

**SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL****CABINET****DATE: MON 24 MARCH 2025**

**REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER: MATT FURNISS**  
**CABINET MEMBER FOR HIGHWAYS, TRANSPORT AND ECONOMIC GROWTH**

**LEAD OFFICER: OWEN JENKINS**  
**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR HIGHWAYS INFRASTRUCTURE & PLANNING**

**SUBJECT: HIGHWAY HIERARCHY POLICY UPDATE**

**ORGANISATION STRATEGY PRIORITY AREA:** Growing A Sustainable Economy So Everyone Can Benefit  
 Enabling A Greener Future

<b>Purpose of the Report:</b>
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This report explains improvements to the Footway Hierarchy section of the [SCC Highway Hierarchy Definition Policy](#). The updated policy is attached as Annex 1.

The Footway Hierarchy is a data led method of categorising Surrey's footways based on usage as recommended by [Well Managed Highway Infrastructure - a Code of Practice](#). The hierarchy is an important tool that dictates the following things:

- How frequently a footway is inspected by the Safety Inspection Team (Every 1, 3, 6 or 12 months),
- How frequently footway condition data is collected, and
- Is a key component of the Capital Scheme Prioritisation Policy for prioritising capital footway maintenance works.
- It is also used to inform snow clearance priority, resource allowing, when it snows.

This report outlines policy updates that are being recommended following a review prompted by the publication of the 2022 Surrey Transport Plan (STP).

<b>Recommendations:</b>
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It is recommended that the Cabinet Member:

1. Approve the footway changes to the Highway Hierarchy Policy

<b>Reason for Recommendations:</b>
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The changes recommended for approval include:

- Increasing hierarchy for large schools from hierarchy 3 (H3) to hierarchy 2 (H2)

- Splitting hierarchy 4 (H4) into hierarchy 4a (H4a) and 4b (H4b).
- The report also outlines other improvements resulting from a detailed review of hierarchy across the county

This change will benefit pedestrians in Surrey in the following ways:

- A greater length of Surrey's footway will have an increased hierarchy. The footways with increased hierarchy are serving key community facilities (E.g. schools, bus stops, care homes), meaning a greater length of SCC footway will be inspected more frequently, be given a higher priority for maintenance spending, and have more frequent footway condition data collection.
- The whole county review will provide reassurance that the hierarchy of each footway meets our policy definition criteria.
- The new H4a maintenance category will increase the score given to H4a footways in the capital prioritisation policy and mean improved targeting of maintenance spending, focussed on new H4a category footway promoted from existing H4 footways (with remainder being H4b footway)
- There are intended benefits to vulnerable users by targeting community facilities in the hierarchy criteria such as bus stops, care homes and medical facilities

<b>Executive Summary:</b>
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## **Business Case**

1. This report focuses on improvements to the Footway Hierarchy section of the [SCC Highway Hierarchy Definition Policy](#). The Footway Hierarchy was established and approved by Cabinet in 2012 and an updated policy was approved by Cabinet in 2018 with delegated powers to the Cabinet Member for subsequent updates.
2. The existing footway hierarchy dataset assigns a hierarchy (H1, H2, H3, H4) to every known footway that Surrey County Council is responsible for maintaining. As can be seen in the above linked policy document, the existing hierarchy categories were based on the following criteria:

Category number	Category Name	Brief description
1	Primary Walking Route	Busy urban shopping and business areas and main pedestrian routes - major shopping outlets typically +100 number shops.
2	Secondary Walking Route	Secondary Walking - Medium usage routes through local areas feeding into primary routes, local shopping centers typically +20 shops, Town centre links to transport hubs.
3	Link Footway	Link Footways – Linking local access footways, small retail shopping outlets typically +5 shops, large schools and Industrial outlets, +500 pupils or equivalent pedestrian movements.
4	Local Access Footway	All remaining footways not qualifying for a higher category. Rural footways, Town paths, non-link footways in housing estates.

3. In 2012 the first stage of producing the footway hierarchy dataset was a data led exercise – using UPRN (Unique Property Reference Number) GIS data to analyse numbers of shops and business, as well as transport datasets, and schools. Consultation then took place with officers and elected members who contributed local knowledge. Since its establishment in 2012 the dataset has been subject to adhoc updates as required (E.g when a new housing development is adopted, or when an enquiry from member or the public or feedback from officers leads to a decision to change a footway's hierarchy) or as a result of changes to datasets such as a new or closed school.
4. The existing hierarchy has proved robust when being tested by civil claims against the County Council in court. It should be noted the Cabinet approved changes in 2018 related to language and wording changes rather than significant category/criteria changes.
5. The footway hierarchy is a key tool that dictates how frequently a footway is inspected by the Highway Safety Inspection Team (Every 1, 3, 6 or 12 months), how frequently footway condition data is collected, and is a key component of the Capital Scheme Prioritisation Policy for prioritising capital footway maintenance works. It is also used to inform snow clearance priority, resource allowing, when it snows.
6. This review of the footway hierarchy was prompted by the new Surrey Transport Plan (STP) published in 2022 and the objective to transform our transport network from 2022 to 2032. Workshops and consultations were undertaken about where we could adapt our policies and ways of working to align more closely to the STP's objectives to improve the walking experience in Surrey and prioritise walking routes.
7. It was established that the existing hierarchy was broadly satisfactory and in line with Well Managed Highway Infrastructure - a Code of Practice, however the

following improvements have been progressed and are recommended for approval by this report:

