Suffolk County Council

20mph Policy



Introduction

In an effort to enhance road safety and improve the quality of life in our communities, we are excited to introduce the new 20mph policy. The policy allows communities greater opportunity to reduce the speed limit, where appropriate, in residential and high-pedestrian areas to 20mph. By implementing this policy, we hope to create safer environments for pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers alike.

The decision to lower speed limits is backed by extensive research and successful case studies from other regions. Studies have shown that reducing speed limits can significantly decrease the number and severity of road accidents. Additionally, slower speeds contribute to a more pleasant and liveable community, encouraging outdoor activities and fostering a sense of neighbourhood cohesion.

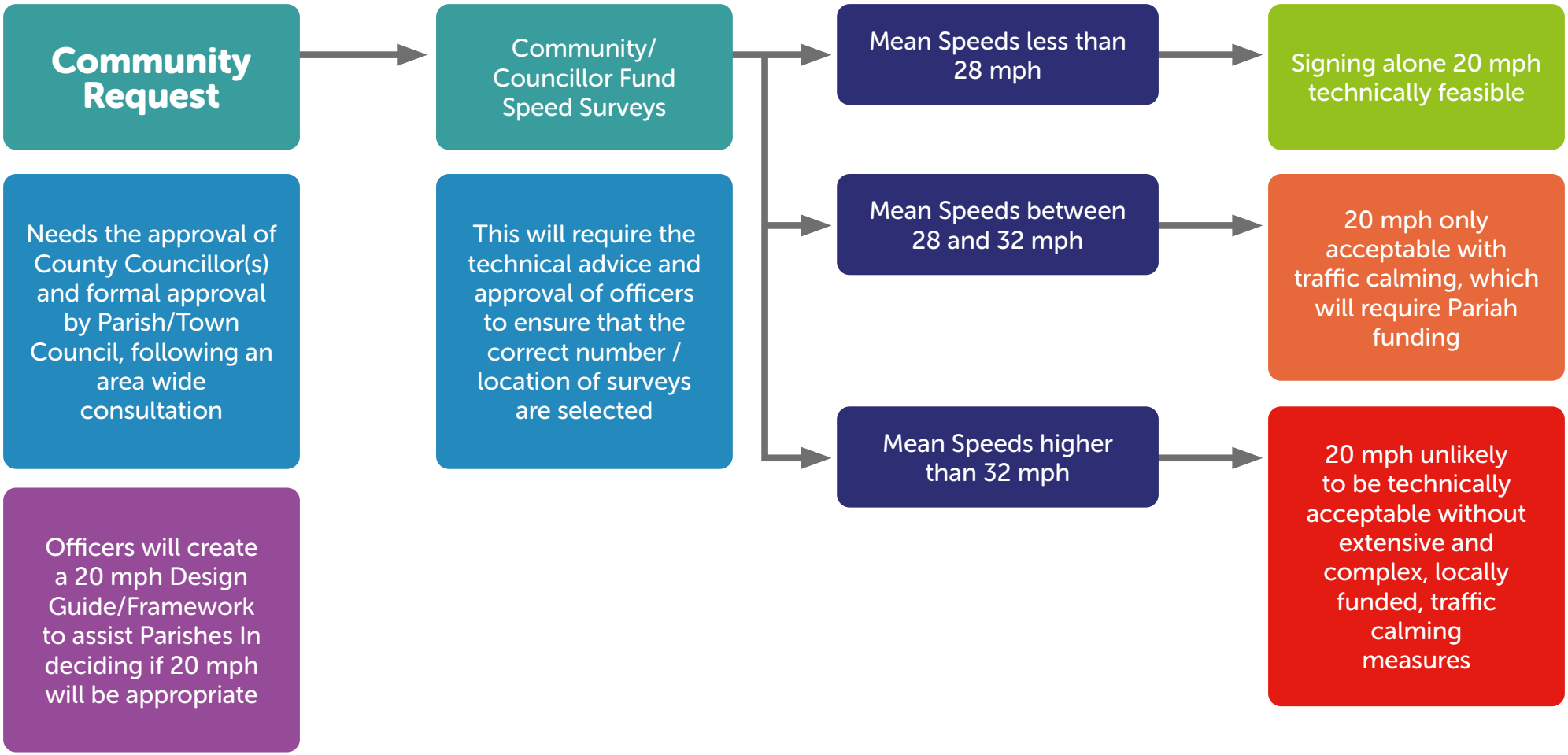
We will work closely with local communities to ensure smooth implementation and compliance.

Together, we can make our streets safer and more enjoyable for everyone.

The 20mph assessment process

The new policy is focused on the function of the road and actual speeds. This means where communities want lower speed limits, and the speeds are already low, the presumption in favour of a lower limit will apply. To aid decision making and provide local communities a clear understanding we have provided criteria for when a 20mph speed limit might be acceptable, and the considerations for ensuring good compliance with the new limit.

