SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL

SUFFOLK SPEED LIMIT POLICY

(Approved by The Cabinet at their meeting on 9 December 2014)

Introduction

1. This policy has been developed to give a strong framework to consider whether changes to existing speed limits are appropriate or not and give guidance on speed limits for any new roads. It has been developed following engagement of key stakeholders by the Roads and Transport Policy Development Panel which is a cross party group of Councillors and will be kept under review. There is a separate policy for 20mph limits* and this policy covers all other limits. The policy does not consider directly issues of enforcement, publicity, engineering/ environmental measures or other measures to improve compliance.

2. The overall speed limit framework, including the setting of national limits for different road types, and which exceptions to these general limits can be applied, is the responsibility of the government. The three national speed limits are:

    - The 30mph speed limit on roads with street lighting (sometimes referred to as Restricted Roads)
    - The national speed limit of 60mph on single carriageway roads
    - The national speed limit of 70mph on dual carriageways and motorways

3. These national limits are not, however, appropriate for all roads. The speed limit regime enables traffic authorities such as Suffolk County Council to set local speed limits in situations where local needs and conditions suggest a speed limit which is different from the respective national speed limit.

Background

4. Transport systems play a major part in supporting economic growth but this needs to be in a sustainable and safe way and one that improves the quality of life for communities. A key objective for the Council is to strengthen the Suffolk economy and a Suffolk Growth Strategy has been prepared to achieve that. This indicates that the effective movement of goods and materials and access to training and education are vital for future growth. Speed management including the setting of effective speed limits can support these objectives. Furthermore tourism is identified as an important area and speed limits can support local initiatives including encouraging green tourism by supporting cycling and walking.

5. Historically, Suffolk County Council has been proactive in introducing speed limits primarily on road safety grounds. Suffolk was the first county to introduce

a comprehensive 30mph limits in villages in the 1990s. Generally it is considered that current speed limits are appropriate but it is recognised that in certain circumstance it is appropriate to review speed limits both in terms of their level and extent. It is considered that the principle of village 30mph limits remains appropriate and will not be changed.

6. In 2013 the Department for Transport (DfT) published Setting Local Speed Limits (Circular 01/2013)** giving detailed guidance for traffic authorities. This policy takes account of that guidance, as well as changes in technology and society over recent years. In recent years there has been significant progress in reducing road casualties on Suffolk roads, as well as changes in the way national and local government, the police, and other stakeholders are now engaging with each other and the wider community to continue this progress. Speed limits should be evidence-led and self-explanatory and seek to reinforce people's assessment of what is a safe speed to travel. They should encourage self-compliance. Speed limits should be seen by drivers as the maximum rather than a target speed.

7. Setting speed limits at the appropriate level for the road, and ensuring compliance with these limits, play a key part in ensuring greater safety for all road users. The relationship between speed and likelihood of collision as well as severity of injury is complex, but there is a strong correlation.

Underlying principles

8. The aim of speed management strategies should be to achieve a safe distribution of speeds consistent with a speed limit that reflects the function of the road and the road environment. This should imply a mean speed appropriate to the prevailing road environment, and with all vehicles moving at speeds below or at the posted speed limit, while having regard to the traffic conditions.

9. The estimated collision and injury savings should also be an important factor when considering changes to a local speed limit. Another important consideration when setting a speed limit is what the road looks like to the road users. Drivers are likely to expect and respect lower limits, and be influenced when deciding on what is an appropriate speed, where they can see there are potential hazards, for example schools, built-up residential areas in towns or villages and shopping streets.

10. A principal aim in determining appropriate speed limits should, therefore, be to provide a consistent message between speed limit and what the road looks like, and for changes in speed limit to be reflective of changes in the road layout and characteristics. The following are the important factors when considering what is an appropriate speed limit:

    - **History of collisions**, including frequency, severity, types and causes;
    - **Road geometry and engineering** (width, sightlines, bends, junctions, accesses and safety barriers etc.);
    - **Road function** (strategic, through traffic, local access etc.);
    - **Composition of road users** (including existing and potential levels of vulnerable road users);

- **Existing traffic speeds**; and
- **Road environment**, including level of road-side development and possible impacts on residents (e.g. severance, noise, or air quality).