8. Large schools should be given an increased hierarchy category
  - a. In the current policy large schools of 1000+ are categorised as H3 in the existing hierarchy.
  - b. In recognition of the concentration of pedestrians around schools and to mitigate that risk it is proposed that large schools are now defined as 250+ pupils and moved from H3 into category H2
  - c. Where clusters of two or more schools are close together with cumulative 250+ pupils (E.g where infant and junior schools are within 250m of each other their pupil numbers will be added together cumulatively)
  - d. Local links between schools and other community facilities is also being reviewed as part of this exercise. This was in response to feedback from Highway Safety Inspection team colleagues who felt these routes could be improved.
  
9. A review of all the datasets available to base hierarchy decisions on has been undertaken and a new methodology put in place to use the new datasets. Using this process, a detailed review of footway hierarchy across the county has taken place to make use of the new more detailed data. Improvements include identification of care and nursing homes and bus stops, and the review has ensured that where appropriate there is an increased footway hierarchy link to those facilities.
  
10. The introduction of a new category is proposed, separating category H4 footways into two categories - H4a and H4b.
  - a. Surrey's 5670km of footway has previously been heavily weighted toward being in Cat H4 (88% of total footway length). The purpose of this new H4a category is to improve the differentiation between the existing H4 footways ensuring those most important for local communities are given greater priority for maintenance. H4a footways are those that do not qualify for the H3 category, but are considered more important than H4b.
  - b. It is proposed that this new H4a category is used to give greater weighting to capital maintenance priority, but will not influence the safety inspection frequency
  - c. The proposed changes to the category descriptions in the policy can be seen below and in the revised policy document Annex 1

<b>Category number</b>	<b>Brief description</b>
<b>1</b>	Busy urban shopping and business areas and main pedestrian routes - major shopping outlets typically +100 number shops.

Category number	Brief description
2	Secondary Walking - Medium usage routes through local areas feeding into primary routes, local shopping centres typically +20 shops, Town centre links to transport hubs. Large schools 250+ pupils
3	Link Footways – Linking local access footways, small retail shopping outlets typically +5 shops, schools fewer than 250 pupils and Industrial outlets. Linking to local bus stops where appropriate.
4a	Key walking routes through and linking urban areas and community facilities.  Well used walking routes linking rural settlements
4b	All remaining footways not qualifying for a higher category. Rural footways, Town paths, non-link footways in housing estates.

- d. For reference the existing lengths of footway in each category are shown below

Hierarchy Category	Current Length (km)	%
1	59	1%
2	74	1.3%
3	508	9%
4	5029	88.7%
Total	5670	

- e. And below is a table showing estimated lengths following this change. This is an estimate only and will be updated once the work is finalised should the recommended changes be approved

Hierarchy Category	New Length (km) Estimate	%
1	59	1%
2	182	3.2%
3	400	7.1%
4a	400	7.1%
4b	4529	79.9%
Total	5670	

11. Other notable improvements through this project
  - a. Alignment with LCWIP plans to ensure appropriate hierarchy is assigned in [LCWIP Walking Zones and Walking Corridors](#). As these are developed and established the footways within each will be reviewed and hierarchy adjusted as appropriate.
  - b. Alignment with Safe Routes to schools' maintenance requirements and processes put in place to share and respond to safe route to School requirements

#### **Consultation:**

12. Internal consultation has taken place with relevant teams within Highways & Infrastructure and with the Cabinet Member for Highways Transport & Economic Growth.
13. External Feedback has been received through benchmarking conversations with other Local Authorities and the Vaisala Road AI user group with other Local Authorities. Feedback has been received from consultants Atkins Realis on how they have implemented footway hierarchies for other Local Authorities

#### **Risk Management and Implications:**

14. These changes are not considered to introduce new risks, but rather the opposite – the changes will mean greater frequency of inspection to more of Surrey's most used footways, and similarly an improved targeting of maintenance funding through increased scoring to higher priority footways. The increase of safety inspections to a greater length of Surrey's footways should reduce risk to network users and make Surrey's legal defence more robust.

