Agreed Statement of Common Ground between Shepway District Council and the Highways Agency regarding the Local Development Framework Core Strategy

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This Statement of Common Ground sets out the agreed position of Shepway District Council and the Highways Agency regarding the soundness of the Core Strategy, and in particular any proposals relating to the Strategic Road Network (SRN). The statement also explains how this agreed position has been reached.

1.2 Shepway District Council is responsible for the preparation of the Local Development Framework Core Strategy, and for the preparation of an associated Infrastructure Delivery Plan.

1.3 The Highways Agency is responsible for managing and operating the SRN in England on behalf of the Secretary of State for Transport. This responsibility includes considering the potential impacts on the safe and efficient operation of the SRN that result from development proposals and initiatives.

1.4 The SRN in Shepway comprises the M20 Junctions 11 to 13, the A20 to the east of the M20, the A259 to the west of Brenzett and the southern section of the A2070 between Brenzett and M20 Junction 10.

2 CORE STRATEGY TRANSPORT EVIDENCE BASE

2.1 URS / Scott Wilson were commissioned by Shepway Council to prepare a Transport Strategy for their District. The remit of the Transport Strategy was to include and consider both transport matters which relate to the existing district area, as well as those relating to the potential Strategic Site allocations which have been made for future development.

2.2 The overall objective of the Transport Strategy has been to prepare a sound and robust evidence base, which can feed into the Core Strategy and assist in meeting the former requirements of Planning Policy Statement 12 and currently the National Planning Policy Framework (para 182).

2.3 The Highways Agency has been consulted by Shepway District Council at various junctures during the preparation of the Transport Strategy, including the development of the spreadsheet traffic model which has been used to determine the impacts of existing and Strategic Site traffic on the District’s highways.

2.4 The Highways Agency considers the Transport Strategy to be a robust and credible document representing the principal transport evidence base for the Core Strategy.

3 HIGHWAYS AGENCY RESPONSE TO DRAFT CORE STRATEGY SUBMISSION DOCUMENT


3.2 The 20th September 2011 letter confirmed that the Highways Agency were generally supportive of the Core Strategy document. The letter did however contain a total of seven concerns or requests for clarification from Shepway District Council.
3.3 Shepway District Council have undertaken further analysis on these comments with a view to sufficiently addressing them to the satisfaction of the Highway Agency. The issues are discussed further below.

How mechanisms such as Travel Plans will be enforced within the Local Development Framework proposals to ensure sustainable developments are delivered.

3.4 Shepway District Council states that Policy SS5 of the Core Strategy requires that all major trip generating developments will implement Travel Plans. Also, ongoing Strategic Site negotiations with Kent County Council include discussions of Travel Plans and these shall be progressed as appropriate.

3.5 The Highways Agency are satisfied with Shepway District Council’s response and the requirements of Policy SS5. The Highways Agency will also have the opportunity to consider the content of Transport Assessment and Travel Plan documents through the planning application and masterplanning processes at a later date.

Confirmation that the Shorncliffe Garrison Strategic Site has been considered within the transport modelling evidence base work undertaken to date.

3.6 Shepway District Council has confirmed that this site has been included within the traffic modelling exercise. All Strategic Sites were modelled originally in the January 2011 Transport Strategy, and then re-modelled for the June 2011 Transport Strategy Addendum which was based upon an updated estimation of the residential elements of Strategic Sites that may be delivered up to 2026.

3.7 The Highways Agency are satisfied that the potential traffic impacts associated with future development of the Shorncliffe Garrison site has been considered within the transport evidence base.

3.8 The inclusion of Policy SS7 and Appendix 2 ‘Infrastructure Projects’ in the Core Strategy also identifies the likely requirement for upgrading of the Cheriton High Street Junction. The Highways Agency considers this to be important due to the potential for the operation and safety of the M20 and its Junction 12 to be adversely impacted by congestion in and around the nearby Cheriton High Street area.

3.9 The Highways Agency will also have the opportunity to consider the content of Transport Assessment and Travel Plan documents through the planning application and masterplanning processes at a later date.

Confirmation that the Folkestone Racecourse Strategic Site can be satisfactorily accommodated at M20 Junction 11, because previous junction modelling work did not appear to support the proposed level of development at this location.

3.10 Shepway District Council has confirmed that this site has been included within the traffic modelling exercise. All Strategic Sites were modelled originally in the January 2011 Transport Strategy, and then re-modelled for the June 2011 Transport Strategy Addendum which was based upon an updated estimation of the residential elements of Strategic Sites that may be delivered up to 2026.

3.11 The Highways Agency are satisfied that the transport evidence base demonstrates that traffic associated with the development of Folkestone Racecourse can be satisfactorily accommodated within the existing capacity at M20 Junction 11.

3.12 The Highways Agency will also have the opportunity to consider the content of Transport Assessment and Travel Plan documents through the planning application and masterplanning processes at a later date.
Previous work in the Cheriton area has identified potential issues for M20 Junction 12 if the local road network, particularly the Cheriton High Street/Interchange, is not improved or traffic levels managed. The Highways Agency has longstanding concerns about the layout of the junction and its available capacity to accommodate potential developments in the area. The Highways Agency suggests that it is vital that this junction is considered for appropriate capacity improvements as set out in Appendix 2 of the Core Strategy.

3.13 Shepway District Council has referred to planning application Y09/0681/SH which sought to extend the Tesco Cheriton store and included proposed alterations to the A20/Cheriton Interchange junction, effectively introducing a right turn to remove local traffic from M20 Junction 12. This application was however previously withdrawn by the applicant.

