

## *Introduction*

Suffolk has a very strong rural character and its highway network is an integral part of the perception of, and access to, the countryside. Local roads are also an irreplaceable part of Suffolk's landscape and countryside heritage. Therefore, they should be protected from inappropriate change.

The impact of the private car and other vehicles has had a marked effect in both urban and rural areas. Local authorities have important roles in:

- providing a safe and efficient highway network for residents, businesses and visitors
- promoting sustainable forms of transport and
- protecting the countryside, towns and villages from the potentially damaging effects of development and the ever increasing size and volumes of traffic

When carrying out highway work in rural areas the County Council and district councils in Suffolk have resolved that it should be undertaken to a standard which is satisfactory in safety, technical and environmental terms.

The publication of this document should assist this process. It establishes a set of policy guidelines and recommends procedures as well as bringing together important information for all those who have a role in promoting, designing, financing, and implementing highway work in rural areas.

The advice is divided into four parts:

Part One looks at general principles. It outlines the procedures which should normally be followed, it emphasises the benefits of proper consultation and partnership working and addresses the important issue of funding.

Part Two deals with landscape and ecological issues and highlights the importance of features of historic interest.

Part Three looks at detailed aspects of highway works in rural areas and is a good practice guide for designers and those who are responsible for the implementation of works.

Part Four explains the significance of those locations within the county which have a special designation due to their environmental or ecological qualities. It provides information on relevant legislation and policies and defines the roles of local authorities and other organisations.

The Appendices give detailed information of Acts, Directives, Policies and other references given in the main text.



### I.1.3. Formulation of a Brief

When initiating works a brief needs to be prepared. This should take into account the views of all parties involved in the project.

### I.1.4. The Preliminary Design Stage

Before design work commences an agreement should be reached on who will be involved from each authority and the role of any consultants. Preliminary ideas for the design of any scheme should be circulated for comment at an early stage.

The need to obtain any planning or environmental consents should be established. Certain major works may require a statutory Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and other County Council schemes over a certain cost or size may require an informal environmental appraisal in accordance with the County Council's Environmental Management System (EMS). [See Sections 3.1.1 and 4.4.5]

Work in locations with special designations or protection may require approval or advice from other organisations. [See Section 4.5 : Roles of Relevant National Organisations]

### I.1.5. Public Consultations

Suffolk has a high quality landscape and built environment and the general public is invariably interested in change and new development. Consultation gives the public an opportunity to be involved in the process.

The extent and timing of public consultations will be dependent upon the nature, size and sensitivity of any works. With most small projects, for example those which are essentially maintenance work or very minor improvements, it would be inappropriate to engage in widespread consultations. With certain other works, just the views of the relevant district and town or parish council may be sufficient.

When significant schemes are being proposed other interested parties will need to be involved in deciding what form the consultation exercise should take. In such circumstances the level of consultation should be agreed by all those involved in the project. It could include public meetings, staging an exhibition, producing leaflets and circulating questionnaires.

Consultation should always be organised in such a way that it ensures that people can contribute to the process in an informed and constructive way. Responses should then be properly considered before any design solutions are finalised. The aim should be to achieve the implementation of the optimum scheme after proper examination of all the issues.

In certain circumstances, it may be appropriate to implement a temporary experimental scheme before a final decision is made, although such an approach can be very costly.



## 1.2. Funding for Work and Maintenance

### 1.2.1 Role of the Highway Authority

The majority of works carried out in the highway are the responsibility of the local Highway Authority, Suffolk County Council. Such works include, for example, repairing roads and bridges, maintaining verges and planting, implementing safety and traffic management works, the provision of new footways and cycle facilities, and improving public transport.

The County Council has a number of environmental policies and initiatives embodied in the County Structure Plan, Local Transport Plan (LTP), and Environmental Management System Guidance Manual, which need to be taken into account when allocating funding for schemes.

In specially designated locations such as conservation areas, areas of outstanding natural beauty (AONB) and special landscape areas, the impact of highway works may be of particular importance and the ensuing scheme may cost more in order to achieve a satisfactory solution. In less sensitive areas, a more standard approach may be acceptable.