#### **Financial and Value for Money Implications:**

15. The recommended changes will require additional resources within the Highway Safety Inspection (HSI) team to inspect the footways with an increased hierarchy at an increased inspection frequency. However this will be offset by improvements to the HSI process, where the introduction of Route Reports image recognition surveys to driven routes will reduce the number of inspectors required to drive those routes, delivering an overall efficiency in line with the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

#### **Section 151 Officer Commentary:**

16. The Council continues to operate in a very challenging financial environment. Local authorities across the country are experiencing significant budgetary pressures. Surrey County Council has made significant progress in recent years to improve the Council's financial resilience and whilst this has built a stronger financial base from which to deliver our services, the cost of service delivery,

increasing demand, financial uncertainty and government policy changes mean we continue to face challenges to our financial position. This requires an increased focus on financial management to protect service delivery, a continuation of the need to deliver financial efficiencies and reduce spending in order to achieve a balanced budget position each year.

17. In addition to these immediate challenges, the medium-term financial outlook beyond 2024/25 remains uncertain. With no clarity on central government funding in the medium term, our working assumption is that financial resources will continue to be constrained, as they have been for the majority of the past decade. This places an onus on the Council to continue to consider issues of financial sustainability as a priority, in order to ensure the stable provision of services in the medium term.
18. The changes proposed in this report will lead to improved targeting of existing highway maintenance budgets. This will also lead to an additional resource requirement, which will be managed within the approved budget through efficiencies in the way the Council undertakes inspections.

#### **Legal Implications – Monitoring Officer:**

19. [Well Managed Highway Infrastructure - a Code of Practice](#) (“the Code of Practice”) was published by the UK Roads Liaison Group in 2016. The Department of Transport is currently considering updating it.
20. The Code of Practice provides guidance for local authorities on managing highway networks. It emphasises a risk-based approach, encouraging authorities to tailor their policies to local circumstances rather than adhering to prescriptive standards. Although not legally binding, compliance with the Code of Practice demonstrates good practice and helps local authorities manage risks and meet statutory duties.
21. Section A.4.3 of the Code of Practice is clear that a network hierarchy based on asset function is the foundation of a risk-based maintenance strategy and is crucial in both establishing levels of service and to the statutory network management role for developing co-ordination and regulating occupation. It further provides that hierarchies should be dynamic and regularly reviewed to reflect changes in network characteristics and functionality so that maintenance strategy reflects the current situation, rather than the use expected when the hierarchy was originally defined.

#### **Equalities and Diversity:**

22. This policy change has intended benefits for pedestrian network users and vulnerable users. Footways serving main routes to schools and some other community facilities will see an increase to their hierarchy category which directly influences how frequently those footways receive safety inspections, and the collection of condition data and will increase their priority for surfacing

maintenance. Part of this exercise will request feedback from officers and councillors to feedback where they think footways should be considered for a higher hierarchy.

23. Separately to this policy but as a result of the same review in response to the new Surrey Transport Plan, footway surfacing scheme assessments have been reviewed and improved to better consider [Inclusive Mobility Best Practice Guidance](#). The results of these walkovers will be provided to the design team to include in maintenance schemes where possible, for example where the gradient or crossfall of a footway can be improved by the resurfacing maintenance scheme.

**Other Implications:**

24. The potential implications for the following council priorities and policy areas have been considered. Where the impact is potentially significant a summary of the issues is set out in detail below.

<b>Area assessed:</b>	<b>Direct Implications:</b>
Corporate Parenting/Looked After Children	No significant impacts arising from this report
Safeguarding responsibilities for vulnerable children and adults	No significant impacts arising from this report
Environmental sustainability	No significant impacts arising from this report
Compliance against net-zero emissions target and future climate compatibility/resilience	No significant impacts arising from this report
Public Health	No significant impacts arising from this report

**What Happens Next:**

25. Once approved the changes will be incorporated into the Highway Safety Inspection Routes during Summer 2025
26. The 2026/27 pipeline footway maintenance programme will be reviewed to include any adjustments resulting from the hierarchy changes during Summer 2025

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**Report Author:**

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Contact through MS Teams

**Consulted:**

Asset Planning Team Manager (Author – Network & Asset Management (NAM))

Asset Planning Policy & Programme Team Leader (NAM)

Asset Systems & Analytics Team (NAM)

Network Safety Team Leader (NAM)

Highway Engagement & Commissioning Team Manager (Highway Operations & Infrastructure (HOI))

Policy & Compliance Manager (HOI)

Highways & Transport Senior Management Team (SMT)

STP Thematic Projects Group members (A range of senior colleagues from across the Highways Infrastructure & Planning Directorate who are working to deliver the Surrey Transport Plan)

Matthew Furniss (Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth)

Lucy Monie (Director Highways & Transport)

Amanda Richards (Assistant Director Highways NAM)

Richard Bolton (Assistant Director Highways HOI)

**Annexes:**

Annex 1 - The Highway Hierarchy Definition Policy March 2025

Annex 2 - Equality Impact Assessment Screening Tool Highways Footway Hierarchy Policy

Annex 3 - Full EIA Highway Hierarchy Policy

**Sources/background papers:**

[Well Managed Highway Infrastructure - a Code of Practice](#)

[Inclusive Mobility Best Practice Guidance](#)

All background papers used in the writing of the report should be listed, as required by the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985.

A copy of any background papers which have not previously been published should be supplied to Democratic Services with your draft report.

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