The process for communities to apply for a 20mph limit



The initial request would come from the local community, typically a parish or town council. It would need the support of the local County Councillor(s) and be based on meaningful local engagement to test the local appetite. This should show clear support from a Parish survey or similar consultation (e.g. through a neighbourhood plan). County Councillors are encouraged to engage with the Community Liaison Engineer in the first instance.

Guidance is provided for local communities as to where 20mph speed limits are generally successful, and where they are not, to prevent too much abortive work being carried out by the community. See the Guidance note for local communities.

Observed mean traffic speeds	Acceptability of 20 mph speed limit	Expected measures
Below 28 mph	Likely to be acceptable.	Sign only speed limit. Gateway signing for conspicuous entrance and compliance would be recommended
28–32 mph	Unlikely to be acceptable with signing alone.	Gateway signing, traffic calming throughout the area.
Above 32 mph	Unlikely to be acceptable without extensive measures.	Extensive and high influence traffic calming (e.g., road humps, cushions, buildouts, chicanes), illumination to avoid hazards at night, subject to Road Safety Audit.

The local community or councillor will then have to fund speed surveys in locations agreed as being representative with SCC officers. Existing data may already exist and may be used instead if considered suitable by officers.

Once the survey data has been reviewed a recommendation will be made based on the observed traffic speeds.

Once the assessment has been made, and a recommendation provided, the scheme can progress to the design stage if sufficient local funding is available for both the estimated costs of design and construction, based on other similar projects.

Additional considerations

Primary consideration will be given to the function of the location. Where the focus is on 'place' and significant numbers of more vulnerable road users are likely to be present, support is likely to be forthcoming. However, where the focus of the road is on 'movement' and traffic speeds and / or volumes are naturally higher, support is unlikely.

Requests are therefore unlikely to be taken forward on the major roads, such as the Major Road Network (including the A12 and A140 for example).

Generally, the local community would arrange the engagement and consultation. However, in larger towns only a small number of streets may be affected and therefore consulted. The relevant local County Councillor(s) will have a key role in this situation to bring a scheme forward.

A minimum length of 600m for a speed limit would be expected, but 400m could be considered, especially if covering multiple roads.

The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) recommends 24mph as the threshold for signed only limits and this position is maintained locally by Suffolk Police. The Police may formally object to individual schemes on a

variety of grounds, for example, if they deem existing speeds to be too high and there is insufficient traffic calming included.

Reducing the speed limit will therefore not result in any likelihood of additional enforcement. Communities need to understand this and consider if a 20mph speed limit is appropriate or would require additional traffic calming to be effective. In the situation that a new speed limit has been implemented and has poor compliance the local community will need to reconsider if the limit:

- Is inappropriate (and should be raised back to its original limit).
- Requires additional traffic calming (to be funded locally).
- If they need to deploy local resources (such as a Community Speed Watch scheme).

In some cases, Suffolk County Council will promote 20mph speed limits, linked to specific improvement schemes. These proposals will often be linked to areas where zonal pedestrian improvement schemes or active travel corridor schemes are proposed, in most cases these will be in the larger towns, with the highest potential for sustainable transport. These schemes will be considered against the policy criteria above, and as required will be supplemented with traffic calming and engineering measures to ensure compliance with the new 20mph speed limit.

The formal acceptance of Speed Limit Orders will still require approval as set out in the Council's constitution, at the end of the Statutory Consultation period. The decision makers will use discretion to decide on marginal cases, or request the opinion of the Development and Regulation Committee where appropriate.

Specific circumstances regarding schools

Speeding in the vicinity of schools can create additional risk, particularly for young people. Typically, around a quarter of pedestrian KSI accidents are under 16 years of age. Children have a less developed sense of the speed of approaching vehicles than adults when the vehicle is travelling in excess of 20mph and this can cause them to take on additional risks.

When considering the implementation of a 20mph limit around a school, opportunities to extend the scheme to produce a coherent 'area' plan should be taken. Driver compliance is lower for 'school only' schemes and increases in direct proportion to the length of the 20mph limit. It is likely that the minimum length expected for other 20mph limits would not apply outside schools, and would be the exception to shorter lengths. Other measures such as warning signs to highlight the presence of both the school and the limit should be considered.

It is consistently reported that perceived safety is the most significant barrier to active travel and providing a safe 'area' around the school for more vulnerable road users will encourage active travel with the associated positive benefits around child health and learning outcomes and could lead to a reduction in inconsiderate driver behaviour and non-compliant parking.

In the interests of coherence and increased compliance, it is anticipated that many school 20mph limits will be considered as part of a wider town or parish scheme. However, where this opportunity does not exist or is inappropriate, schools will be able to directly request and implement a 20mph limit.