

Report to	Policy & Programme Committee
Date	24 July 2014
By	People & Places Manager
Title of Report	South Downs National Park A27 Position Statement
Purpose of Report	To approve a SDNPA Position Statement for the A27 and to provide background information to the position statement and inform members of the Highways Agency timeline for the process

Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to:

- 1) Approve the position statement (section 2)**
 - 2) Note the background information and the principles (sections 3 to 8)**
 - 3) Note the Highways Agency timeline (section 9).**
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I. Introduction

- I.1 The A27 forms an important part of the Strategic Road Network (SRN) providing the main east - west link for commercial and non-commercial vehicle users to access the key north and south routes across the SDNP (A3(M), A23/M23, A26).
- I.2 As well as managing and maintaining the A27, the Highways Agency (HA) has wider responsibility for planning the long term future and development of the SRN. As a consequence of 'A Fresh Start for the Strategic Road Network' published in Nov 2011 (Alan Cook) the HA was recommended to work with local authorities (LAs) and local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) to initiate route based strategies for the SRN.
- I.3 The then Secretary of State accepted the recommendation in the Government's response (May 2102), stating that it would enable a smarter approach to investment planning and support greater participation in planning for the SRN from local and regional stakeholders.
- I.4 A two stage process followed whereby an evidence base was gathered to help identify performance issues on routes and anticipate future challenges, whilst taking account of asset condition and operational requirements, and gaining a better understanding of the local growth opportunities.
- I.5 The second stage involves the HA using the evidence to take forward a programme of work to identify possible solutions for a prioritised set of challenges and opportunities.
- I.6 The Spending Review in June 2013 committed the Government to tackling some of the most notorious and long-standing road hot spots in the country by undertaking a small set of feasibility studies targeted at key locations and problems. The announcement included a commitment to conduct a study on the A27 corridor as one of seven studies that the DfT is now taking forward.
- I.7 The Coast to Capital LEP Strategic Economic Plan identifies improving the A27 as a priority in order to stimulate economic development, and in September 2012 the SDNPA added some caveats to the proposal in the Arun Local Plan which gave support in principle for the safeguarding of a (not defined) alternative route for the A27 around Arundel. SDNPA members, whilst not giving any specific approvals added some caveats to this general support in 2012 reinforcing the message that the safeguarding should be i) 'in principle' rather than for a particular route and ii) noting that there have been changes in road construction and landscaping techniques that have developed in recent years.

- 1.8 However, Defra guidance, 'English National Parks and the Broads - UK Government Vision and Circular 2010', providing policy guidance for those bodies with statutory functions, specifically instructs such bodies that, 'there is a strong presumption against any significant road widening or the building of new roads through a Park unless it can be shown there are compelling reasons for the new or enhanced capacity and with any benefits outweighing the costs significantly. Any investment in trunk roads should be directed to developing routes for long distance traffic which avoids the Parks'.
- 1.9 With many conflicting ideas of what could be achieved, it is helpful for partners and the SDNPA to have an agreed view on what the SDNPA sees as the main issues and impacts on the South Downs.

2. Position Statement

- 2.1 Where the A27 runs through the South Downs it is passing through a nationally designated, protected landscape. Any proposed schemes must take into consideration all potential impacts on the special qualities of the National Park and look to improve rather than damage the special qualities. Identifying the correct issues is essential to ensuring that the correct solutions are found.
- 2.2 The SDNPA would like to see a range of joined-up imaginative and sensitive schemes which accord with the Government's transport hierarchy and align with National Park purposes. Past evidence shows that the majority of traffic on the A27 is local. Solutions should look at how the A27 links with the local road network and use necessary means available to encourage all people to reduce non-essential car journeys, travel at different times, and make more use of trains and bus services.
- 2.3 All solutions should aim to reduce CO₂ emissions and improve air quality, the landscape, biodiversity and the lives of those who live, work and visit the SDNP.

3. Supporting Information for the Position Statement – identifying principles with which the SDNPA will continue to work with the relevant agencies

3.1 Supporting Information - Section 62 Duty

- 3.2 The twin purposes of National Parks are: i) to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage, and ii) to promote the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the park. Further, the SDNPA has a duty to work in partnership to foster the social and economic well-being of local communities within the National Park, in support of the twin NP purposes.
- 3.3 Under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act (1949) (Section 11A(2)), amended by Section 62 (2) of the Environment Act (1995), any public organisation working in a National Park has a responsibility to have regard to the twin purposes of the National Park.

