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## **HIGHSTED ROAD PROPOSED FOOTWAY, SITTINGBOURNE**

To: **Swale Joint Transportation Board**

By: **Tim Read, Head of Transportation**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Electoral division: **Sittingbourne South**

Date: **11 February 2019**

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**Summary:** This report summarises previous investigations and development work on proposals to install a footway on Highsted Road between its junctions with Farm Crescent and Swanstree Avenue. It also summarises the results of a public consultation on four options and seeks a recommendation from the Board on any further actions.

### **For Decision**

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#### **1.0 Introduction and background**

- 1.1 Highsted Road is a partly-residential road in Sittingbourne that links Swanstree Avenue with Bell Road. (The road is now divided by Swanstree Avenue and there is a length that continues south of this point but this is not part of this proposal.) For most of its length, it is fronted by residential development with footways on both sides. However, the footway on the southwest side ends at the last property and on the northeast side ends just past Farm Crescent. The road also has vehicular entrances to the Sittingbourne Memorial Hospital site and Highsted Grammar School.
- 1.2 Kent County Council and local elected representatives have regularly received requests from residents and users of Highsted Road for a footway on this section. At present, pedestrians must either walk in the carriageway or take a much longer route via Brenchley Road and Bell Road or the Rectory Road estate.
- 1.3 Along the length of Highsted Road concerned, the highway verge on the west side is too narrow to accommodate a footway. On the east side, whereas there is a large grass verge, highway rights only exist over a narrow strip adjacent to the edge of carriageway.
- 1.4 In 2014, the County Council investigated two options to install a footway on one side of the road:

1.4.1 A footway on the west side adjacent to the carriageway. This option would have required the acquisition of a strip of school land, the removal of several mature trees and the relocation of the full length of security fencing. An outline price was calculated at £108,000 at 2013/14 prices. The County Council did not progress this option as this was not affordable and the school was not willing to release any land in its ownership due to potential development opportunities.

1.4.2 A footway on the east side adjacent to the carriageway. This option would have required the acquisition of a strip comprising multiple parcels of land from residential properties in Haysel. Due to the configuration of the land parcels, if one or more parcels were unavailable, a continuous footway would not be possible. The County Council wrote to all homeowners concerned in 2014 asking whether (a) they supported the proposed footway and (b) if they were willing to dedicate their land to become highway maintainable at public expense. Some of the owners did not support the scheme or could not give unconditional assistance in relation to the scheme. Therefore, the County Council could not progress this option.

1.5 As any option requiring land outside of the existing highway is not available for the scheme, the County Council has now investigated whether there are options to provide a separate footway within the extent of the existing highway.

## **2.0 Current proposal**

2.1 The existing carriageway between Farm Crescent and Swanstree Avenue varies in width between 5 and 6.5 metres. The preferred width of a footway is 1.8 metres and the absolute minimum acceptable would be 1.2 metres. However, depending on the speed and volume of adjacent traffic, a greater width may be appropriate for pedestrians to be safe and comfortable. Given the current relatively narrow carriageway, any reduction in width will prevent two-way flow of traffic on this length. For this reason, any conversion of carriageway to footway would necessitate the removal of traffic in one or both directions.

2.2 Collision data for Highsted Road and its junctions has been investigated. For the last three years for which data is available (to 30 September 2018), there have been no collisions recorded for Highsted Road itself nor its junction with Swanstree Avenue. There was one collision recorded at the junction of Highsted Road with Bell Road. Therefore, the collision data alone does not provide justification for making changes to the highway.

2.3 The County Council has developed three footway options for public consultation:

### Option 1 – Southbound traffic only

This option would only allow general traffic to proceed from north-to-south between Farm Crescent and Swanstree Avenue. A new 1.8-metre-wide footway would be constructed on the eastern side of the road for the full length with the remaining road being at least 3.25 metres wide throughout.

### Option 2 – Northbound traffic only

This option would only allow general traffic to proceed from south-to-north between Swanstree Avenue and Farm Crescent. A new 1.8-metre-wide footway would be constructed on the eastern side of the road for the full length with the remaining road being at least 3.25 metres wide throughout.

