A26 Tonbridge to Tunbridge Wells - Proposed Cycle Route Design

To: Joint Transportation Board
Date: 18 July 2016
Main Portfolio Area: Planning & Transportation
Author of Report: Bartholomew Wren/Hilary Smith
Classification: Non-exempt
Ward: Culverden, St John’s, Southborough & High Brooms and Southborough North

SUMMARY

The Borough Cycling Strategy, adopted in March 2016, identifies the A26 between Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells town centres as a priority utility cycling route. The route benefits from some segregated infrastructure for cyclists at present; this is not however, consistent or continuous and requires further improvement to provide a higher quality route.

The Borough Council secured funding from the West Kent Local Sustainable Transport Fund during 2015/16, to prepare detailed plans to improve the route. Feedback and support is sought from JTB regarding the scope and detail of the plans, so that these can be finalised. Once complete, the plans will be used to support funding bids and development-related funding negotiations.

LINK TO

The Cycling Strategy and proposed A26 route improvements link to the Five Year Plan including:

Objectives - ‘A Prosperous Borough’ and ‘A Green Borough’

2.4 Challenges - “Addressing transport congestion: improvements to our local network and alleviating traffic congestion are crucial in order to encourage growth and improve ease of accessibility to Tunbridge Wells”.

6.3.3 A26 (Southborough & London Road) - Next Steps: “Work with Kent Highways Services to implement proposals put forward in the draft Transport Strategy to further ease traffic congestion in the centre of Royal Tunbridge Wells and secure funding from the South East Local Enterprise Partnership”.

In addition the proposed A26 route links to Kent County Council’s recently prepared Draft Active Travel Strategy which has the following aim:

‘to make active travel an attractive and realistic choice for short journeys in Kent. By developing and promoting accessible, safer and well-planned active travel opportunities, this Strategy will help to establish Kent as a pioneering county for active travel.’
**Report Status**

Report seeking feedback and support to take the project forward.

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**Route to Implementation/Timetable:**

The cycle route proposals will be subject to stakeholder consultation, in addition to consultation as part of the statutory process relating to revised Traffic Regulation Orders, which will be required to implement the proposals. This procedure is set out in: the Local Authorities’ Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996 (SI 1996/2489) as amended.

It is anticipated that funding may be available from the Kent Sustainable Improvements Programme to deliver a first phase of the route in this financial year. In addition there is £80k s106 funding for the upgrade of the section of the route between Culverden Park and Queens Road.

The programme for delivery is not yet finalised, however, it is expected that the cycle route will be delivered in stages as funding becomes available and works can be planned appropriately into the KCC highway works programme.

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**BACKGROUND/INTRODUCTION**

1. Tunbridge Wells Borough Council adopted its new Cycling Strategy in March 2016. The Strategy encourages active travel and identifies the shared commitment of TWBC and KCC to provide an enhanced cycle route network. It acknowledges that levels of cycling in Tunbridge Wells are relatively low at present, and that whilst the Borough has some cycle routes that link Royal Tunbridge Wells town centre to suburban areas, these are either incomplete or require further enhancement.

2. The Cycling Strategy is an implementation tool to assist partners in achieving the higher level objectives that are set out in the Borough Transport Strategy. Objective 6 in the Transport Strategy aims to increase the use of sustainable transport modes which include cycling and walking.

3. It is considered that every resident, worker and visitor should have the opportunity to cycle for everyday purposes (utility cycling). In order to achieve this, it is recognised that a range of measures and interventions are required to make cycling a more attractive proposition, especially for shorter local journeys. The lack of dedicated infrastructure is a significant barrier for many people in using a bicycle as part of their normal day to day life.

