex Transport Plan, and Assurance. The scores under these headings are then weighted to ensure the Framework accurately represents the benefits delivered by differing types of schemes, allowing them to be directly compared against one another. In addition to scoring the schemes, the detailed assessment also identifies risks and issues that need to be addressed before schemes can be signed-off and programmed for design and delivery.
- 2.5 The areas covered within the Detailed Assessment are as follows:

West Sussex Transport Plan Themes

- Prosperous West Sussex: impact the scheme will have on sustainable economic prosperity, and the delivery of development and regeneration plans.
- Healthy West Sussex: impact the scheme will have on accommodating the needs of an ageing population, light pollution, noise pollution, air quality, allowing people to live healthy lifestyles, and ensuring access to local facilities and services.
- Protected West Sussex: impact the scheme will have on achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050, minimising impacts on the historic, natural and built environment, conserving and enhancing biodiversity, and adapting to the effects of climate change.

- Connected West Sussex: impact the scheme will have on the efficiency of the road network (e.g. addressing congestion and rat running), addressing road safety issues, improving the attractiveness of rail and bus networks and their integration with other modes, and extending and improving the network of active travel facilities.

Assurance

- Deliverability: scheme maturity, land availability, scheme dependencies, and timeframes.
- Financial: availability and expiry of external funding, whole life costs, benefit cost ratios, and income generation.
- Technical: compliance with national and local standards and requirements.
- Legal: compliance with statutory duties and responsibilities, the Equality Duty, legal obligations, and any other relevant approvals e.g. planning permission.
- Political Alignment: support of the Local Member, local community, and other stakeholders.
- Policy Alignment: alignment with corporate non-transport plans, policies and strategies, and the statutory 'Development Plan'.

Working with Communities

- 2.6 It is recommended that one point of entry is developed for all external applicants seeking to make any change on the highway. Currently, applicants are expected to decide whether their schemes are Community TROs, Community Highway Schemes or Local Transport Improvements, which is confusing and unnecessary. The proposed, more user-friendly approach would allow the applicant to submit one application that would be assessed by officers. Feedback would then be given to the applicant on how their scheme will be assessed/delivered and the associated timescales.
- 2.7 It has also been recognised that earlier involvement of engineering specialisms in the development of Community Highway Schemes will avoid last minute changes to schemes as part of the moderation process. This in turn will prevent disappointment when communities learn later in the process that their aspirations were not technically feasible and will encourage a co-design approach between applicants and engineers.
- 2.8 The development of a Community Highways Scheme can be a complex and time-consuming matter and the County Council wants to support applicants in this process as far as possible. Therefore, a guidance document will be drafted to explain how Community Highway Schemes will be assessed and delivered, providing practical advice and tips for applicants as they develop their ideas. This will be made available on the County Council website and provided to all County Councillors and Town/Parish/Neighbourhood Councils.

Faster Delivery

- 2.9 Whilst the vast majority of the Highway Improvement Programme will take two years to deliver due to the complexity of the schemes, there are a handful of 'simple' schemes each year that could be designed and delivered in one year. For these schemes, it is recommended that they are delivered through the County Council's existing Frameworks as small programmes of works.
- 2.10 It is important to note that a preliminary assessment would be required at the beginning of any simple scheme to make sure it could be delivered in one year. It will not be possible to simply 'fast track' schemes the applicant believes to be simple as this will be very likely to cause delays and potential cost uncertainties if the necessary design work is not fully completed.
- 2.11 Any simple scheme must:
- cost less than £25,000 to deliver
 - not require a Road Safety Audit
 - not require a complex TRO
 - not be part of a wider programme of works in the area
 - have full support of the local community and Local Member

4 Other options considered (and reasons for not proposing)

- 3.1 The new Assessment Framework is being piloted this year with regard to the inclusion of Community Highway Schemes in the 2023/24 delivery programme; other schemes will continue to be assessed using existing methodologies. This is considered preferable to rolling out the Assessment Framework across the whole of the Highway Improvement Programme this year, because it will allow lessons to be learnt from the pilot and for small amendments to be made as necessary, before the new Framework is finalised and used to assess and prioritise all potential schemes for inclusion in the Highways Improvement Programme from 2024/25 onwards.
- 3.2 The Assessment Framework could be rolled out across the whole of the Highway Improvement Programme this year, but the pilot will ensure a well-managed implementation and will allow, following a review, for small amendments to aspects, such as the weightings.