### Option 3 – Closure to all traffic except cycles

This option would prevent drivers of all vehicles except for cyclists from being able to use the road between Farm Crescent and Swanstree Avenue. No separate footway would be provided but pedestrians and cyclists would be able to use the full width of the existing road without other traffic. Cyclists would be able to leave and join the main carriageway at either end or the existing shared use path on Swanstree Avenue.

In addition, Option 4 – no change - has been included in the consultation to allow a comparison to be made.

- 2.4 The County Council commissioned a Stage 1 road safety audit on Options 1-3 before these were finalised for consultation. No changes were made to the outline designs as a result of this audit.
- 2.5 The County Council undertook an Equalities Impact Assessment on Options 1-3, which identified two potentially negative impacts that could not be removed or mitigated:
  - 2.5.1 Highsted Road has street lighting but this length is not overlooked by any residential properties. Antisocial behaviour and fear of crime could discourage some from using this route outside of peak hours and especially at night, especially with reduced flows of vehicular traffic along the road for Options 1 to 3. Options 1 and 2 would be slightly better in this respect as they would retain a throughflow of traffic throughout the day whereas Option 3 removes all motorised traffic. Other than actions to encourage greater usage of the route throughout the day, there are no obvious options within the control of the highway authority to discourage antisocial behaviour and increase passive surveillance of the route as this would involve off-highway land use change.
  - 2.5.2 Option 3 proposes a single surface shared between pedestrians and cyclists. Tactile and visual elements at either end of the new route will prevent pedestrians from accidentally stepping into an area with motorised traffic. However, some disabled people are reluctant to share with cyclists due to perceived risk of conflict. Shared use paths without separate provision for pedestrians have been used in many other locations without problems, including nearby on Swanstree Avenue. Department for Transport guidance (such as Local Transport Note 1/12 Shared Use Routes for Pedestrians and Cyclists) sets out best practice on how to provide shared use facilities without

compromising the safety of disabled pedestrians and this will be used to inform the detailed design. The 5 metre wide carriageway and the relatively low numbers of expected pedestrians and cyclists mean that the potential for conflict is very low in comparison to a town centre location, for example. A continuous raised kerb will be provided along the east side to give people with visual impairments a definite boundary to follow.

### **3.0 Consultation**

3.1 The County Council carried out a consultation exercise with residents and elected representatives at the end of 2018:

3.1.1 Consultation leaflets<sup>1</sup> with the questionnaire were delivered to approximately 250 addresses on Highsted Road and adjacent roads on 30 November 2018. The leaflet contained details of the proposals along with an outline design for each Option. Residents were invited to respond on or before 13 January 2019;

3.1.2 The consultation leaflet was also available to view on the County Council's website, where respondents could also complete an online version of the questionnaire. This was originally planned to be open until 13 January but was extended to 18 January to allow younger people to respond following a planned Swale Youth Forum meeting earlier that week;

3.1.3 The following individuals and organisations were also briefed on the consultation and asked to publicise it as appropriate: local County Member; local district councillors; South Avenue Primary, Fulston Manor and Highsted Grammar Schools; medical facilities on the Sittingbourne Memorial Hospital site; the local branch of Age Concern; and Swale Community & Voluntary Services.

3.2 The public consultation sought peoples' views on the outline Options presented. Options 1 to 3 would all require a traffic regulation order and further formal consultation.

3.3 By the closing date for consultation, the County Council had received 140 completed questionnaires (online and paper copies). A summary of the responses is included in Appendix 1.