3.14 The Highways Agency are satisfied that the inclusion of Policy SS7 and Appendix 2 ‘Infrastructure Projects’ in the Core Strategy identifies the likely requirement for upgrading of the Cheriton High Street Junction. This is important due to the potential for the operation and safety of the M20 and its Junction 12 to be adversely impacted by congestion in and around the nearby Cheriton High Street area.

3.15 The Highways Agency will also have the opportunity to consider the content of Transport Assessment and Travel Plan documents through the planning application and masterplanning processes at a later date.

Previous Transport Assessment work in the Hawkinge area has identified that the collection of A20/A260 junctions operate over capacity and therefore mitigation is required. It is recommended that any further development proposed at this location will have to mitigate their development impact at this location.

3.16 The Highways Agency has concerns over the safety and operation of the A20/A260 junction (comprising two roundabouts and a priority junction) and the adjacent A20 carriageway. This concern has stemmed from information presented in a Transport Assessment supporting two planning applications (Y10/0738/SH and Y10/0739/SH) for a mixed use development in Hawkinge, located off Haven Drive.

3.17 Capacity assessments undertaken for the Transport Assessment have demonstrated that the A20/A260 junction currently operates over capacity, and that this situation is expected to worsen in the future. The capacity problems are largely brought about by the currently anticipated growth in background traffic levels in the future.

3.18 The applicant proposed a highway scheme to improve traffic conditions at the A20/A260 junction and the Highways Agency agreed that it would mitigate the traffic impacts of the development and provide a ‘nil detriment’ scenario in accordance with Department for Transport 02/2007 Circular ‘Planning and the Strategic Road Network’. Planning applications Y10/0738/SH and Y10/0739/SH have been granted planning permission but are both conditioned to the delivery and opening to traffic of the agreed highway works at the A20/A260 junction, prior to any part of the development being occupied.

3.19 For the reason that developers are only required to provide ‘nil detriment’ mitigation schemes under Circular 02/2007, the Highways Agency are concerned that the improvements agreed from the two planning applications referred to above will not be sufficient to prevent traffic from tailing back onto the mainline carriageway of the A20 and potentially into the Roundhill Tunnel. This could have significant safety implications because accidents that occur on high speed roads such as the A20 are likely to have more serious or fatal consequences than those occurring on low speed roads.

3.20 Additionally, the Highways Agency’s operation protocol for the Roundhill Tunnel does not allow queuing to extend into the tunnels themselves. Thus in the event of queuing
extending into the tunnel, it would have to be closed until all traffic has cleared. This situation would have both safety and operational implications that must be avoided other than in exceptional circumstances.

3.21 Shepway District Council has confirmed that the June 2011 Transport Strategy Addendum incorrectly included an allocation of 300 dwellings at Hawkinge as a ‘Strategic Site Allocation’. The correct situation is reflected in the Update to Transport Strategy Highway Impact Report (A21). The Core Strategy recognises that Hawkinge has undergone considerable growth in recent years and therefore seeks to consolidation of the settlement. As such no new sites for any type of development are proposed in the Core Strategy.

3.22 For the reason that the Core Strategy does not allocate any new development to the Hawkinge area, the Highways Agency are satisfied that the Strategic Allocations contained within the document are unlikely to worsen the operation of the A20/A260 junction.

3.23 Notwithstanding this, the Highways Agency and Shepway District Council (in consultation with Kent County Council) are committed to resolving the situation explained above in unison, outside of the Core Strategy consultation process. This is required to ensure that the local and strategic highways in the Hawkinge area operate efficiently and safely in the future.

*Confirmation that the development proposals in the submitted document are wholly consistent with the transport modelling evidence base work undertaken to date to confirm that the highway network performs as expected and the list of proposed infrastructure improvements (as detailed in Appendix 2) are still appropriate. This should be in respect of the scale, type and location of development proposed.*

3.24 The Highways Agency are satisfied that this issue has been addressed by the transport evidence base and further to the previous responses in this Statement of Common Ground.

*The Core Strategy should contain a view on the deliverability of the transport interventions being proposed, although it is recognised that this will largely be presented in the supporting Infrastructure Delivery Plan.*

3.25 The Highways Agency are satisfied that this issue has been addressed by the transport evidence base, the Core Strategy document and further to the previous responses in this Statement of Common Ground.

4 HIGHWAYS AGENCY RECOMMENDATION

4.1 The information set out above represents a Statement of Common Ground where the Highways Agency’s concerns have been alleviated by provision of additional information or clarification from Shepway District Council. The Highways Agency is satisfied that the clarification above is sufficient to justify the soundness of the Core Strategy in relation to its earlier comments.

4.2 The Highways Agency and Shepway District Council (in consultation with Kent County Council) are committed to resolving the situation regarding the A20/A260 junction at Hawkinge in unison, and outside of the Core Strategy consultation process. This is required to ensure that the local and strategic highways in the Hawkinge area operate efficiently and safely in the future.

4.3 The Highways Agency will continue to be involved in the preparation of Shepway District Council’s Local Development Framework through collaborative working on subsequent Development Plan and Supplementary Planning Documents. In particular,
the Infrastructure Delivery Plan will build upon the details of the infrastructure identified by Shepway District Council as being needed to support the delivery of the Core Strategy. It shall explain the approach that Shepway District Council has taken to identifying this infrastructure, how it will be delivered, and an assessment of the potential risks associated with doing so.