

A26 Tonbridge to Tunbridge Wells Cycle Route

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Originating Authority	Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Final Decision Taker	Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Exemption	Non-exempt
Classification	For Recommendation

Recommendation:

That the Joint Transportation Board supports the progress of the A26 cycle route proposals and the following next steps:

- Undertake the statutory Traffic Regulation Orders consultation for the changes to the route in early 2017;
- Submit the business case for funding to the Local Enterprise Partnership Accountability Board in early 2017; and
- Agree a delivery timetable with KCC, aiming for a start in June 2017.

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 but this requires further improvement to provide a higher quality route and encourage more cycling.

The proposed designs for the route were published for a six week consultation beginning on 7 November 2016. Following the consultation it is now recommended that the JTB agrees to support Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) and Kent County Council (KCC) in taking the scheme forward.

Report Status:

Report seeking support to take the project forward in the financial year 2017/18.

Route to Implementation/Timetable:

The scheme will be subject to further consultation as part of the statutory process to revise the relevant Traffic Regulation Orders required to implement the proposals. This will be undertaken between February and April 2017.

A total of £1.2 million is available from the underspend on the recent signalisation scheme at Yew Tree Road/Speldhurst Road on the A26 and a business case will be submitted to the Local Enterprise Partnership Accountability Board proposing that this money be used to implement Phase 1 of the cycle route starting at the Tunbridge Wells end. It is anticipated that additional funding will be available from the Kent Sustainable Improvements Programme to deliver the remaining part of the route. In addition, TWBC is currently holding £80K Section 106 funding for the upgrade of the stretch of the route between Culverden Park and Queens Road.

A timetable for implementation will need to be approved by KCC but it is anticipated that the cycle route will be delivered in stages starting in June 2017.

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.'

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 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.

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

3. A decision is required on whether to take forward the A26 cycle route proposal and implement the scheme within the financial year 2017/18.

WHO HAVE WE CONSULTED AND HOW?

4. The consultation programme started on 7 November and covered both the sections of the route in Tunbridge Well Borough and also in Tonbridge & Malling Borough (to the Brook Street junction).
5. The consultation programme included a number of elements as follows:
 - Publication of the route proposals on the Kent County Council Consultation Portal along with a questionnaire for feedback.
 - Two drop-in evenings held at Tunbridge Wells Grammar School for Boys on 14 and 28 November between 5pm and 8pm attended by TWBC officers and consultants DHA Planning. These events were well attended with approximately 40 people visiting on 14 November and over 50 people on 28 November.
 - Promotion of the consultation via social media.
 - Leaflet drop to all properties (residential and business) along the A26 between Tonbridge to Tunbridge Wells town centres – with details of the events and the on-line questionnaire.
 - Signs on lamp columns along the A26 to inform about the consultation.
 - Direct mail-out to relevant bus companies and discussions with Arriva at the Quality Bus Partnership meeting (2 December).
 - Direct mail-out to local schools.
 - Officer attendance at meeting of the Tunbridge Wells Access Group (28 November).
 - Direct email to relevant contacts that have expressed an interest in the project.
6. The consultation closed on 18 December 2016. A statutory consultation on the Traffic Regulation Orders for aspects of the route is also required and will be undertaken in early 2017.

WHAT FEEDBACK HAS BEEN RECEIVED?

7. A total of 212 people/organisations responded to the consultation via the on-line or paper questionnaire. Of these 82% were local residents. Overall the majority of people that responded via the questionnaire either strongly agree or agree with the proposed route designs at 67%. This compares with 24% of respondents that either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the proposals and 9% that neither agreed nor disagreed.
8. There is a substantial level of support for the scheme amongst the respondents, but the consultation also raised a number of issues/concerns and these are set out in the table below with a response to each:

Issue	Response
The proposals will create more congestion on the route	The intention of the scheme is to encourage more cycling and reduce the overall number of car journeys on the A26. The proposals do not significantly reduce junction or link capacity and will therefore have a negligible impact on motorists journey times.
Concern about removal of bus lane on Southborough	This concern is understood. However, removal of the bus lane is required to provide a cycle lane northbound on this uphill part of the route (where cyclists are vulnerable). This is a very short stretch of bus lane and therefore has a limited impact on the overall journey times for buses along the A26. It is not the intention to remove other longer stretches of bus lane that provide greater benefits to buses.
Concern about 20mph restriction in Southborough	There is no opportunity to provide cycle lanes through Southborough due to the width of the carriageway, therefore a speed reduction scheme is proposed to provide safer conditions for cyclists.
Lack of physical segregation for additional safety	This has been considered carefully but it is not possible to provide physical segregation on the route. This is due to the width and character of the road but would also add significantly to the cost of the scheme.
No infrastructure provided between the Hand & Sceptre and Mabledon	This has been considered carefully. Unfortunately, there is no opportunity to provide cycle lanes on this stretch of the A26 due to the width of the road. A scheme to widen the road or provide a shared pedestrian/cycle route on the eastern side of the road would be cost prohibitive at present due to the significant change in levels and the proximity of private property boundaries. This does not mean that this could not be re-visited in the future if significant funding became available.
Removal of parking bays between Beltring Road and Southfields Road in St Johns	Concern about this aspect of the proposal is understood. However, removal of these bays is required to provide a continuous lane along this section of the route. The presence of on-street residents parking is unusual and not appropriate on a strategic route such as the A26.

HOW WILL THE DECISION BE COMMUNICATED?

9. The formal consultation relating to the Traffic Regulation Orders that are necessary to implement the proposal will be reported to the Joint Transportation Board in April 2017 prior to the delivery of the cycle route improvements.
10. Otherwise TWBC and KCC will communicate the decision to progress the scheme via social media, website and press releases as appropriate.

CONCLUSIONS

11. The consultation feedback has shown that there is significant support for improving the cycle route along the A26.

Appendices to the Report

- Appendix A – Public Consultation Drawings H20
- Appendix B – Public Consultation Drawings H21
- Appendix C – Public Consultation Drawings H22
- Appendix D – Public Consultation Materials