The Lead Member is recommended to:

1. approve the proposed Action Plan for addressing congestion in Uckfield town centre; and
2. approve continued close working with the Uckfield Town Centre Steering Group to deliver Town Centre Traffic Management Improvements

1. Financial Appraisal

1.1 There are currently 4 large residential developments with planning permission in the Uckfield area which are subject to Section 106 planning agreements. These agreements secure £4.2m towards the cost of design and implementation of Town Centre Traffic Management Improvements. The first of these contributions (£305,000) is expected to be received by Wealden District Council in the autumn with further larger contributions expected in mid 2012. In addition, a further £41,140 towards the design and implementation of a scheme has already been received from smaller developments in Uckfield. Additional contributions for smaller developments will be sought as applications come forward.

1.2 The cost of a traffic improvement scheme depends on its design and scale, but estimates at this stage provide a range between £5m and £16.5m. Further contributions are expected from future development allocations through Wealden District Council’s Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy which is currently in progress. A scheme is required to both support the contributions already secured for developments currently under construction and to accommodate future traffic through allocations in the Core Strategy.

2 Supporting Information

2.1 In order to work closely together and recognising the need for Uckfield town centre improvements, officers and Members of the four authorities; East Sussex County Council, Wealden District Council, Uckfield Town Council and East Sussex Fire and Rescue, have formed a Steering Group. This Group ensures that any improvement scheme promoted will meet the needs of the local residents and businesses.

2.2 The Steering Group recognised that in order to assess properly the congestion and traffic movements in the town, an up to date traffic model was required. Extensive traffic surveys were undertaken in November 2010 in order to produce a SATURN transport model. The model study area covers the whole of the town and includes the bypass. The model is a comprehensive tool representing existing peak hour traffic conditions. It also provides forecast traffic flows to test different transport interventions taking into account the likely proposed development allocations brought forward through the LDF Core Strategy up to 2027.

2.3 A detailed report summarising the SATURN model and the associated transport planning work undertaken to date is being finalised and will be made public in the summer. This will provide the background to explain the extent of and reasons for traffic congestion in the town centre and how these might be addressed.

2.4 Wealden District Council’s Proposed Submission Core Strategy has been out to consultation and representations are currently being analysed. The next stage in the process for the Core Strategy is Examination in Public (EIP) which is scheduled for autumn 2011. The Core Strategy proposes an additional 1000 dwellings and 11000 sq m of retail floor space in Uckfield.
3.1 Traffic levels in Uckfield town centre will become unmanageable as a result of developments permitted on the basis of the Wealden Non-Statutory Local Plan. This has led to congestion centred round the Bell Lane/High Street traffic signal controlled junction. Improvements to the signals have previously been implemented, but there is limited scope to make further significant improvements without additional land being available. Without intervention and implementation of Town Centre Traffic Management Improvements, traffic congestion will continue to grow as the developments that are currently being constructed become occupied.

3.2 The SATURN model will be used to test and evaluate the potential effects of a range of transport interventions including the effects on the potential reinstatement of the Lewes to Uckfield railway line. These interventions range from Demand Management to providing new highway infrastructure. Demand Management could take the form of a travel planning approach to limit the number of vehicle trips through the junction by provision of improved public transport or improvements in the way car parking is provided and managed in the town. New highway infrastructure could be a new road to the north or south of Bell Lane. Any proposal is likely to be supported by a package of measures to improve facilities for all road users which would benefit residents, businesses, shoppers and other interested parties.

3.3 The proposed Uckfield Town Centre Action Plan is:

1. Detailed Modelling Report. The SATURN transport model report will be made available on the web in the summer.
2. Option Development. Different options will be worked up to a feasibility level and tested using the model during 2011.
3. Consultation and Exhibition. Events showing the range of proposals are likely to be held early in 2012. The public and other specific interested groups will be given the opportunity to influence and comment on the ultimate scheme through extensive consultation.
4. Preferred Option. Depending on the outcome of these public events, a preferred option will be brought back for approval to the Town Centre Steering Group and Lead Member in 2012.
5. Scheme Approval. Once a scheme has been approved by the Lead Member, it will be taken forward through the necessary statutory processes so that implementation can take place once funding is in place.

3.4 The close partnership working of the four authorities ensures that the interests of different groups are protected through the process ensuring an inclusive approach. The Steering Group will continue to meet to maintain the close working arrangements at this important stage of scheme development and approval.

4. Conclusion and Reason for Recommendation

4.1 A robust SATURN transport model has been produced and a summary report will be made available to the public.

4.2 The Action Plan for Uckfield Town Centre provides a way forward for developing Town Centre Traffic Management Improvements to support the contributions already secured and to deal with future traffic through further development allocations in the Core Strategy. Accordingly, the Lead Member for Economy, Transport and Environment is recommended to approve the Action Plan and approve continued close working with Wealden District Council, Uckfield Town Council and East Sussex Fire and Rescue.

RUPERT CLUDBB
Director of Economy, Transport & Environment
21 July 2011

Contact Officer: Lawrence Stringer Tel: 01273 482251
Local Member: Councillor Sparks

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
None