

**Meeting date:** 25<sup>th</sup> November 2020  
**Report to:** Highways and Environment Cabinet



**Subject/report title:** Solihull Highways Management Service Update  
**Report from:** Head of Highway Management  
**Report author/lead contact officer:** David Keaney/ Paul Tovey

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**Wards affected:**

All Wards |  Bickenhill |  Blythe |  Castle Bromwich |  Chelmsley Wood |  
 Dorridge/Hockley Heath |  Elmdon |  Kingshurst/Fordbridge |  Knowle |  
 Lyndon |  Meriden |  Olton |  Shirley East |  Shirley South |  
 Shirley West |  Silhill |  Smith's Wood |  St Alphege

**Public/private report:** Public

**Exempt by virtue of paragraph:** NA

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**1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To consider and seek approval to update Highway Management Service processes associated with the following functions:
- (a) Road Safety Audit (RSA) Policy
  - (b) Blue Badge Parking Space and H Bar Mark Application Process
  - (c) Review of Borough Speed Limits

**2. Decision(s) recommended**

- 2.1 Cabinet Member is asked to:
- (a) Approve the proposed changes to the Road Safety Audit policy as set out in section 4.4 of the report and contained within **Appendix A**.
  - (b) Approve the proposed changes to the H bar marking and Blue Badge Parking Space Application Processes as set out in sections 4.6 – 4.14 of this report and shown in **Appendix B, C** and **D** respectively,
  - (c) Agree to introduce the new £75 charge for H bar markings from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021, and

- (d) Note that the proposed review of speed limits in the Borough has been deferred to the 2021/20 financial year, due to a change in service priorities associated with the Covid19 pandemic.

### **3. Matters for Consideration**

- 3.1 The Highway Management service provides a wide range of statutory functions critical to the successful operation of the network of roads, footways, cycle paths and rights of way in the borough.
- 3.2 The service has a number of policies and processes which guide these functions and this report, recognising emerging best practice, updated national guidance and associated service pressures, seeks to update these.

#### **Road Safety Audit Policy**

- 3.3 Road Safety Audits are undertaken on highway improvement schemes at various stages of their design, construction and when brought into operation to ensure they will not create future highway safety problems.
- 3.4 Originally intended to audit highway improvement schemes affecting the Trunk and Strategic Road network, since 2008 the Institution of Highways and Transportation (IHT) has published guidance for local highway authorities over ways in which they can appropriately resource a Road Safety Audit process relative to their own needs. It also advises on those areas in which they may consider carrying out Road Safety Audits in a different way to that set out in HD19/03 of Volume 5 of the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges, which relates specifically to schemes affecting the Trunk Road network.
- 3.5 The advice provided by the IHT was based on a practical and reasonable response to the issues facing local highway authorities.
- 3.6 Following the issue of the above guidance, the Council adopted its own Road Safety Audit Policy & Procedure in 2013, which was specific to our needs and most recently revised in 2017. New guidance published recently has triggered the need to review and update current practices.

### **4. What options have been considered and what is the evidence telling us about them?**

- 4.1 Whilst it would not be appropriate or necessary to carry out a Road Safety Audit on all works taking place within the borough, they are an important tool available to the Authority to audit and assess the likely road safety implications of an intended highway improvement scheme and identify mitigating actions to any specific risks highlighted.
- 4.2 At present, in line with our current Road Safety Audit Policy and Procedure, between 20 and 30 audits are carried out annually. These include a mixture of developer lead highway improvement schemes and our own highway improvement works. In October 2018, Highways England introduced an updated standard (General Principles and Scheme Governance GG 119) which introduced a number of minor updates and improvements to the existing road safety audit process.

4.3 The main changes introduced are summarised below:

- (a) Auditors are required to have experience which is relevant to the type of scheme being reviewed, details of which are to be included in the team member's cv.
- (b) RSA Stage 3 (Bringing into operation) should be undertaken within one month of opening, unless otherwise agreed with the highway authority.
- (c) RSA Stage 4 (12 month desk top review) should be produced where road traffic collisions have been recorded in the vicinity of the highway scheme over the post 12 month period of validated road traffic collision data.
- (d) Site visits should include a maximum of 6 persons.
- (e) An interim road safety audit can be undertaken between the three main stages of audit with the permission of the highway authority. It should not be used as a replacement for the formal stage audit itself.
- (f) A new template is provided in Appendix D of GG 119 for preparing the audit report which supersedes the previous style.

