



Our ref: NH/24/06170

Your ref: Draft Rother Local Plan 2020–2040: Public Consultation under Regulation 18 of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning)

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**FAO: Planning Policy Team  
Rother District Council**

17 July 2024

Dear Planning Policy Team,

Thank you for your formal notification email of 30 April 2024 inviting National Highways to comment on the Draft Rother Local Plan 2020–2040: Public Consultation under Regulation 18 of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning), as part of the consultation process, seeking a response no later than 1700 on 23 July 2024.

The use of **bold underlined text** below identifies areas where National Highways requests changes to the draft report or where National Highways requests that further evidence be submitted.

## **Introduction**

National Highways has been consulted on the Rother District Council's (RDC) Draft Local Plan (Draft LP) that has been prepared, pursuant to Regulation 18, as part of the first stage of engagement for updating the Local Plan 20230 – 2040.

Regulation 18 sets out the Council's draft policies and growth strategy that will be included within the Local Plan and provides the opportunity for stakeholders to comment on the contents of the Draft LP.

National Highways has an interest proposal that have the potential to impact on the safe and efficient operation of the SRN, in addition to the cumulative impact on the SRN of targeted growth. Consequently, it is necessary to determine the impact of the emerging RDC Local Plan, particularly at the A259 which runs in an east-west direction in the south

of the RDC area and the A21 which runs in a north-south direction through the centre of the RDC area.

Junctions of note along the A259 include:

- A259/ Fishmarket Road (Skinners Roundabout);
- A259/ Wish Street (Kettle o' Fish Roundabout);
- A259/ A2036 roundabout;
- A259/ A269 junction; and
- A259/ Chestnut Walk/ Peartree Lane/ Cooden Sea Road (Little Common Roundabout).

Junctions of note along the A21 include:

- A21/ Northbridge Street/ Church Lane roundabout;
- A21/ A2100 (John's Cross Roundabout); and
- A21/ B2244 junction.

These comments summarise our review of the consultation material and recommends actions to be considered in the development of the Local Plan.

## **Background**

### Rother District Council's Core Strategy (2014) and Development and Site Allocations Plans (2019)

The new Local Plan will replace the current set of adopted development plan documents that include RDC's Core Strategy (2014) and Development and Site Allocations (2019) Plans.

### Road Investment Strategy

#### *A21 Safety Package*

Road Investment Strategy 2 (RIS2) included proposals for Road Investment Strategy 3 (RIS3) (known as 'RIS3 pipeline'). One of the schemes that was originally included in the RIS3 pipeline was the "A21 Safety Package". However, due to its importance, this scheme was brought forward by National Highways into development.

National Highways has committed to deliver a suite of safety improvements along the A21 route corridor from Sevenoaks to Hastings. This scheme started in December 2020 and is forecasted to be completed by December 2024. The scheme is split into four sections.

### *A27 East of Lewes Package*

To the west of Rother District, RIS2 included the “*A27 East of Lewes Package*”, that was committed for Road Period 2 (RP2). National Highways would note that this scheme relates to the “*preferred route announcement for the A27 East of Lewes Improvement Scheme (2017)*” that is referred to above. The scheme was completed in June 2023.

The scheme sought to mitigate congestion on the A27 to the east of Lewes that was caused by the narrow carriageway and low capacity at junctions. The scheme also considered the issue of limited overtaking opportunities, meaning that traffic regularly queued behind cyclists and other slow-moving vehicles.

### *A27 Lewes to Polegate*

Again, to the west of the Rother District, one of the ‘RIS3 pipeline’ schemes mentioned in RIS2 was the A27 Lewes to Polegate scheme.

This scheme seeks to deliver improvements to the A27 between Lewes and Eastbourne, including improving junctions around Eastbourne by upgrading the A27 to dual carriageway south of the Polegate roundabout and introducing cycling and walking facilities.

**Again, it is important to note that, at the time of writing, there is no commitment to deliver RIS3 schemes.**

### ‘Strategic road network and the delivery of sustainable development’ circular 01/2022

The consultation material has been reviewed for accordance with the policy document “*Strategic road network and the delivery of sustainable development*” (Circular 01/2022). This document should be read in conjunction with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), planning policy for traveller sites, national planning policy for waste, planning practice guidance, national design guide, National Model Design Code, Manual for Streets (MfS) and Local Transport Note (LTN) 1/20.

It should be noted that in relation to local plans and spatial development strategies, the government expects that the relevant authorities will engage with National Highways from the outset of the process, to understand the interaction between land use designations and the impacts on road safety and future performance of the SRN.

