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**By:** Kent Downs AONB Director

**To:** Environment, Highways & Waste Policy Overview Committee  
- 16 July 2009

**Subject:** Kent Downs AONB Rural Streets and Lanes: A Design Handbook

**Classification:** Unrestricted

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**Summary:** This report informs members about the Kent Downs AONB Rural Streets and Lanes: A Design Handbook (the draft of which was brought to and supported by the Highways Advisory Board on a previous occasion) and seeks that it is approved and adopted as policy.

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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The statutory Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan, adopted by Kent County Council and relevant Districts and Boroughs, identifies the design and maintenance of highways in the AONB as a key issue for action. Sign clutter, creeping urbanisation and traffic speeds and volume are identified as key issues. The agreed action is to produce a Design Handbook for the streets and lanes of the AONB.
- 1.2 The Kent Downs AONB Unit, working with Kent County Council highway officers, recruited and appointed highways consultants, Halcrow, to produce a Design Handbook for the AONB. A copy is attached. This report seeks endorsement of this revised document by the Policy Overview Committee and adoption of the principles within it as policy for the future management of rural streets and lanes within the Kent Downs. The principles within the document are applicable to all rural parts of Kent.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 The Kent Downs AONB is a nationally protected landscape – given legal equivalence to the National Parks. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 places a ‘Duty of Regard’ for the purposes of the AONB on all local authorities and public bodies when carrying out their functions. The scope of this duty includes the design and maintenance of highway infrastructure. The primary purpose of AONBs is to ‘conserve and enhance natural beauty’.
- 2.2 The Kent Downs AONB Management Plan (1<sup>st</sup> Review) was produced and submitted to Secretary of State by the AONB Unit on behalf of the AONB partnership in April 2009, the AONB partnership includes Kent County Council. Each of the Local Authorities in the partnership has formally adopted the Plan, its policies and actions.
- 2.3 The first Statutory Management Plan ran from 2004-9. A series of actions were adopted to respond to the policies within that Plan, the key action with regard to this report was Action SDT 8 ..‘produce environmental and landscape guidelines for the management of Kent Downs roads’.

## **Kent Downs AONB Rural Streets and Lanes: A Design Handbook**

2.2 The aim of the Design Handbook is to encourage a more appropriate approach to the design of existing and new highways (streetscapes) in the Kent Downs AONB. This Handbook is intended to reverse the trend towards generality and restore the distinctive quality and character of the highways or streetscapes in the Kent Downs but will be subject to appropriate legislation and guidance.

2.3 The audience for the Handbook is wide and will include:

- Highway and transportation engineers.
- Developers, architects, planners, urban designers and surveyors.
- Local planning authorities, elected members of local and parish councils, environmental organisations and local heritage groups.
- Public utilities, telecommunication providers, local businesses, farmers, landowners and farm contractors.

2.4 The objectives of the Handbook are as follows:

- To identify the special characteristics and features of the rural roads network that contribute to the distinctive character and quality of the AONB.
- To provide high quality detailed guidance for consideration in the development of new highway treatments and improvements.
- To ensure the conservation and maintenance of the key characteristics and features of the AONB.
- To raise awareness and understanding of the importance of the rural roads network, including its historic/heritage, landscape and biodiversity importance.
- To do so in a way which increases safety and is practical and cost effective.

2.5 The Handbook draws on Government guidance and best practice examples of similar work from across the UK and Europe. Case studies from Kent and the Kent Downs are also included in the Handbook.

### **3. Consultation**

3.1 The Handbook has been subject to extensive consultation as recommended by the Highways Advisory Board. Two consultation workshops were held for local authority officers, highways engineers, parish councils and other stakeholders to involve stakeholders at an early, pre-consultation stage. There were subsequently two round table meetings with KCC Highways Engineers and other relevant officers as well as the Kent police. Changes were made to the document following suggestions and feedback at this stage and the document went out subsequently for full formal consultation. Comments received at this stage were documented along with action taken leading to the production of the final copy. A table of comments and action is attached here as an annex.

### **4. Recommendation**

4.1 It is proposed that Policy Overview Committee recommends to the Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste that the Kent Downs AONB Rural Streets and Lanes: A Design Handbook is approved and adopted as policy.

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Accountable Officer: Nick Johannsen, Director Kent Downs AONB 01303 815170  
[nick.johannsen@kentdowns.org.uk](mailto:nick.johannsen@kentdowns.org.uk)

Enclosures: Copy of the Kent Downs Rural Streets and Lanes: A Design Handbook