4.4 Having reviewed the changes introduced by Highways England, an updated Road Safety Audit Policy has been prepared for highway improvement schemes carried out on the local road network in Solihull which is contained in **Appendix A**.

## **5. Reasons for recommending preferred option**

5.1 Whilst a number of the identified changes as set out in section 4.4 of this report are relatively minor and a number already form part of our standard working practices, it is considered appropriate and beneficial to update the Council's policy in line with the latest accepted best practice.

5.2 The updated policy will be published on the Council's website, referenced in the design guide and also circulated to key stakeholders who regularly carry out audit on schemes in Solihull to ensure all those Officers involved in undertaking or reviewing Road Safety Audits are aware of the changes introduced.

## **6. Matters for Consideration**

### **Blue Badge Parking Space and H Bar Application Process**

6.1 To enable people to access their property by car, residents are able to apply for either an advisory Blue Badge holder parking space or H bar marking.

6.2 An advisory Blue Badge Parking Space (BBPS) (previously known as a Disabled Persons Parking Space), is a parking space marked on the public highway available for use by any blue badge holder. They can be provided to support local residents, whose medical conditions mean they qualify for a blue badge and helps them to park close to local amenities or their homes when they do not have a suitable off road parking space available.

- 6.3 A H bar marking is an advisory marking indicating areas that should be kept clear of parked vehicles where the kerb is dropped, either outside an entrance to property or at a crossing place for pedestrians.
- 6.4 The H bar process is self-funded by the applicant, whereas a BBPS is provided free of charge through the Vulnerable Road User capital allocation. Both services continue to prove very popular and have been provided extensively across the borough to aid access for residents and overcome localised parking issues that would not warrant the introduction of formal parking restrictions.
- 6.5 Demand has remained high for both services, including during the recent lock down period when an increase in home working and the introduction of furlough schemes meant that more people were at home throughout the day. Whilst the Council took steps to reduce this impact, including temporarily suspending certain parking restrictions, the level of demand for the two services has been undiminished.
- 6.6 Traditionally the application process for both BBPS and H bar markings has been a paper based and multiple stepped process which required receipt, processing and issuing of paper based records, including for H bar markings which is a paid for service, the processing of cheques.
- 6.7 During the last 8 months when home working has been the prevalent means of working, this paper based process has caused a number of issues which have created unnecessary delay and complication to a service which is intended to aid residents.
- 6.8 In order to address these issues both processes have been reviewed and opportunities to simplify and stream line identified that will aid customers, manage expectations and assist with the overall management of the service.

**7. What options have been considered and what is the evidence telling us about them?**

- 7.1 The options under consideration are to remain with the paper based application process or move towards online electronic systems, with a paper based back up facility. Recent circumstances are driving the need for e-payment methods and less personal contact and the technology to deliver this is now well proven. Our customers are becoming more used to these methods and with the backup provided at the Connect Centres and in paper if required, the time feels right to make the move away from paper, where practical.
- 7.2 In order to streamline the process of considering and responding to such requests it is intended to use online and electronic submissions as the preferred method of submitting all applications from the start of the New Year. Doing so will enable the overall process to be quicker, remove the need for residents to submit applications and payment by post and cheque and improve the overall customer experience.
- 7.3 The use of online payment is now well established and it is proposed that the Council's existing website and customer electronic payment system (Civica Epay) are utilised to facilitate these changes.
- 7.4 For H bar applications the previously complicated and multiple charging system is

proposed to be replaced with a single one off fee. Previously the fee structure required applicants to submit an initial non-refundable £25 application fee, which if accepted would be followed by a tailored quote based on a fee of £10 per linear metre of lining. The typical length of a H-Mark being 5.5 in length meant that the average cost charged was around the £80 mark.

