

Report to:	Lead Member for Transport and Environment
Date of meeting:	19 December 2016
By:	Director of Communities, Economy and Transport
Title:	A27 East of Lewes Improvement Scheme – Proposed Consultation Response
Purpose:	To seek Lead Member approval for the County Council’s consultation response to Highways England’s consultation on smaller scale improvements to the A27 between Lewes and Polegate.

RECOMMENDATION: The Lead Member is recommended to approve the County Council’s proposed response to Highways England’s consultation on smaller scale improvements to the A27 between Lewes and Polegate

1 Background Information

1.1 The A27 from Falmer to Pevensey, along with the A21 (except in Hastings), the A259 from Pevensey to Guldeford (except in Hastings) and the A26 (from Beddingham to Newhaven) form the strategic road network within the county and is the responsibility of Highways England (HE).

1.2 There has been significant under investment in the A27 over the last 50 years and as a consequence the road is currently not fit for purpose to fulfil its function of carrying strategic and long distance traffic. In 2013, the Government announced a series of improvement studies to help identify and fund solutions to tackle some of the notorious and long standing hotspots in the country. One of these studies focussed on the A27 corridor between Portsmouth and Pevensey. Following an analysis of the evidence available and the potential issues / future pressures that may arise, the feasibility improvement study identified three priority areas along the A27 corridor for further consideration – Arundel, Worthing and east of Lewes.

1.3 For east of Lewes, the study identified that there were considerable operational issues in terms of network performance, journey time reliability, safety and resilience. The study considered the potential options – ranging from localised bypasses to more comprehensive offline solutions to address these issues, with an assessment of the strength of the economic case including whether they demonstrated value for money and were deliverable.

1.4 Following the outcomes of the A27 improvement study in 2014, the Chancellor in his 2014 Autumn Statement and subsequently the Department for Transport’s (DfT) Roads Investment Strategy: Investment Plan published in March 2015, identified that around £75m had been set aside for improvements east of Lewes. A summary of the A27 Feasibility Study outcomes is at **Appendix 1**.

1.5 Notwithstanding, the A27 Reference Group, which brings together local MPs, local authority leaders and the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP’s) along with the business community, lobbied Government and HE at the time, and continue to do so, for an offline dual carriageway improvement to the A27 between Lewes and Polegate to support economic growth in the county. The case for a more comprehensive solution focuses on supporting the delivery of the planned growth in the Eastbourne / South Wealden area as well as additional housing and employment space coming forward in the Hailsham / Polegate area through Wealden’s Local Plan review.

2. Supporting Information

2.1 The DfT and HE appointed consultants to take forward the development of the smaller scale capacity improvements and sustainable transport improvements using the available funding in the Roads Investment Strategy. HE and their consultants have been developing these proposals over the last 12 months and HE consulted on their proposals between 28 October and 8 December. These proposals include schemes at Selmeston, Drusillas Roundabout, Wilmington and Polegate.

2.2 Further details of Highways England’s proposed smaller scale capacity improvements for the A27 east of Lewes are at **Appendix 2**. A copy of the HE’s consultation document is available in the Members Room.

2.3 HE have proposed the enlargement of the existing roundabout near Drusillas to provide two lane entry on the A27 arms of the junction thereby increasing its capacity. The junction is a congestion hotspot on the A27, particularly during the morning and evening peaks, and also provides access to Alfriston and Drusillas Park to the south as well as Berwick Station to the north. From HE's assessment, this will have significant beneficial effects in terms of improved journey time and reliability; no significant environmental effects and a very high benefit to cost ratio. It is recommended that this proposal is supported.