11. These factors have been used to assess the general criteria for speed limits given below.

Speed limit criteria

12. In association with the police, Suffolk County Council, remains committed to keeping speed management and speed limits under review in order to:
    - Maintain good levels of understanding, acceptance and compliance with speed restrictions in Suffolk;
    - Develop route management strategies which meet the needs of road users, and improve quality of life for local communities;
    - Encourage self-compliance, with speed limits seen by drivers as the maximum rather than a target speed; and
    - Improve road safety.
13. Primary roads and main distributor routes are typically the A and B roads in Suffolk which carry traffic between the larger settlements, or are major urban network links for short – medium distance traffic. Drivers on these routes that link larger settlements in particular will expect to be able to make progress at reasonable speeds within the national speed limits. Restrictions on speed should therefore be considered carefully, with the economic and environmental effects taken into account and ensuring that traffic remains on the most suitable roads and is not displaced onto unsuitable roads. In some circumstances a reduction from the national limit would be appropriate such as where the collision rate is above the average for the type of road and specific measures to address the problems cannot be identified. Such limits should be set at a level appropriate to the geometric standard of the road and so that the need for the limit is self-evident to motorists, or signing is used indicating that it is for accident reduction purposes.
14. The risk of collision increases within settlements and the selected speed limit should be appropriate to the potential dangers. Likely areas of concern within settlements will include:
    - junctions
    - private accesses
    - local facilities (shops, post office, schools, public houses, etc.)
    - pedestrian activity (crossing the road, walking on footways, walking on the carriageways)
15. In general, as the size of the settlement increases, so too do the numbers of potential hazards. The need for a lower speed limit is therefore self-evident and reducing speed accordingly is accepted by motorists. Moving traffic, particularly at higher speeds, gives rise to severance and affects the quality of life in communities. A balance has to be struck between the needs of the community

and the needs of motorists, particularly where roads are the main traffic routes in the county.

16. For all other roads which are the C or unclassified roads, there is a less likely expectation that drivers would be able to make progress in the manner that they can on the higher classified roads. Therefore lower limits may be more acceptable and enforceable and the economic impacts are generally likely to be less significant.

17. To encourage self-enforcement, limits should be as clear as possible and in order to achieve this, drivers should not be confronted with too many changes in speed limits over short distances. Therefore any one limit should be not less than 600m in length except as noted below for 30mph limits.

18. Fear of traffic can affect people's quality of life in villages and it is self-evident that villages should have comparable speed limits to similar roads in urban areas. It is therefore government and Suffolk County Council policy that a 30 mph speed limit should be used throughout villages. This is reflected in the criteria given below

19. In deciding upon speed limits **lower than the national levels**, the criteria to be considered should be the following:

Speed limit – 60mph

- dual carriageway
- no facilities - shops, schools etc.
- only limited frontage development
- collision history
- few bends, junctions or accesses
- individual houses/small group(s) not exceeding 500m overall length

Speed limit – 50mph

- few facilities - shops, filling station, public house, etc.
- some frontage development but not necessarily extensive
- collision history
- existing traffic speeds
- few junctions and possibly limited bends and accesses
- limited pedestrian/cycle activity
- limited reasons to cross the road

Speed limit – 40mph

- settlement has shop(s), school(s), public house, filling station, etc.
- significant development on both sides of road, but not necessarily continuous, with some development in depth, overall frontage exceeds 500m in length
- collision history

- existing traffic speeds
- many junctions, bends and accesses
- some pedestrian/cycle activity throughout the day with possible peaks associated with schools or community facilities
- some provision for pedestrians/cyclists or acknowledged need and possibly warning signs
- lengths of road that more closely fit the conditions for a 50mph limit but where the standard of road/forward visibility is more appropriate to 40mph

Speed limit – 30mph

Urban situation

- a clear built up area with almost continuous frontage development numerous facilities generating pedestrian/cycle activity - schools, shops, PH, play areas, etc.
- collision history
- existing traffic speeds
- numerous junctions or accesses
- significant pedestrian activity throughout the day
- refer to the Suffolk Residential Design Guide *** in relation to new residential developments.