- 7.5 Most H bar applications are straight forward and can be assessed and a decision reached following a desktop review of the application. Digital mapping and photography now allow H bar lengths to be assessed and works ordering plans drawn up which, in the majority of circumstances, means it is no longer necessary to visit or mark up the site prior to the works being undertaken. As such it is proposed to simplify the application process by removing the two step payment process and reduce the number of site visits.
- 7.6 A new single fee of £75 for all H bar applications of 6m or less is proposed with an additional £10 per linear metre fee for applications exceeding 6m in length. It is suggested that this new charge, should be implemented from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021 and will enable the service to recover all costs incurred in operating the service whilst providing a competitive and affordable service for residents suffering from localised parking issues. The new proposed policy and process is shown at **Appendix B** and **C**.
- 7.7 The BBPS process has also been reviewed and whilst there are no large scale changes proposed to either the process or policy, it is proposed to develop an online portal which will aid residents submitting documentation in support of their application.
- 7.8 Engagement has commenced with colleagues in IT and this will be developed and brought forward over the coming months.
- 7.9 The proposed updated policy for Blue Badge Parking Spaces is shown at **Appendix D** which also acknowledges the broadening of those now entitled to apply for a Blue Badge. The main change proposed relates to clarifying the number of BBPS provided on a single road. This is in response to instances where there have been a high number of requests for BBPS in the same or adjoining streets, leading to a disproportionate impact on parking capacity in the area.
- 7.10 In order to monitor and assess whether additional bays should be provided on roads where existing disabled parking spaces comprise 25% or more of total parking capacity; It is proposed that such requests are referred to Ward Councillors for consideration and where agreement cannot be reached, the matter referred to the Cabinet Member for final decision.

## **8. Reasons for recommending preferred option**

- 8.1 The proposed changes to the BBPS and H bar application processes and policies are intended to stream line and aid residents in applying for both types of road markings. The new processes will assist in our management of both processes, improving the services provided to the borough's residents whilst reducing operating costs.
- 8.2 Introducing the new charge from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021, will provide sufficient time to implement the revised process in time to progress the associated applications during the winter period and allow installation as soon as the weather starts to improve in late

Spring 2021, and after the winter gritting period has finished.

## **9. Matters for Consideration**

### **Review of Borough Speed Limits**

- 9.1 Solihull Council in its role as the traffic authority is responsible for and sets local speed limits where local needs and conditions make a speed limit lower than the national speed limit appropriate.
- 9.2 To support traffic authorities in discharging this duty, the Department for Transport provides guidance to be used for setting maximum speed limits on single and dual carriageway roads in both urban and rural settings.
- 9.3 The guidance sets out that speed limits should be evidence-led and self-explaining and seek to reinforce people's assessment of what is a safe speed to travel at. They should encourage self-compliance. Speed limits should be seen by drivers as the maximum rather than a target to exceed.
- 9.4 The guidance goes on to state that traffic authorities should keep their speed limits under review so that they can reflect changing circumstances and to consider the introduction of more 20 mph limits and zones.

## **10. What options have been considered and what is the evidence telling us about them?**

- 10.1 Speed limits in Solihull were last subject to a full scale review in 2015 as part of a project which focused on and rationalised a number of rural speed limits. Since that time, 8 changes to speed limits in response to new road layouts, including the introduction of 4 new 20mph speed limits have been introduced.
- 10.2 A map showing the boroughs current speed limits is shown annexed to this report as **Appendix E**. Roads not highlighted on the plan are subject to national speed limits (60mph on single carriageway roads and 70 mph and dual-carriageways).
- 10.3 The next review was due to take place over the summer of 2020, during which time an assessment of the borough's 20mph speed limits and zones was to be undertaken. This would have enabled a new policy to be developed following the latest guidance from the Department of Transport to guide our future use and roll out of 20mph speed limits and zones, mindful of the increasing number of requests from the public for their introduction.
- 10.4 Unfortunately the impact of Covid19 and its associated restrictions have meant that traffic patterns were not suitable to carry out the surveys necessary to support the proposed review; it is therefore intended that this work will now be rolled into 2021 with a further report brought to this portfolio in November 2021.

## **11. Reasons for recommending preferred option**

- 11.1 The impact of Covid19 has meant that it has not been possible to undertake a full

review of speed limits in the borough during 2020. Requests continue to be received, including for the introduction of new 20mph limits and zones in response to concerns over vehicle speeds and compliance. They are therefore still considered to be relevant and necessary and so a supporting policy should be developed.

- 11.2 A borough wide review of speed limits will help to identify where persistent changes in driver behaviour potentially necessitate a change in the posted speed limit and if there are any inconsistencies on the network. It will also allow us to assess the benefits of those 20mph limits already introduced and put in place a policy, referencing the latest national best practice and guidance to ensure that they are implemented and used appropriately and proportionately to gain the most value.
- 11.3 Undertaking a review over the next 12 months as a number of major developments and events are scheduled to take place in the borough over the coming 5+ years, and implementing any subsequent recommendations, will ensure that the network is well placed to respond to changing traffic patterns that these events and developments including the recently approved draft Local Plan will bring.