5 Consultation, engagement and advice

- 4.1 The recommendations within the report have been developed in consultation with internal stakeholders from across the Highway Improvement Programme. This has included workshops to develop the approach and to test and refine the new Assessment Framework.
- 4.2 Developing recommendations were presented to the Communities, Highways and Environment Scrutiny Committee in March 2022. The Committee was supportive of the proposed new ways of working with communities and approach to prioritisation of schemes.

6 Finance

- 6.1 Although the introduction of the Assessment Framework has no additional financial implications, it will help to ensure that the Capital Highway

Improvement Programme includes schemes that deliver best value for West Sussex.

- 6.2 The Assessment Framework requires officers to review existing s106 contributions available for improvement work and allows informed decisions to be taken on the allocation of funding to schemes that best deliver against corporate objectives. It also prioritises schemes that have time limited funding allocated to them to ensure funding is not lost through poor programming.

7 Risk implications and mitigations

Risk	Mitigating Action (in place or planned)
Expectations of external applicants will not be met when they submit requests for Community Highway Schemes. Either because they are not delivered in one year, or not prioritised	<p>Improved information on the website will clearly explain the process of assessment and the type of schemes that can be delivered in one year.</p> <p>Earlier involvement of the engineers will encourage a collaborative approach to the development of schemes.</p>
Increased demand for small scale improvements requires increased resourcing	<p>Historic programmes are being reviewed to better understand the potential scale of any such programme in the future.</p> <p>Moving forward, staff and financial resources will be considered annually in the development of the programme to ensure that they are achievable.</p>

8 Policy alignment and compliance

- 8.1 Our Council Plan – the Assessment Framework will ensure schemes identified for inclusion in the Highways Improvement Programme most effectively deliver County Council objectives, thereby ensuring the best use of resources.
- 8.2 West Sussex Transport Plan 2022-2036 – the vision and strategic objectives of the Plan, which was adopted by the County Council in April 2022, have been embedded in the Assessment Framework at both the Initial and the Detailed Assessment stages. Any scheme that progresses to the detailed stage will be assessed against each of the strategic objectives in the Plan, which are grouped under the themes of Prosperous, Healthy, Protected, and Connected West Sussex.
- 8.3 Legal Implications – although there are no implications relating to the recommendations within this report, the Assessment Framework requires project managers to consider whether schemes will help the Authority to meet statutory (non-transport) duties and responsibilities and whether there are legal requirements for the Authority to deliver schemes (e.g. under S106 agreements).
- 8.4 Equalities – an Equality Impact Report has been undertaken and is attached as Appendix A to this report. The assessment concludes that a detailed Equalities Impact Report was not required. The new Assessment Framework requires project managers to identify if schemes have potential positive or negative

impacts on those with protected characteristics. This is done at an early stage and schemes that have potential impacts will be required to complete a more detailed impact assessment to ensure the appropriate groups are consulted and, where possible, involved in the co-design of schemes (including to mitigate any adverse impacts).

- 8.5 Climate Change – although there are no implications relating to the recommendations within this report, the Assessment Framework requires project managers to assess scheme alignment with the Climate Change Strategy and to consider how the scheme might reduce reliance on fossil fuels and reduce carbon emissions and what impact it will have with regard to adapting to and becoming more resilient to a changing climate.
- 8.6 Public Health – although there are no implications relating to the recommendations within this report, the Assessment Framework requires project managers to assess how schemes might accommodate the needs of an ageing population, allow people to live more healthy lifestyles, and reduce community severance issues.
- 8.7 Crime and Disorder, and Social Value – no identified implications.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Equality Impact Report

Background papers

None