Principle

A. Any scheme brought forward by a public organisation must demonstrate how it positively supports the twin purposes of the NP as defined in Section 62 of the Environment Act (1995).

4. Supporting Information – the A27 in the context of the Government's transport hierarchy, and the routes impact on the SDNP

- 4.1 The Government's transport hierarchy (developed by the Sustainable Development Commission and subsequently adopted by DfT) provides the framework for the provision and management of transport within the UK. Matching the hierarchy, which also appears in the South Downs Partnership Management Plan, to the purposes and duties of the National Park guides the SDNPA's responses and actions.
- 4.2 The transport hierarchy sets clear priorities:
- Reduce the need to travel
 - Switch to sustainable modes

- Manage existing networks more effectively
 - Create extra (car related) capacity only when alternative methods have been fully explored.
- 4.3 The South Downs Partnership Management Plan sets out a number of Policies that encourage other forms of transport and look to alleviate pressures on the highways network.
- 4.4 The A27 features in the HA's top priorities for roads that need improvement in the country, whilst the parallel running rail network which is under severe passenger, timetable and infrastructure pressure, does not have a similar priority and has limited resources allocated that would help contribute to a solution for the A27.
- 4.5 In considering its position the SDNPA needs to weigh up the potential benefits (economic, relieving congestion on smaller roads within the NP etc) against not only the obvious landscape and biodiversity impacts, but also the effect on ecosystem services, tranquillity and other special qualities.
- 4.6 Roads, traffic and their associated infrastructure, including signage and lighting, can have a significant impact on the communities through which they pass, as well as to the local distinctiveness, tranquillity, dark night skies and biodiversity. Creating wider route corridors will further exacerbate habitat loss, fragmentation and degradation, and will increase the barriers to movement of species. Although it is part of the strategic road network the A27 corridor should still be considered as an integral part of the landscape of the SDNP and efforts should be made to seek to reduce the impacts of it and its traffic on biodiversity, cultural heritage, landscape, local communities and visitors.
- 4.7 Opportunities should be taken whenever and wherever possible to improve both the environment and the wider landscape, creating tangible biodiversity benefits which either increase net natural capital or, where losses are unavoidable, mitigate for these losses. Relevant surveys should be undertaken to ensure up to date evidence is used to properly inform decisions. Practical measures that enhance biodiversity (like planting wildflower-rich road margins, creating reed-beds to filter harmful run off before the water finds its way into the water-course, or planting native tree species to help conceal the road and mask vehicular sounds) can all provide points of interest for users of the A27 and can create safer driving conditions where drivers are stimulated by their surroundings, thus bringing real benefits for motorists and communities in the Downs, whilst delivering benefits for biodiversity and the landscape.

Principle

- B. The agencies responsible for transport provision across the south coast corridor are encouraged to work with one another to ensure that the provision and choice of modes of services are a realistic option.**
- C. Landscape, cultural heritage and biodiversity impacts should be paramount in the consideration and design of any scheme.**
- D. Consideration and care must be taken by the highways engineers to ensure that highways schemes are designed and constructed to positively contribute to the special qualities.**

5. Supporting Information – the economy

- 5.1 *The HA Route Based Strategy states that: The strategic road network is key in promoting growth of the UK economy, and alleviating congestion can realise economic benefits – Evidence Report South Coast Central Feb 2014 (p13).*
- 5.2 The economic benefit of the SDNP to the UK economy is in the region of £333m annually. The picture in the SDNP is of a very distributed network economy built on hundreds of SMEs and home businesses. Planned improvements to broadband coverage, including the national roll out of SuperFast broadband, will enable broadband access for some SMEs and home-based businesses and help to reduce the need to access transport networks. The economic arguments for and against improved A27 links need to take into account the

inland rural economy not just the needs of the larger coastal conurbations and the regions further east and west and international markets.

- 5.3 It is essential that when considering the economic impact of the A27 the basis for the cost / benefit analysis is transparently laid out for all to scrutinise. Much of the research subsequently conducted after the previous multi-modal survey on the cost / benefit equation for road widening schemes has undermined the claims for economic benefit made for many schemes at their proposed stage.