As noted in Paragraph 31 of Circular 01/2022, the NPPF expects local plans and spatial development strategies to be underpinned by a clear and transparent evidence base which informs the authority's preferred approach to land use and strategic transport options, and the formulation of policies and allocations that will be subject to public consultation. National Highways will expect this process to explore all options to reduce a reliance on the SRN for local journeys including a reduction in the need to travel and integrating land use considerations with the need to maximise opportunities for walking, wheeling, cycling, public transport and shared travel.

Furthermore, as stated within paragraph 29, local authorities should consider the cumulative impacts of development, including planned growth in adjoining authorities and how this impacts the SRN.

More detailed comments relating to the policy requirements of Circular 01/2022 are provided, where relevant, throughout this review.

## **Geography and Population**

RDC has reviewed key characteristics and provided underlying statistics to establish the existing situation of the district; however this does not relate to transport matters.

National Highways would note that Circular 01/22 states that as part of their Local Plan evidence base *"the local authority should identify the key issues within their study area regarding transport provision and accessibility, setting out how the plan or strategy can address these key issues in consultation with (National Highways)"* (paragraph 33). This overview of some of the challenges and opportunities within the district may help to frame this key Circular requirement.

RDC notes that the as a predominantly rural district there is a high reliance on the private car.

**National Highways would recommend that RDC use current Census data, such as method used and distance travelled to work and car availability, to highlight the issues relating to private vehicle use and the lack of public transport provision within the district.**

**National Highways are happy to engage with RDC to understand where existing National Highways evidence can be shared to assist in the plan-making process. We would note that data for a number of traffic count locations on the A21 and A259 is available via WebTRIS (<https://webtris.highwaysengland.co.uk/>).**

## Vision, Overall Priorities and Objectives

RDC has set out an overarching vision that splits into a number of 'priorities'. The main vision centres around improving sustainable development and enhancing quality of life within the district by 2040.

National Highways would note that two priorities have been put forward:

- Overall Priority 1: Green to the Core; and
- Overall Priority 2: Live Well Locally.

National Highways would suggest that a vision-led approach aligns with Circular 01/2022 policy. Circular 01/2022 recommends setting outcomes communities want to achieve and providing the solutions to deliver those outcomes (vision-led approaches including 'vision and validate,' 'decide and provide' or 'monitor and manage'). Paragraph 15 states National Highways will *"support local authorities in achieving this aim through its engagement with their plan-making and decision-taking stages, while recognising the varying challenges that will be presented by certain sites based on their land use, scale and/or location"*.

### Overall Priority 1: Green to the Core

RDC notes that to contribute to being 'Green to the Core', a radical reduction in carbon emissions is required through planning for sustainable transport, net zero housing and renewable energy.

National Highways would note that promoting sustainable forms of transport and facilitating an active travel network aligns with paragraph 13 of the Circular 01/2022, where it is stated that *"walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport must be the natural first choice for all who can take it"*.

### Overall Priority 2: Live Well Locally

With 'Live Well Locally' RDC hopes to create sustainable and inclusive communities by implementing 'Connected and compact neighbourhoods' where people can meet most of their daily needs within a reasonable distance of their home, with the option to walk, wheel, cycle or use public transport.

National Highways welcomes ensuring communities can easily access their needs within a reasonable distance, we would note that this aligns with Circular 01/2022, and National

Highways expects strategic policy-making authorities to promote development at locations that are or can be made sustainable.

## **Strategic and Non-Strategic Policies**

RDC has set out a number of strategic and non-strategic policies:

*“**Strategic policies** set out the overall strategy for the pattern, scale and design quality of places and make sufficient provision, in line with the presumption in favour of sustainable development. **Non-strategic policies** set out more detailed policies for specific areas and types of development, including site allocations.”*

RDC has grouped the policies within 10 categories, the following are of relevance for National Highways:

- Green to the Core;
- Live Well Locally;
- Development Strategy and Principles;
- Health and Well-being;
- Infrastructure;
- Housing; and
- Economy.

National Highways has reviewed the policies relevant to transport, National Highways and the SRN and would offer the following comments.

### **Green to the Core**

Within the Green to the Core chapter, RDC sets out a number of detailed policy requirements to contribute to climate change mitigation, with the aim to meet the Council’s “Climate Strategy 2023”, which states that Rother will make the district climate-resilient and reduce emissions to net zero by 2030.

The overall aim for Rother to become a net-zero district is welcomed by National Highways and we would note that this aligns with National Highways commitment to net zero maintenance and construction emissions by 2040 and net zero road user emissions by 2050, which is also in line with the government’s commitments in Decarbonising Transport: A Better, Greener Britain (“the transport decarbonisation plan”).