In certain circumstances it may be possible to pool funding from several different sources in order to achieve a satisfactory solution. Early identification of opportunities will enable funding to be allocated. It is also important that the different budget managers are prepared to assist in this partnership approach where a variety of objectives can be achieved.

Good design and environmental sensitivity may not always be more expensive than a standard approach. With imagination and flexibility, highway works throughout the county can be carried out in a way that their environmental impact is minimised and that they are appropriate for their context but still fulfil the purpose for which they are being undertaken.

### 1.2.2. Funding from Other Sources

In some cases the County Council is unable to fund the optimum scheme and may look to other sources of funding. District councils may be prepared to contribute to work in their area if it means that it is carried out in a way that

meets environmental objectives in their local plan. Parish councils might likewise contribute if it means that an important local problem is satisfactorily addressed. In such cases, the partnership approach not only swells the budget, but also ensures that local communities are involved and take ownership of the improvements.

Other partners may include the utility companies, other private organisations, or Government bodies such as English Heritage, the Countryside Agency and the East of England Development Agency.

In many cases, partnership with others will mean that additional objectives can be achieved. A traffic management or speed restriction scheme may, for example, use hedgerow and tree planting as a way of visually narrowing a road, possibly slowing traffic, at the same time as making an important contribution to the appearance and ecology of the countryside. In such cases, other bodies may be able to contribute to the cost of this work.

### 1.2.3. Maximising the Funding

By adopting a flexible approach it is often possible to maximise funding for work. This could be by:

- ensuring early consultation with all interested parties in order to identify possible partnership opportunities
- making the most of local skills and knowledge
- combining individual schemes or initiatives in order to reduce costs, as well as achieving several objectives
- allowing partners to contribute over more than one financial year or programming work so that it is carried out over two financial years



### 1.2.4. Maintenance

Maintenance budgets comprise revenue and capital monies.

Revenue money is spent on keeping the highway network safe and serviceable. Such works would include routine cleansing of drains, maintaining vegetation, clearance of weather related problems, filling in potholes and similar surface repairs.

Capital money is spent on improving the highway network, for example, through substantial resurfacing or drainage schemes or implementing traffic management and local safety measures.

Revenue allocations are based on the size of the network and the results of structural maintenance condition surveys. Programmes of work are developed and prioritised by the County Council's Area Highway Managers.

Capital allocations are based on initiatives identified in the Local Transport Plan.

#### Funding - *Examples of work undertaken by partnership funding*



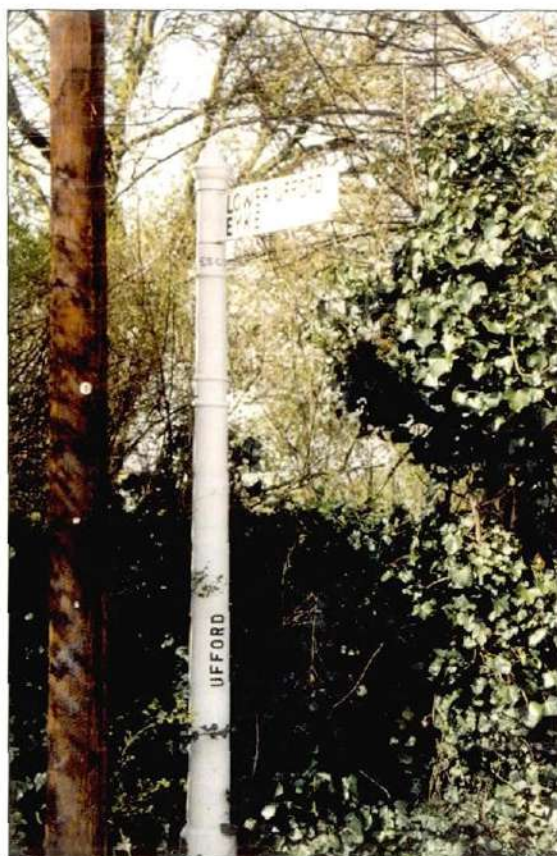
*Village green protection: Thorndon*



*Provision of enhanced fingerposts: Pettistree*



*New footway: Orford*



*Repairs to traditional signposts: Ufford*