### **4.0 Discussion and member comments**

4.1 Based on the number of properties directly affected (approximately 250), 140 responses represent a good response rate. However, in comparison to ward level data, there could be an underrepresentation of females of 60 years and older and under 35 year old males and females. In particular, no respondents

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<sup>1</sup> The consultation leaflet contained an error in its description of the current restrictions at the junction of Highsted Road with Swanstree Avenue. At present, a traffic regulation order and physical measures prevent drivers from turning right in from Swanstree Avenue. There is no restriction on drivers turning out from Highsted Road and it was wrong to state this in the consultation leaflet.

identified as under 16 year old males or under 24 year old females. Given the presence of the local schools on the road and previous representations from local school students, their absence from the results is disappointing.

- 4.2 As part of the questionnaire, for each Option respondents were asked whether (a) this was their preferred option, (b) this was not their preferred Option but they would support it or (c) they did not support this Option. Whereas there is still a strong desire for a footway, every one of the proposed Options (from 1-3) had objections from more than 60% of respondents. Option 1 (southbound traffic only) gained the highest level of support, with 31 respondents stating it as their preferred Option and 26 further respondents prepared to support it.
- 4.3 Many residents stated their concern that Options 1-3 could result in congestion on other roads and junctions in the area. Some residents stated that the removal of their ability to drive in both directions would not be acceptable to them.
- 4.4 For each Option, respondents were also asked whether they would walk or cycle more if implemented. Based on the responses given, Option 3 (closure to all traffic except cycles) would encourage the most people to cycle or walk more. All Options (1-3) would have a positive effect on people walking. Option 2, however, would result in more people choosing to cycle less than would be gained by others who would cycle more.
- 4.5 Many respondents promoted the idea of acquiring land either to the east or west of the road as their preferred option. However, as outlined above, the County Council has previously investigated these options and they have been discounted.
- 4.6 If Board members were minded to recommend progressing a footway scheme, Option 3 (closure to all traffic except cycles) provides the most potential benefit in terms of increased uptake of walking and cycling. However, given the lack of consensus on any individual Option, it is recommended that no further action is taken. Lack of support at this initial stage does not suggest that this is a desirable scheme for residents overall and is likely to indicate many objections to a formal traffic order.

## **5.0 Recommendation**

- 5.1 It is recommended that no further action is taken.

Contact Officer:	Paul Brand
Reporting to:	Tim Read – Head of Transportation

***Appendices***

Appendix 1 – Summary of results from the public consultation.

***Background Papers***

None

## Appendix 1 – Summary of results from the public consultation

Graph 1 – Age profile of respondents compared to Woodstock ward<sup>2</sup>.