4. The Cycling Strategy identifies a network of routes within the urban areas of Royal Tunbridge Wells, Southborough, Paddock Wood and Cranbrook which require implementation and/or improvement. These are set out in priority order. Route 1 - Tonbridge to Tunbridge Wells town centres via the A26 is the highest priority as it is an inter-urban corridor that connects Royal Tunbridge Wells town centre with Southborough, other prominent residential communities and secondary schools. Once complete it is hoped that the route will link with Route 8 - A26 London Road to Dowding Way via Barnetts Wood as well as Route 5 - 21st Century Way.
5. The A26 is a key arterial road that is subject to heavy traffic flows, especially at peak times. Department for Transport annual average daily flow data for 2014 confirms that 85.7% of daily traffic is derived from cars and taxis in comparison to 0.5% of journeys by pedal cycle. It is also a designated Air Quality Management Area. A solution is required to increase the level of cycle use along the route which would contribute to congestion relief and improvements in air quality, as well as encouraging active travel.

6. Consultants have been appointed to prepare plans for the improvement of the cycle route. These are included separately at Appendix A, and are a further development of the route assessment that was undertaken to accompany the Borough Cycling Strategy. The plans include detailed annotations of the proposed alterations. The design approach is based upon the following criteria;

- Seek to provide a safe, coherent, comfortable and attractive route that conforms to established cycle route design principles, providing segregated space where this is achievable. Where this can’t be achieved consider reducing traffic speed as a means of improving perceived safety.
- Application of London Red Route principles which seek through design and enforcement to minimise stopping to maintain traffic flow and provide enhanced priority for cyclists.
- Take account of up-to-date guidance and legislation, including The Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2016.
- Use land that is within the ownership of Kent Highways, with the exception of revisions at Southborough Common (subject to agreement).

7. The proposals include the following key features:

- Where width is available existing advisory cycle lanes are widened to provide mandatory lanes (minimum 1.5m wide).
- Revised geometry at some side junctions, most of which include raised tables that provide an enhanced flush crossing arrangement for pedestrians. Raised tables also help to reduce the speed of vehicular turning movements.
- Inclusion of two bus stop bypass features north of the junctions with Culverden Park and Pennington Road (Southborough).
- Provision of continuous red surfacing throughout the scheme on all cycle lanes with priority for cyclists across side junctions.
- Removal of two short sections of on street parking on the western side of the A26 between Southfield Road and Beltring Road, and between Still Lane and Holden Road.
- Introduction of 20mph limit on the A26 between the junctions of Pennington Road and Holden Park Road (opportunities for introducing pilot 20mph areas within the Borough are being explored separately).
- Removal of southbound bus lane between the Hand and Sceptre and junction at Yew Tree Road to allow for cycle lanes to be introduced in both directions.
- Improvement of segregated provision at Mabledon to include the extension of shared use pedestrian and cycle paths both north and southbound.
- Provision of new shared use link on Quarry Hill (within Tonbridge & Malling Borough).

8. Options to provide some physical segregation between the mandatory cycle lanes and vehicular running lanes, continue to be discussed with KCC officers. The route could include the trial use of rumble strips within the separating solid white lines marking the cycle lane. This is subject to agreement and feedback from the appointed highway safety auditor in due course. It is recognised that the physical segregation of cycle
lanes can increase perceived safety and therefore, encourage less confident cyclists to use on carriageway routes.

9. It should be noted that the proposals do not include any segregated cycling infrastructure between the junction of Church Road (Southborough) and Mabledon. This is due to constraints of available highway land and topography, meaning that any solution would require costly land purchase and civil engineering which is considered to be unachievable. Reducing the 40mph speed limit along this stretch of road has been considered but is not supported by the consultants. In reaching this decision they have been guided by the DfT guidance on Setting Local Speed Limits (Circular 01/2013); the guiding principle of which is that speed limits should be evidence-led and encourage self-compliance. The key factors that should be taken into account in making decisions on speed limits include:

- Accident history;
- Highway geometry and engineering;
- Road function;
- Composition of road users (including levels of vulnerable road users);
- Existing traffic speeds; and
- Highway environment.