2.4 In addition, HE have put forward proposals for improving the capacity of the existing A27 / A2270 signalised junction at Polegate with two further options which incrementally improve the link between the junction and the Cophall roundabout. Whilst all of the proposals will result in reduced congestion at the junction at peak times and all have very high benefit:cost ratios, it is recommended that the proposal which involves railway bridge widening and the provision of two lanes in both directions between the A27 / A2270 and Cophall Roundabout junctions is supported. Whilst it is the most expensive of the three options, it offers a greater journey time saving through the junction compared to the other two options as well as larger benefits in terms of journey reliability and safety. With the current proposals, residents in Brown Jack Avenue in Polegate wanting to turn right and then travel up to the Cophall Roundabout will not be able to do so and will have to use Gainsborough Lane further along the A27. This will need to be reviewed should these proposals come forward, to ensure that residents in Brown Jack Avenue are able to make all traffic movements into and out of the junction as at present.

2.5 Three options have been put forward for the Selveston area – a new bypass to the far south of the village, a bypass close to the village and upgrading the existing A27 through Selveston. Whilst all of the options do provide some slight benefits in terms of safety, none offer significantly beneficial journey time savings – between 15 and 60 seconds – relative to the costs ranging from £45 to £55m. The two bypass options will also encroach on the South Downs National Park. As a consequence, the benefit:cost ratios (BCR) for all options are poor with a BCR of 0 for upgrading the existing route through the village, and 0.5 and 0.8 for the near and far southern bypass options respectively. Therefore, as the benefits do not justify the potential level of investment required, it is recommended that none of the Selveston options put forward are supported.

2.6 HE have consulted on two options for the Wilmington crossroads junction both of which would create a staggered junction, with one upgrading the pedestrian islands and the other providing an underpass in order to improve crossing on foot at the junction. Both options produce slight benefits in terms of journey time savings and reliability as well as to safety and community severance at the junction. However, the costs range between £10 – £12m and as a consequence both options represent poor value for money with a BCR of 0.9 for both. On this basis, it is recommended that neither of these options are supported.

2.7 HE are also proposing the introduction of a shared use path for pedestrians and cyclists along the length of the A27. At present, there is a shared use facility between Southerham Roundabout and Burgh Lane and, as proposed, this would be continue to the north of the A27 to Selveston where it would cross and continue south of the A27 to Polegate. It is recognised there would be slight benefits as a result of fewer delays from traffic overtaking cyclists and reducing the risk of accidents involving pedestrians and cyclists on the A27 as well as greater benefits in linking communities along the A27. However, the number of pedestrians and cyclists likely to use the route are still only going to be relatively small to justify the level of investment, hence the poor benefit:cost ratio of 0.9. Therefore, it is recommended that HE need to demonstrate the potential need for the route to justify the level of investment being proposed.

2.8 Our support for the Polegate and Drusillas roundabout proposals is on the proviso that we would not want to see these smaller scale improvements compromise our wider ambitions for more comprehensive improvements between Lewes and Polegate coming forward.

3. Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

3.1 Following the outcomes of the A27 Feasibility Improvement Study in 2014, £75m was allocated in the DfT's Roads Investment Strategy towards a package of smaller scale improvements to the A27 east of Lewes. HE have developed a series of proposals which are currently subject to consultation.

3.2 It is recommended that the County Council advises HE in our consultation response that we do not support the proposals for Wilmington and Selveston which have been assessed as offering poor value for money and that further work is required to justify the need for the shared footway / cycleway along the whole length of the A27. It is also recommended that we support the proposals to improve the Drusillas roundabout and the improvement to the A27 / A2270 signalised junction along with the railway bridge widening and provision of two

lanes in both directions between the A27 / A2270 and Cophall Roundabout junctions which both offer very high value for money. This support is on the proviso that these proposed smaller scale improvements do not compromise our, and our local authority and business partners', wider ambitions for a more comprehensive improvement between Lewes and Polegate coming forward.

RUPERT CLUBB

Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

Contact Officer: Jon Wheeler

Tel. No. 01273 482212

Email: jon.wheeler@eastsussex.gov.uk

LOCAL MEMBERS:

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

None