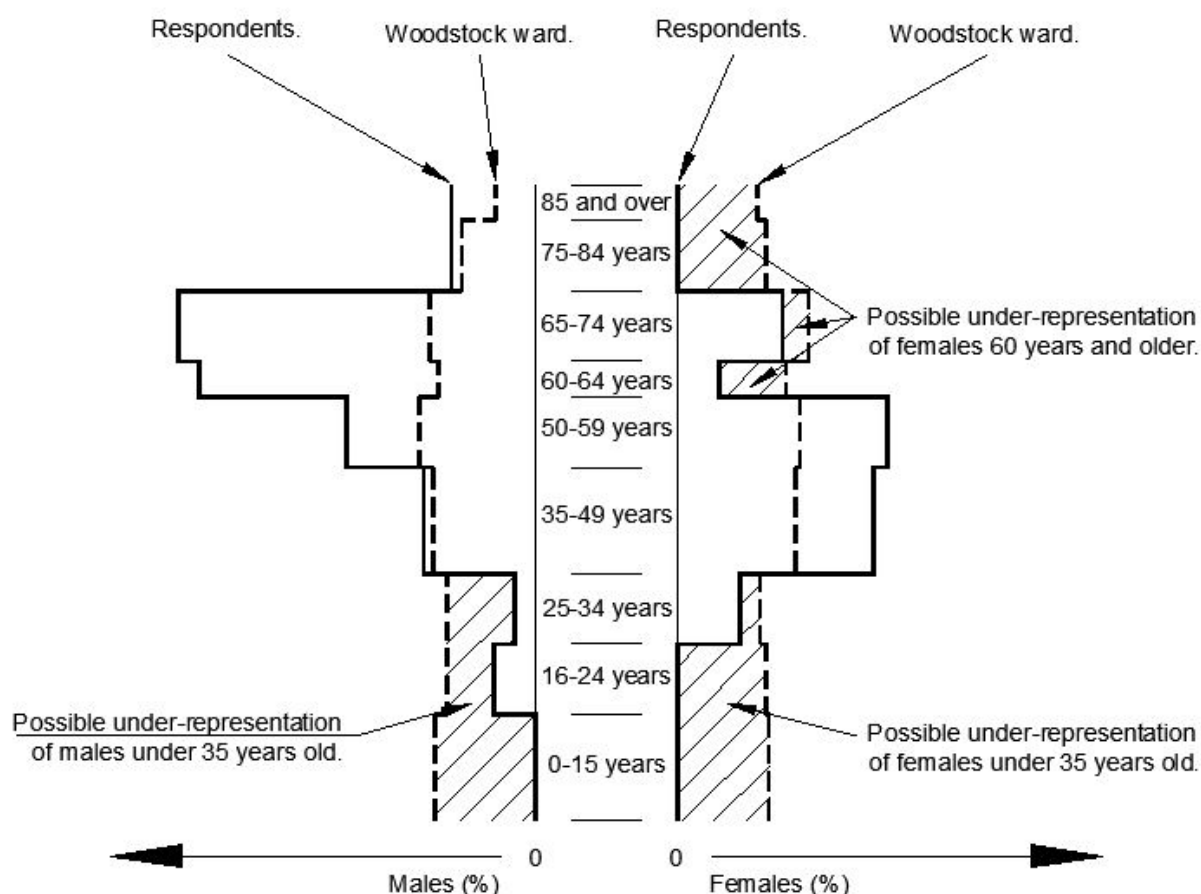


Table 1 – About the respondents and the organisations that they represent

	Numbers
As a local resident of Highsted Road, Grayshott Close, Kestrel Close, The Finches, Farm Crescent, Pond Drive or Haysel.	100
As a visitor to Highsted Road, Grayshott Close, Kestrel Close, The Finches, Farm Crescent, Pond Drive or Haysel.	17
As a visitor to Sittingbourne Memorial Hospital, Memorial Medical Centre or another facility on this site.	3
As an employee of Sittingbourne Memorial Hospital, Memorial Medical Centre or another facility on this site.	0
As a visitor to Highsted Grammar School.	1
As a parent or guardian of a student attending Highsted Grammar School.	3
As a student at Highsted Grammar School.	0
As an employee of Highsted Grammar School.	0
As a representative of a local community group or residents' association.	0
As a representative of an educational establishment, such as a school or	0

<sup>2</sup> Ward population and questionnaire responses have been standardised, i.e. total male and female population will add up to 100% in each case. Ward population source: 2017 Mid Year Estimates, The Office of National Statistics, © Crown Copyright.

college.	
As a representative of a parish, town or borough council in an official capacity.	2
As a parish, town or district councillor or county member.	1
As a local business owner.	2
As a representative of a charity, voluntary or community sector organisation.	1