Principle

E. That any scheme proposed transparently lays out the cost / benefit effects to the local community of the SDNP.

6. Supporting Information – impact on local communities within the SDNP

- 6.1 *The HA Route Based Strategy states that:*
- *Travellers and particular business travellers and logistics operators like to plan their journeys to arrive on time and minimise unproductive time (p11);*
 - *By 2020 the strategic framework for road safety 2011 forecasts the potential for a 40% reduction of the numbers killed or seriously injured, compared to 2005-2009; the HA are working towards this aspirational goal (p18);*
 - *4 out of 5 accidents involve cars; disproportionately high numbers of fatalities or serious injuries involve motor cycles, pedestrians and large goods vehicles (p20).*
- 6.2 Major highways schemes can have a huge detrimental impact on the landscape and communities through which they pass, and it is incumbent on designers of schemes to seek the best solution for a number of factors including journey times and ease of access, but also in terms of reducing the impact of the road and its users on the landscape and surrounding communities.
- 6.3 Congestion can of course occur at any time night or day, and so the issue to be addressed is where congestion occurs regularly and at certain peak times.
- 6.4 Peak times vary for locations and affects but generally become apparent around 7.30am-9.30am in the morning and 4.30pm-6.30pm in the evening. In some locations congestion is more marked in one direction, and is not really felt on the opposite carriageway.
- 6.5 In normal circumstances journey times **are** reliable even in peak times. Commuters know that their journey will take approximately 'x' many minutes / hours at peak times and less at off-peak times. With use of existing technology it should be possible to produce real time information that journey planners can use to schedule the most efficient route for their fleet, anticipating journey times to include on and off-peak times.
- 6.6 Increasing capacity at problem junctions or managing flows will lead to increased usage up to and on those sections, and allow vehicles to get to the next pinch point sooner. Ultimately what will be evident are knock-on effects and congestion at previously uncongested points on the SRN and adding extra vehicles to already congested but not 'improved' sections and to the feeder networks. Overall, journey times may not be improved for many users, and if journey times are reduced in some areas then that may also encourage commuters to travel over further distances, impacting elsewhere.
- 6.7 Increasing the flow of traffic usually results in increased speeds. As speeds rise so do the consequences of higher speed collisions, leading to increased 'killed or seriously injured' (KSI) statistics. Slower speeds bring less serious accidents resulting in reduced KSI figures that the highway authorities aspire to.
- 6.8 Figures collected from the HA from 2004 to April 2013 for HA Area 4 (part of West Sussex and East Sussex) show volumes across the region. Locally for the A27, there are a couple of minor increases of the order of 2.5% - 5%, but these are not showing as increases elsewhere on the network, suggesting that the increased traffic has come from local roads and quickly moves off the network.
- 6.9 The A27 can form a barrier for those communities, groups and individuals whose interests

lie on either side of the A27 and who might not have a bridge, the agility or confidence or any other means to help them across the A27. For example, the provision of buses at Wilmington, East Sussex which the elderly, or families with pushchairs and small children in tow could use, are almost worthless if its potential users cannot or will not attempt to cross the A27 to access the bus stop.

- 6.10 Similarly, though there is occasional provision for walkers / riders at some busier locations in the form of formalised crossing points or bridges most of the rights of way network comes to an abrupt stop at the A27 with no provision for horse-riders or less agile walkers to navigate the busy road to continue their journey on the other side of the A27.
- 6.11 Schemes that improve flow at junctions can have perverse consequences, for example the recent works to build a bridge over the railway line at Beddingham and provide for a dedicated left turn from the A26 to Seaford, essentially designed to improve safety and encourage more train services, actually results in some journeys that would otherwise have been made by train (because of the time needed to drive through this junction) now being made by car. Additionally, the dedicated left turn with reduced waiting times encourages more traffic to use it than might otherwise have gone from Eastbourne to Lewes via the A27.
- 6.12 Reducing waiting times at traffic lights between transitions can mean that at peak times there is an almost constant stream of traffic further along the road from the junction. For example, Long Man Parish Council has reported at various meetings with the HA / ESCC that residents at Wilmington, west of Polegate find it difficult to find a suitable gap in the traffic at peak times where they have sufficient time to cross following 'improvements' to the Polegate intersection including decreasing traffic light waiting times.
- 6.13 Providing better crossing opportunities, encouraging drivers to drive at an appropriate speed and creating a safer environment for all users should be a pre-requisite of any scheme on the A27.