## Live Well Locally

Within the Live Well Locally chapter, RDC sets out a number of detailed policies that aim to contribute to promote healthy, sustainable, inclusive and connected communities by reducing the overall need to travel, whilst offering the best opportunity for active travel.

National Highways would note that the majority of Live Well Locally policies relate to and attempt to tackle transport issues.

Policy LWL2 puts forward accessibility criteria to facilities and services, promoting housing developments within areas where amenities can be accessed via walking and cycling, or by public transport. National Highways would consider the policy to support development within the most sustainable locations as appropriate as it aligns with the requirements of Circular 01/2022, where National Highways expects strategic policy-making authorities to promote development at locations that are or can be made sustainable.

Policy LWL3 “Walking, Wheeling, Cycling and Public Transport (Outside the Site)” refers to promoting development sites within areas in close proximity to public transport as well as established active travel routes. When these do not exist, a high-quality walking and wheeling route should be provided from the site to a transport node, primary school, food-shop and open green or blue space, in line with Manual for Streets and LTN 1/20. Furthermore, Policy LWL4 “Walking, Wheeling, Cycling & Public Transport (Within the Site)” states within the site of new developments, walking, wheeling and cycling should be prioritised, ensuring pedestrian and cycle routes are as direct and safe as possible, developed in line with Manual for Streets and LTN 1/20 and are integrated into the surrounding area. National Highways would note that promoting sustainable forms of transport and facilitating an active travel network aligns with paragraph 13 of the Circular 01/2022, where it is stated that *“walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport must be the natural first choice for all who can take it”*.

## Development Strategy and Principles

RDC notes that the proposed spatial development strategy seeks to maximise development opportunities while also delivering the Local Plan’s vision and objectives.

RDC’s proposed development strategy has been split into five spatial sub-areas. RDC has presented an analysis of the existing situation within each sub-area, identifying key areas of concern.

## Bexhill

RDC notes that there are known capacity constraints on the A259 western route into Bexhill via Little Common and at the Little Common roundabout. RDC suggests that in order to open up opportunities for development in West Bexhill, *“junction improvements and significant interventions, such as roundabout redesign, will be required to both alleviate road capacity and prioritise shared and active transport options on the existing network”*.

**National Highways would note that RDC must consider Circular 01/2022 paragraph 29: “... there cannot be any presumption that such infrastructure will be funded through a future RIS. The company will therefore work with local authorities in their strategic policy-making functions in identifying realistic alternative funding mechanisms, to include other public funding programmes and developer contribution strategies to be secured by a policy in a local plan or spatial development strategy.”**

## Northern Rother

In North Rother, RDC notes that the A21 could become a sustainable travel corridor with buses given priority, linked to walking, cycling and wheeling routes. Furthermore, RDC states that: *“The Transport for the South-East (TfSE) Strategic Investment Plan identifies bypasses on the A21 at Flimwell and Hurst Green as necessary transport interventions to decarbonise transport in the south-east by 2050.”*

National Highways would note that introducing a sustainable travel corridor along the A21 aligns with Circular 01/2022 policy by encouraging walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport use as the natural first choice. **However, we would again reiterate that the need for any SRN mitigation must be considered after all options have been taken to maximise the accessibility by sustainable transport modes and there cannot be any presumption that infrastructure to mitigate Local Plan impacts will be funded through a future RIS.**

## Development Strategy and Principles Policies

RDC’s proposed development strategy and principles are set out in six policies.

National Highways would note, although RDC has previously referred to promoting sustainable travel and encouraging development in sustainable locations, the



development strategy and principles policies do not fully incorporate promoting development in sustainable locations near existing communities and public transport.

Policy DEV1 does refer to providing appropriate amenities and the provision of appropriate means of access for disabled users, however, **National Highways would expect the policy to specifically relate to providing development within sustainable locations in order to promote active travel and the use of public transport.**

## Health and Wellbeing

Within the Health and Wellbeing chapter, RDC sets out a number of detailed policies that aim to support health and wellbeing within the district.

National Highways would note that a number of the health and wellbeing policies relate to transport. Policy HWB1 refers to prioritising the use of accessible sustainable and active transport measures and Policy HWB6 supports the development of new public rights of ways and other public networks as well as improving the access to the existing network.

The overall aim to improve active travel and public transport infrastructure is welcomed as this aligns with Circular 01/2022 policy by encouraging walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport use as the natural first choice.

**Furthermore, National Highways would encourage RDC within their Local Plan to engage with neighbouring authorities regarding public transport improvements. Improving public transport links between authorities will help alleviate pressure on the SRN by reducing the number of cross-boundary private vehicle trips.**

## Infrastructure

RDC has set out a number of policies related to the district infrastructure delivery. RDC notes that it is essential that development and resulting population growth is supported by the appropriate level of infrastructure to serve it. This relates to Strategic Infrastructure requirements and Digital Connectivity.