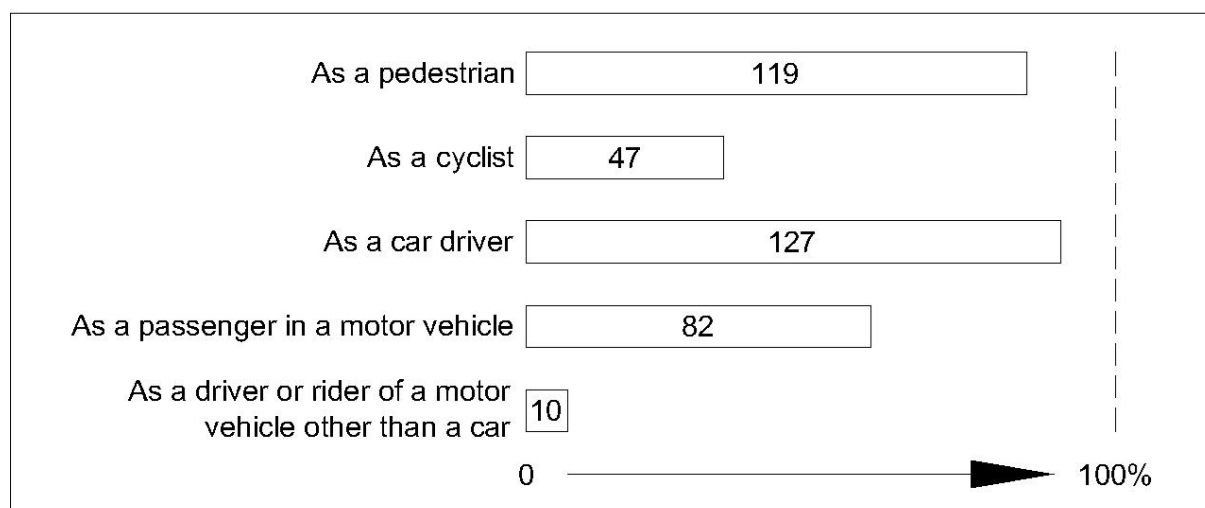
In addition to the above, separate letters and emails were received from the following:

- Milstead Parish Council;
- The Sittingbourne Society;
- A Swale Borough Councillor for the area;

Table 3 – Respondents who considered themselves to be disabled as set out in the Equality Act 2010

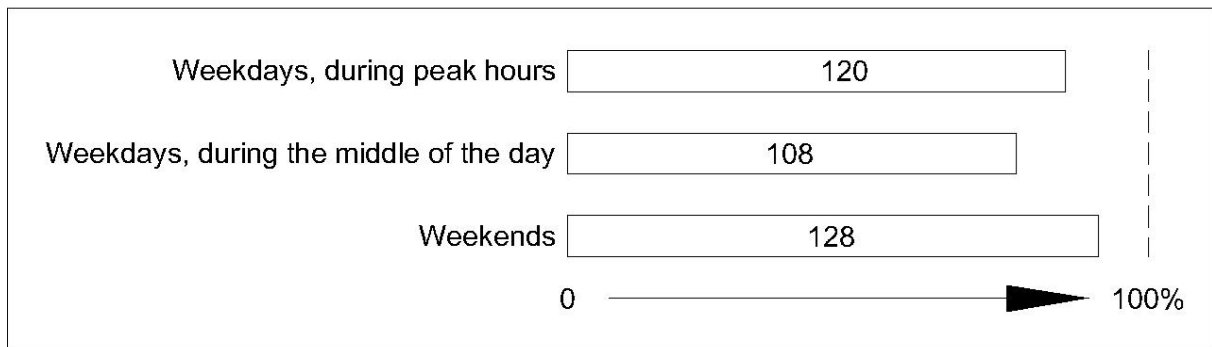
Disabled		Not disabled	Preferred not to say
3		103	3
of which:			
2	Longstanding illness or health condition or epilepsy;		
1	Physical impairment;		
1	Sensory impairment (hearing, sight or both)		
0	Mental health condition;		
0	Learning disability;		
0	Preferred not to say.		

Graph 2 – How respondents currently travel along Highsted Road.

