

The Safer C7 Project

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Safer C7 Project is seeking to commission a consultant organisation to: assess the C7 Lewes-Newhaven Road, taking account of the planned developments to the C324, through Kingston village to its junction with the A27; produce recommendations that will reduce the safety risks for all the users of these rural roads; develop a phased strategy for implementation of the agreed improvements; and produce a detailed costed plan for the initial phase.

BACKGROUND

The C7 is classed as a rural road, linking Newhaven with Lewes. It runs through the west side of the Lower Ouse River valley, in the South Downs National Park in East Sussex. The C7 is 6 miles long and provides the only route between Lewes and Newhaven for residents in six historic villages and hamlets, as well as for several farms and businesses. Along the East side of the river valley, the A26 provides a parallel trunk route from Lewes to Newhaven, via the A27. There are no public crossing points for vehicles across the river Ouse and the railway line which both run down the river valley between the C7 and the A26.

The geography of the C7 is narrow and winding, with junctions to several villages, farms and two schools located on bends with restricted sightlines. The speed limit is set at 50mph for the majority of the route. The C7 is located within a particularly beautiful part of the South Downs, criss-crossed by footpaths including the South Downs Way and Meridian Way. The Lower Ouse Valley is therefore heavily used by walkers, as well as many cyclists, for leisure and health purposes.

Although classed as country roads, the volume of traffic is high. In May 2023, the average daily traffic flow on the C7 to the south of the C324 junction was 8635, and north of the C324 towards Lewes was 6280. The remaining 2355 vehicles were presumed to be using the C324 through the village of Kingston to access the A27. Prior to the COVID pandemic, approximately 10,000 vehicles were using the C7 south of the A234 junction each weekday.

There is therefore a conflict between the various users of the C7: motorists wanting a quick commute, cyclists and walkers seeking to enjoy this area of outstanding natural beauty, and local residents. Accidents are frequent, but the C7 does not meet the criteria used by East Sussex Highways to prioritise roads for expenditure on safety improvements.

A survey of residents in 2021 indicated that many residents are frightened to cross the road, or to turn out of their villages on to the main road. The C7 is generally felt to be too dangerous for cycling to work or to school and the verges along most of its length are too narrow for walking. Equestrians avoid the road and rarely risk crossing it. The residents' survey indicated a high level (95%) of community support for the aim of the project; that is to make the C7 safer for all its users. The success of the recent crowd funding appeal has demonstrated wide support from cycling and walking groups and other users, as well as from local residents and businesses.

This community project has the formal support of all 5 parishes along the C7 and the C324, the town councils of Lewes and Newhaven, as well as the district and county councillors, and the local MP. Although the C7 does not meet East Sussex Highways' criteria for safety improvement expenditure, the East Sussex Director of Communities, Economy and Transport, Rupert Clubb, has given written support to the commissioning of a feasibility study of the C7, and is willing to provide some limited advice and officer time at key points, to ensure that the study considers measures that would be acceptable to the East Sussex Highways Authority.

Conserving and enhancing the rural character of the road is an essential element of the Safer C7 Project. We intend to commission a consultant who will apply the principles detailed in the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) publication, Roads in the South Down National Park, prepared by Hamilton Baillie Associates Ltd and published in 2015, and in the more recent SDNPA Adopted Design Guide, Supplementary Planning Document, published in 2022.

It is our aspiration that the design strategy for the C7 could be viewed as a best practice example of how traffic calming measures on rural roads can be undertaken in full harmony with their environment. We hope that the resulting strategy will be able to act as a demonstration project or template for safety improvements on other rural roads.

Our intention is that the costed design plan resulting from this work will be used to apply for Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds for staged implementation of the agreed strategy. We have been assured by the South Downs National Park Authority and Lewes District Council that the implementation of this project would be eligible for CIL funding.

It is possible that by the start of this contract, a separate highways study of the C324, the route from the C7 through Kingston village to the A27, will have been commissioned by Kingston Parish Council. This study will focus on producing recommendations to reduce the speed and volume of traffic through Kingston. The consultant appointed for the C7 will be required to review the C324 study, with a view to ensuring compatibility with C7 focused recommendations. All parties agree that safety improvements on both roads are likely to have more impact on users if there is consistency of approach along the length of the route. The overall aim of both studies is to ensure that the two schemes appear 'seamless' to road users, and that both reflect the principles set out in the SDNPA 'Roads in the South Downs' publication and the supplementary planning guidance document.

SCOPE OF WORKS

We have provided the following outline scope of works, but are open to discussion should the consultant wish to propose alternative options.

Stage One

1. Assess the C7 Lewes-Newhaven Road and the C324 spur route through Kingston, to the junction with the A27, in terms of safety risks and the range of road users.
2. Recommend strategies to reduce speed and improve the safety of the road, while preserving its rural character.
3. Document the strategies in a short report using case studies and examples to strengthen the narrative, and to show how the recommendations can be delivered in practice.
4. Present proposals to the project delivery team. Agree and prioritise these into short, medium and longer-term implementation phases.
5. Meet with members of the Safer C7 Project Delivery Team as needed, and (for costing purposes) make presentations at two face to face community meetings, which may be held in the evening. Meetings with the Project Delivery Team can take place on-line.

Stage Two

6. Produce a detailed costed plan for the initial phase of the strategy, which could be used as the basis for applications for CIL funding for the implementation of the plan.
7. Indicate likely high-level costs for the medium and longer-term phases of the strategy.

Timeframe

The consultant should indicate a timeframe for delivery of the report as part of the proposal.

Costs

The consultant should include a lump sum cost for delivery of the work outlined above, inclusive of all applicable taxes and split into a cost for Stage 1 and Stage 2. Any assumptions used within the cost should be clearly stated.

Payments will be made at agreed milestones. There will be a break point at the end of Stage One, to review and confirm progress to Stage two.

Evaluation Criteria

This is a competitive process and tenders will be evaluated against the following criteria.

- a) Understanding of the project and its context - demonstrated by setting out your understanding of the requirements of this project within your proposal.
- b) Experience – demonstrated by setting out your experience in delivering similar schemes. Please also provide the names, roles and experience of those individuals who will be involved in the work.
- c) Cost - we are not binding ourselves to the least cost option and will compare proposals on a like for like basis.
- d) Programme for delivery and timescales for completion.
- e) Added value – what your organisation can bring to the project to allow us to realise our aspiration of becoming a best-practice case study.

Closing Date for Proposals

Proposals are to be received by 31st October 2023.

The selection will be made by 30th November 2023.

Contact

Please direct all correspondence and queries to Joe Attwood at joe.attwood@thec7road.co.uk
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Website

Further information about the project and its context can be found on our website:

<https://www.thec7road.co.uk>