## 12. Implications and Considerations

12.1 State how the proposals in this report contribute to the priorities in the [Council Plan](#):

Priority:	Contribution:
<p>Economy:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Revitalising our towns and local centres.</li> <li>2. UK Central (UKC) and maximising the opportunities of HS2.</li> <li>3. Increase the supply of housing, especially affordable and social housing.</li> </ol>	<p>The proposed BBPS and H bar policy will aid residents to make effective use of the public highway fronting residential roads throughout the borough and help resolve localised parking issues.</p>
<p>Environment:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Enhance Solihull’s natural environment.</li> <li>5. Improve Solihull’s air quality.</li> <li>6. Reduce Solihull’s net carbon emissions.</li> </ol>	<p>Reducing vehicle speeds has the potential to reduce the severity of collisions and accidents but also of reducing car domination and increasing modal shift. Such measures can enhance the natural environment and contribute towards the Councils wider air quality targets.</p>
<p>People and Communities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Take action to improve life chances in our most disadvantaged communities.</li> <li>8. Enable communities to thrive.</li> <li>9. Sustainable, quality, affordable provision for adults &amp; children with complex needs.</li> </ol>	<p>The provision of a BBPS and H Mark Service will assist those experiencing parking issues and who have difficulty accessing their property. By improving the management of these services and making them more accessible we will help to aid residents in taking up the services offered.</p>

## 12.2 **Consultation and Scrutiny:**

12.2.1 These matters have not been considered by any of the Council's Scrutiny Boards, however, any proposed changes to the highway network will be subject to the normal statutory consultation processes at the appropriate time.

## 12.3 **Financial implications:**

12.3.1 There are no financial implications associated with the proposed changes to the Solihull Road Safety Audit policy.

12.3.2 The proposed changes to the H bar mark policy and process will help to improve the efficiency of the service and result in a reduction in the number of financial transactions. The proposed new single £75 fee has also been included in the Council's on-going review of fees and charges. As such it will be better placed to operate on a cost neutral basis moving forward.

12.3.3 There are no financial implications associated with the proposed changes to the Blue Badge Parking Space policy. These facilities will still be provided free of charge and be funded through the annual £20,000 Vulnerable Road User capital allocation in the Local Transport Plan.

12.3.4 The review of the borough speed limits is likely to result in a number of proposed changes to speed limits across the borough. In each case a traffic regulation order will be required to make the change along with corresponding road markings and signage. In order to fund any changes identified from the review it is proposed to carry the £20,000 allocation forward into 2021/ 22 financial year.

## 12.4 **Legal implications:**

12.4.1 The proposed changes to the Solihull Road Safety Audit policy is intended to ensure that our policies comply with latest guidance and best practice.

12.4.2 The Blue Badge Parking Space and H bar service are both non statutory processes, however supporting residents with disabilities will contribute towards the authority's obligations with reference to the Equality Act 2010.

12.4.3 A Traffic Regulation Order is required in order to lower a speed limit, when appropriate, below the national speed limit of either 30mph, 60mph or 70mph depending on the type of road. There is a prescribed process for making such orders which is set out within the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984.

## 12.5 **Risk implications:**

12.5.1 The Corporate Risk Management Approach has been complied with to identify and assess the significant risk associated with this decision/project. This includes (but is not limited to), financial, political, legislation and reputation risks.

The approach is not intended to eliminate all risks and not all the risks identified can be managed all of the time. Also, risks will still exist that have not been identified.

However, based on the information provided, no significant risks have been identified.



## **12.6 Equality implications:**

- 12.7 The changes proposed to policies and processes in this report are intended to ensure that our processes comply with best practice, are accessible and up to date.
- 12.8 By improving the Blue Badge Parking Space and H bar application process and making it more accessible will provide people with greater choice and ensure that they are able to access information on our policies and determine whether it is something that would benefit them.
- 12.9 The introduction and review of speed limits generally across the Borough has the potential to benefit in particular vulnerable road users and to aid road safety for everyone.

## **13. List of appendices referred to**

- 13.1 Appendix A – Proposed Solihull Road Safety Audit Policy
- 13.2 Appendix B – Proposed H Bar Marking Policy
- 13.3 Appendix C - Proposed H Bar Marking Process
- 13.4 Appendix D – Proposed Blue Badge Parking Space Policy
- 13.5 Appendix E – Map of current borough speed limits

## **14. Background papers used to compile this report**

- 14.1 Design Manual for Roads and Bridges – GG119
- 14.2 Department for Transport Guidance - Setting local speed limits

## **15. List of other relevant documents**

- 15.1 20 mph speed limits on roads – Department for Transport Report into the effectiveness of 20 miles per hour (mph) road speed limits.