Rural situation – villages

- A clear village character with 20 or more houses (on one or both sides of road).
- If just fewer than 20 houses, extra allowance should be made for key buildings such as a church, shop or school.
- Where the character of a village falls outside this definition, discretion should be used in deciding the appropriate speed limit
- A normal minimum length for a new speed limit would be 600 metres.
- This may be reduced to 400 metres where the density of development over this shorter length exceeds 20 houses and, in exceptional circumstances, it could be reduced to 300 metres.

20. In respect of village 30 mph limits in some circumstances it might be appropriate to consider an intermediate speed limit of 40 mph prior to the 30 mph terminal speed limit signs at the entrance, in particular where there are outlying houses beyond the village boundary or roads with high approach speeds. For the latter, consideration needs to be given to other speed management measures to support the message of the speed limit and help encourage compliance. Where appropriate, such measures might include

signing, centre hatching or other measures that would have the effect of narrowing or changing the nature and appearance of the road.

21. There may be specific local circumstances where it would be beneficial to introduce lower limits than national levels which do not meet the above criteria. These will need very careful consideration and may include:

    - where there is a particular collision history and a speed limit is part of a remedial scheme which is signed as such
    - where a limit may support an economic development initiative such as in a tourist area and engineering measures are taken to assist enforcement
    - where there is a significant adverse environment impact such as noise or visual intrusion and engineering measures are taken to assist enforcement
    - to achieve a consistency of approach over a particular route
    - at specific locations on national and local cycle networks to assist cyclists
    - at specific locations to promote walking routes.

22. Furthermore there may be specific local circumstances in relation to Community Speed Watch where small changes to the extent of existing limits are acceptable even if the above criteria are not met. Community Speed Watch in Suffolk is a popular initiative which allows members of the community to address the issue of speeding by becoming actively involved in road safety by monitoring speeds at safe locations with speed detection equipment. It addresses the problem of speeding through the joint work of the police, local community, parish councils and other partners. The aim is not to catch as many speeding drivers as possible but to reduce speed in areas of concern. The use of the speed detection equipment requires a clear forward visibility on 100m from a safe monitoring point. There may be instances where such a distance is not possible to achieve within the existing speed limit terminals and careful consideration will be given to small changes in limits, even if they do not meet the above criteria, to allow speed watch to be undertaken.

23. In the majority of cases the use of above criteria are considered all that is required to make decisions on the introduction of new speed limits. However where there are more significant and expensive schemes such as route treatments or area wide schemes, then consideration will be given to using the Department for Transport Speed Limit Appraisal Tool **** which allows a very detailed assessment to support decision making. This is a web based tool which facilitates forecasting changes to speed levels, journey times for business and personal users, vehicle operating cost, accident severity and emissions resulting from the speed limit changes.

References

*20mph Speed Limit Policy:
www.suffolk.gov.uk/assets/suffolk.gov.uk/Environment%20and%20Transport/Roads%20and%20Pavements/2014-02-25%2020%20mph%20Policy.pdf

** DfT Setting Local Speed Limits:
www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/63975/circular-01-2013.pdf

***Suffolk Residential Design Guide:
www.suffolk.gov.uk/business/planning-and-design-advice/suffolk-design-guide-for-residential-areas/

****Speed Limit Appraisal Tool:
www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/50262/user-guidance.pdf