10. Due to the existing traffic speeds, the absence of residential or commercial frontages and minimal pedestrian movements on the A26 north of Southborough, the consultants do not consider that the justification exists to reduce the speed limit to 30mph. Even if this was pursued, it is not considered that it would result in a significant uptake in cycling amongst those groups that do not currently travel along this stretch of road.

WHAT IS THE ISSUE THAT REQUIRES A DECISION AND WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE PEOPLE OF TUNBRIDGE WELLS?

11. Feedback and support is required to progress the delivery of the A26 cycle route. Once implemented the project will provide a higher standard of cycle route for the benefit of local residents and those who work in the Borough.

WHO HAVE WE CONSULTED AND HOW?

12. To date members of the Tunbridge Wells Cycling Forum have been consulted informally on the detail of the design proposals at a meeting held on 25 April. Discussions have also been undertaken with KCC Highways and a separate meeting held with The Tunbridge Wells Bicycle Users Group.

13. Going forwards further consultation is required with stakeholders including, the Cycling Forum, KCC Highways, Southborough Town Council, owners/occupiers of premises fronting the route, bus operators plus other consultees as necessary.

WHAT FEEDBACK HAS BEEN RECEIVED?

14. Following the meeting of the Cycling Forum, The Tunbridge Wells Bicycle Users Group (TWBUG) has expressed overall support for the scheme but raised some concerns regarding the design of parts of the scheme, particularly the lack of infrastructure to the north of Southborough Common. The following specific points have been made:

- focus on those parts of the route which could be built to the highest standard.
• prioritise the stretch from the centre of town to Yew Tree Road, with Southborough High Street considered as a second priority, when funds allow.
• concern expressed about the recently implemented scheme at the Yew Tree Road and Speldhurst Road junctions, which has included no cycling provision southbound and limited provision northbound, contrary to the wishes of the JTB in [October] 2015.
• ensure that the design takes into account the possibility of a 20mph zone being implemented to the east of St John's Road, allowing for the cycle route to be raised to pavement level and given priority over side junctions.
• consider reducing access to some of the road along the eastern side of St John's Road, to reduce rat-running and improving safety for cyclists.

These points will be considered further as the design is finalised.

HOW WILL THE DECISION BE COMMUNICATED?

15. The outcome of ongoing stakeholder consultation and the more formal consultation relating to the Traffic Regulation Orders that are necessary to implement the proposals; will be reported to the Joint Transportation Board prior to the delivery of the cycle route improvements.

CONCLUSIONS

16. The A26 is a priority cycle route as it is an inter-urban corridor that connects Royal Tunbridge Wells town centre with Southborough, other residential communities and secondary schools. It is a heavily congested route that suffers from poor air quality. The cycle route proposal will create a significantly improved route that will become integrated with the wider cycle route network in due course.

17. It is perceived that there is a high level of unmet demand for cycling especially within the wider urban area of Tunbridge Wells. It is hoped that the route will appeal to those that have yet to consider cycling for local journeys as well as existing cyclists.

RECOMMENDATION:

18. That the Joint Transportation Board supports the principle of the A26 cycle route proposals and the approach to implementation which will include:

• A programme of stakeholder consultation (as set out above);
• The finalisation of route design proposals;
• Applications for funding and negotiations with developers; and
• The agreement of a phased delivery timetable with KCC.

19. Once consultations have been undertaken the final route proposals will be brought back to JTB.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION:

20. To progress towards the implementation of proposals that will provide significant improvements to the existing A26 cycle route. The route will form a central part of the Borough’s urban cycle route network and will encourage more people to cycle in the future.
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Director’s / Head of Service’s Job Title – Director of Planning & Development/Head of Economic Development

APPENDICES TO REPORT
APPENDIX A-F – A26 Proposed Cycle Route Design – Drawing Numbers 11011-T-07 to 11011-T-12