Principle

- F. Safety is paramount, and should not be compromised. Schemes that embrace new evidence and research to support emerging techniques which seek to increase safety whilst reducing the impact of the road in support of the SQs are particularly welcomed.***
- G. That the impacts of changing traffic volumes are considered on the areas surrounding the main project and suitable mitigation and enhancement works are identified as part of any proposed scheme.***
- H. Significant works to improve on the existing situation of accessibility, both across and alongside the A27 for all users, is built into any scheme.***
- I. That the HA continues to use best research to monitor traffic volumes to allow trends to be identified.***

7. Supporting Information – alternatives and additions

- 7.1 It is essential that the transport hierarchy and PMP policies outlined earlier are fully explored, scoped out and implemented. The Multi-Modal Study provides a solid evidence base with which to look at the whole transport / travel issue and compare the situation now with any proposed schemes. Upgrading the coastal railway line from Ashford to Southampton, for example, would help remove some traffic off the A27 and provide an excellent means for leisure users to access the attractions of the SDNP from strategic 'gateway' stations along the route.

Principle

- J. Consideration of previous research and evidence of recommendations implemented are fully taken account of as part of any justification for any new scheme.***

8. Summary

- 8.1 There are conflicting views on the best approach to developing the A27, but correctly identifying the problem(s) will help identify the correct solution(s). The SDNPA will comment on any proposed schemes that come forward on the basis of best available evidence on the impacts upon the Special Qualities of the National Park.
- 8.2 Current evidence suggests predominantly local congestion issues, with bottle-necks at certain peak times, both on the A27 and local roads to it, leading to (so-called) unreliable journey times making it difficult for business to plan deliveries / supplies / journeys etc.
- 8.3 Previously, the multi-modal study showed that the majority use of the A27 was by local traffic. If this is still the case then options need to include understanding more about the nature of these journeys and looking at different ways of reducing demand, spreading / flattening the peak, improving the modal mix of trains and buses and considering the trunk road (HA responsibility) in concert with the local roads network (LHA responsibility).
- 8.4 Any proposals should take fully into account the potential for a mixture of imaginative solutions and proven methods to encourage more modal shift, taking non-essential vehicle users off the A27 and onto alternative modes of transport, and influencing working and recreational patterns to free up capacity on the A27, especially where it runs through the nationally designated, protected landscape of the South Downs.

9. Highways Agency Timeline

Highways Agency	Completion date
Completion of stage 1 of study – evidence gathering and problem prioritisation	End of March 2014
Completion of stage 2 of study – identify the range of infrastructure proposals that could address the problems along the corridor	End July 2014
Completion of stage 3 of study – work to assess the affordability, value for money and deliverability of prioritised infrastructure proposals	Autumn 2014
Design and implementation	The main priority schemes will come out of the £24bn pot by 2021. Depending on how much those cost then this A27 scheme and others like it may be progressed subsequently for development and implementation

10. Links to core values and guiding principles

- 10.1 Section 3 of this report makes specific reference to the relevant PMP policies covering the transport elements. The Duty of the SDNPA is to foster the socio / economic well-being of the local communities within the National Park in pursuit of NP Purposes. This Duty covers the rest of the issues noted.
- 10.2 This report supports the Corporate Plan, Operational Plan and Local Plan.
- 10.3 This report will be communicated internally and externally, in consultation with the Communications Manager or other relevant members of the Communications Team, as appropriate.

11. Resources

- 11.1 No significant staff or financial resources are associated with this paper.

12. Risk management

- 12.1 The main risk associated with this position statement is that the SDNPA is viewed (wrongly) as being 'anti-development, anti-economy, anti-jobs', with all of these issues being solved apparently by works on the A27.
- 12.2 The SDNPA is in fact for sustainable development and works that accord with NP Purposes.

13. Human Rights, Equalities, Health and Safety

- 13.1 There are no implications arising from this report for anyone with any Protected Characteristic.

14. Sustainability

- 14.1 Sustainability is at the heart of the SDNPA's position with regards to the A27 and its desire to see schemes brought forward that will look to solve congestion without necessarily increasing capacity, improving access and connectivity for communities, rather than increasing severance. The SDNPA favours sustainable transport modes where the local interests of the South Downs' communities take priority and the biodiversity and cultural heritage of the area is enhanced by schemes that conserve and enhance their landscape setting.

15. External Consultees

- 15.1 This report was produced by SDNPA officers, with no external consultees directly involved.

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Appendices None

SDNPA Consultees Director of Strategy & Partnership, Director of Operations, Director of Planning, Sustainable Futures Manager, Living Landscapes Manager, Access & Recreation Lead, Landscape Lead, Biodiversity Lead