December 2016

Application process for Community Highways Schemes

Background

Early in 2016 a Task and Finish Group of County Council Members proposed a new process for managing community initiatives requiring changes to the highway. This process was approved as part of a formal Cabinet Member decision in April 2016 and was implemented in June 2016.

Previously, CLC schemes were prioritised locally, had no limit to their value, and often called upon Highways Authority section 106 contributions to support delivery.

Projects were delivered, in effect, on a first-come-first served basis, and with a finite annual budget, the potential 'forward' programme of schemes stretched many years into the future. This created a situation that was difficult to plan and resource, and raised unrealistic expectations within our communities.

The Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport sought to address this situation and convened the Executive Task and Finish Group to consider options for a future process that is sustainable, transparent, and aligns with corporate priorities. The proposals were approved by the Cabinet Member for Highways & Transport as part of this decision in April 2016.

Application Process

To view details of the new process or to submit a scheme for consideration visit the WSCC website and follow the Community Highway Scheme (CHS) application process.

All schemes parish councils or other community groups would like to put forward for consideration must now follow the CHS application process. Your local WSCC Area Highways Manager is always on hand to offer advice on a proposal.

Providing as much information as possible under each of the headings will strengthen the application and each proposal will need the support of the local Member. Following submission all proposals will be evaluated to establish a 'value for money' ranking.

Evaluation

There is no cut-off date for submissions made via this process, which is ongoing. All applications will initially be scored by a Highways Engineer. Applications will then be moderated and, if successful, be considered for inclusion in the next annual works programme for design and feasibility and to secure finance for delivery on the ground the year after.

The evaluation will also consider the availability of section 106 money appropriate to support the proposal. This is now the only route through which parishes and communities can have highway schemes considered for delivery with County Council or s106 funding.

Historically the annual spend delivering such community schemes has been in the region of £2m. This level of funding is not guaranteed in the future and individual schemes much in excess of £200k are likely to require an alternative method of funding. Schemes larger than this are typically strategic level investments and this cap ensures a greater spread of community funding.

Through this new process WSCC Highways will be better able to deliver a manageable programme that can be resourced, planned and will be sustainable.

Frequently asked questions

What happened to projects we were waiting for?

Answer:

All schemes that were previously named in a published WSCC delivery programme are being progressed unless, through the design process, it has become apparent they cannot be feasibly delivered. In that case interested parties would be informed, either by the scheme's Project Manager, the Area Highway Manager or the Local member. For any queries regarding the progress of schemes please contact the Area Highway Manager.

When do we need to submit applications by?

Answer:

There is no cut-off date for submissions made via this process, which is ongoing. Any application made will be scored, moderated and, if successful, be considered for design and feasibility in the next annual works programme.

When will we hear about the success of our application?

Answer:

Applicants will be informed of initial scores and likelihood of progress within 1 month of submission. Applications that score sufficiently to be considered will progress to await the setting of annual budget. Once budget is allocated to a specific project the applicants will be notified of its progress to design. Delivery, subject to feasibility will usually follow in the subsequent financial year. The Area Highway Manager will be available to provide updates on the applications progression throughout this process.

When will our scheme be delivered?

Answer:

Programmes run in line with the financial year – April to March. An application scoring above the threshold will be included in the next annual programme for design and feasibility. If shown to be viable, and subject to funding, schemes will usually be built in the following year.

What happens if our application is rejected?

Answer:

If an application fails to meet the threshold score required applicants will be informed by the Area Highway Manager within 1 month of submission.

Can we re-apply if our application is rejected?

Answer:

If there is a material change to circumstances since the original application that could alter the scoring of the application (i.e. a new external funding opportunity has arisen, or a new consultation exercise has been undertaken and provided as evidence) then an application can be resubmitted.

Does the CHS only apply to roads?

Answer:

Not just roads. The CHS applications process covers all “highways” including Public Rights of Way, footpaths and footways as well as bridleways.

How else can we use s106 money?

Answer:

Highways section 106 contributions are specifically paid so the Highways Authority can implement measures on the highway to mitigate the impacts of development within an area or parish. Only the Highways Authority can determine the needs of the network based on engineering and asset management assessments. If appropriate, section 106 money may be used by the Highways Authority to deliver Community Highway Schemes.