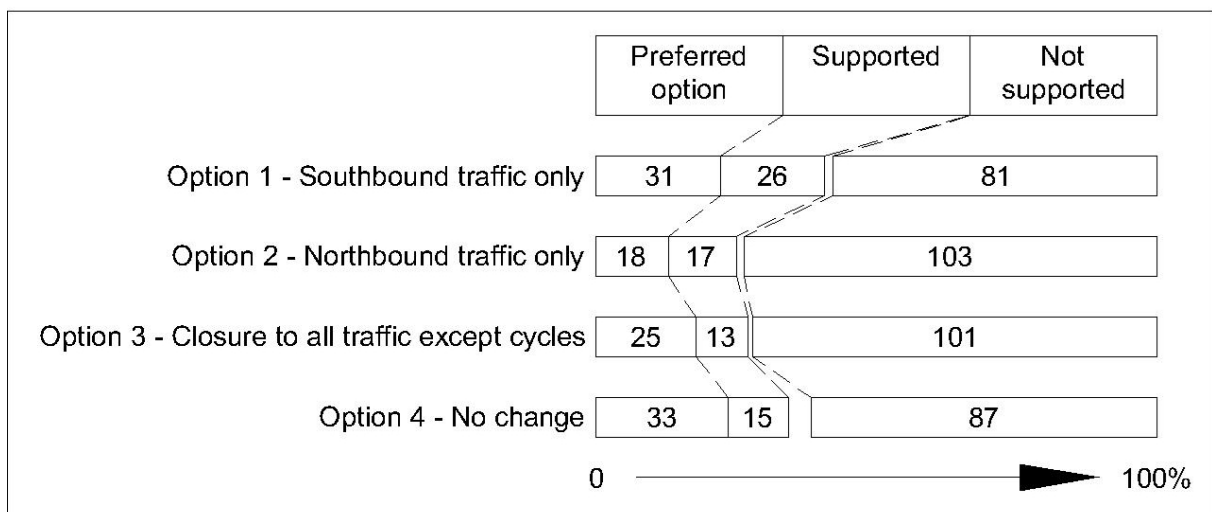




Graph 3 – What times respondents usually travelled along Highsted Road



Graph 4 – Stated preferences on each of the Options



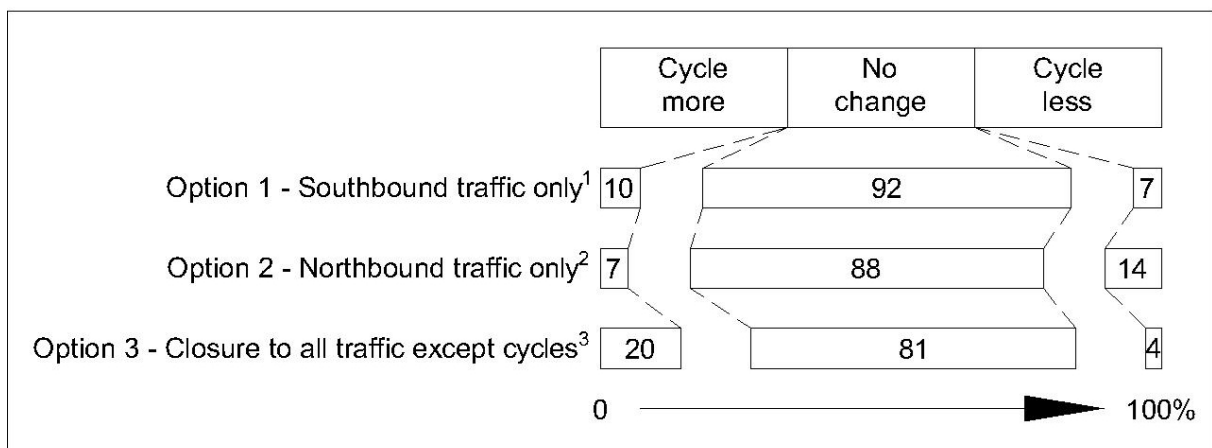
Graph 5 – Stated effect on cycling activity for each Option

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Of those who would cycle more, 9 were already cycling on Highsted Road and 1 would be a new user;

<sup>2</sup> Of those who would cycle more, all were already cycling on Highsted Road;

<sup>3</sup> Of those who would cycle more, 22 were already cycling on Highsted Road and 5 would be new users.



Graph 6 – Stated effect on walking activity for each Option

Notes

<sup>4</sup> Of those who would walk more, 22 were already walking on Highsted Road and 5 would be new users;

<sup>5</sup> Of those who would walk more, 19 were already walking on Highsted Road and 4 would be new users;

<sup>6</sup> Of those who would walk more, 24 were already walking on Highsted Road and 4 would be new users.