Policy INF1 states that “...where new or improved infrastructure, including community facilities, is needed to support development, appropriate provision or contributions will be required”.

**National Highways would reiterate that RDC must consider Circular 01/2022 paragraph 29: “... there cannot be any presumption that such infrastructure will be funded through a future RIS. The company will therefore work with local authorities in their strategic policy-making functions in identifying realistic alternative funding mechanisms, to include other public funding programmes and developer contribution strategies to be secured by a policy in a local plan or spatial development strategy.”**

## Housing

National Highways would note RDC has 19 policies relating to housing, the following housing policies proposed by RDC are of particular relevance to National Highways:

- Policy HOU4: Allocating Sites for Wholly or Substantially Affordable Housing
- Policy HOU5: Rural Exception Sites
- Policy HOU14: External Residential Areas

National Highways would note that Policy HOU5 states that “In exceptional circumstances, planning permission may be granted for small scale residential development outside development boundaries” to meet the need for affordable housing in rural areas. Development will only be permitted if it is well related to an existing settlement and its services, in accordance with the Live Well Locally policies including access to public transport.

**National Highways would suggest that there appears to be significant challenges in terms of only promoting development at locations that are or can be made sustainable and where opportunities to maximise walking, wheeling, cycling, public transport and shared travel have been identified. We would suggest that the district’s strategy in terms of addressing these issues should be clearly identified in the transport evidence base underpinning the Local Plan in line with Circular requirements (paragraph 33).**

**National Highways should be consulted on the criteria to be used to assess potential Local Plan sites to ensure that sites capitalise on the above opportunities and are located in the most sustainable locations in order to support local facilities and reduce the cost of infrastructure needed to make sites sustainable in accordance with Circular 01/2022 and NPPF.**

Policy HOU14 makes reference to the provision of cycle parking, cycle storage and EV charging. RDC notes that provision *for “car parking, EV charging, and safe, secure and covered cycle storage for all new dwellings, including flats should be made in accordance*

*with Local Plan Policy LWL8, East Sussex County Council's 'Guidance for Parking at New Residential Development'.*

National Highways would note that Circular 01/2022 states that “...*high-powered and open-access EV chargepoints should be installed where developments include on-street or communal parking to support the government's objective to end the sale of new conventional petrol and diesel cars/vans by 2030 and HGVs by 2040, and its commitment to decarbonise transport by 2050*”.

**In general, National Highways would suggest that the Local Plan must consider cumulative impacts of housing development in neighbouring authorities. This is in line with Circular 01/2022 paragraph 29.**

**Furthermore, we would suggest that National Highways are to be consulted on the potential locations of new housing development sites to ensure that they are located in the most sustainable locations.**

## **Economy**

RDC has set out a number of specific economic policies. The following policies have been identified as relevant to National Highways:

- Policy ECO1: Supporting New Employment Development
- “*Ensure that traffic generation can be satisfactorily accommodated by the existing or planned local road network... submit sufficient information to assess its likely transport impacts as well as how these impacts would be effectively mitigated and considered in a Transport Assessment*”.
- Policy ECO4: Retail and Leisure Impact Assessments
- Retail & Leisure Impact Assessments are required.

**National Highways would note the impact of any proposed employment site that results in an impact on the SRN should be accompanied by a Transport Assessment and Travel Plan in accordance with the Circular 01/2022.**

**Whilst we acknowledge that the RDC does not present a list of preferred or submitted sites, we suggest that National Highways should be consulted on the criteria to be used to assess potential Local Plan employment sites to ensure that sites capitalise on the above opportunities and are located in the most sustainable locations in order to support local facilities and reduce the cost of infrastructure needed to make sites sustainable in accordance with Circular 01/2022 and NPPF.**

**Furthermore, National Highways would reiterate that the Local Plan must consider cumulative impacts of development in neighbouring authorities. This is in line with Circular 01/2022 paragraph 29.**

## Conclusion

Overall, National Highways would suggest that the policies set out in RDC's draft Local Plan generally align with the themes set out within Circular 01/2022; however, as set out above, a number of actions are recommended. In particular, there is a need to strengthen compliances with Circular 01/2022.

National Highways would suggest that when preparing the Local Plan, the comments made within this report should be considered. National Highways should be regularly consulted on progress with the Local Plan and any interim reports; we would expect National Highways to be consulted on RDC's housing and employment sites before a Local Plan submitted.

If you have any questions with regards to the comments made in this response, please do not hesitate to contact me via [PlanningSE@nationalhighways.co.uk](mailto:PlanningSE@nationalhighways.co.uk).

Yours sincerely,



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