Briefing Note – No Named Roads

Produced for:	Highway Improvement Group
Requested by:	Cllr Tony Vickers
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Stuart Gourley
Service Director:	Jon Winstanley
Date Prepared:	21/09/26
Briefing Author:	Jon Winstanley/Paul Goddard

1 Purpose of the Briefing

1.1 The purpose of this report is to invite the Highways Improvement Group to comment on whether, and how, the Council should take forward work to develop a process for considering requests to name existing rural roads that are currently recorded as unnamed in the National Street Gazetteer.

1.2 The report is also intended to help the Group consider the relative priority of this work in light of existing pressures on the Council's Network Management Team, including its core responsibilities for development control, highway works coordination, road adoptions, street naming and numbering, and other statutory highway functions. If this work is considered a priority, the earliest it could commence would be the next financial year and it would require existing programmed projects to be pushed back into future financial years.

2 Background

2.1 Some minor rural roads in West Berkshire are recorded as unnamed in the National Street Gazetteer. In practice, this means that they may appear as "UNNAMED" or equivalent records within addressing and mapping systems. This can cause confusion for residents, visitors, delivery drivers and, in some circumstances, emergency services or other organisations that rely on accurate location data.

2.2 The issue has been raised by members representing rural areas, who have suggested that parish and town councils could have a role in identifying roads where a locally recognised name already exists or where a name would help address practical problems. The suggested approach is not for the Council to undertake a district-wide review, but to consider whether a bottom-up, locally evidenced process could be developed for cases where there is demonstrable local support.

2.3 Street naming and renaming is a statutory function that must be managed by the district council as the street naming and numbering authority. Parish and town councils could

assist with local engagement and evidence gathering, but they do not hold the legal responsibility for formally naming or renaming roads.

2.4 Section 81 of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 now governs street renaming in England. The legislation requires sufficient local support before a street name can be altered, but no further national regulations or statutory guidance have been issued setting out how that support should be demonstrated. In the absence of national guidance, each local authority must determine a lawful, fair and proportionate local process.

2.5 Historically, the Council has relied on the street naming and numbering powers in the Towns Improvement Clauses Act 1847 to name and number new streets and properties, and to maintain existing street names and numbering records. Where requests have been made to introduce a name for an existing unnamed road, or to change an existing road name, the Council has previously considered the Public Health Acts Amendment Act 1907 and the Public Health Act 1925. In practice, the 1907 Act has rarely been used successfully because it requires a high level of resident consent and uses outdated terminology relating to ratepayers. The 1925 Act is considered more usable in a modern context, but would still require a clear local process, appropriate notices, the opportunity for objections or appeal, and sufficient officer and legal resource. Historically, only a very small number of such requests have been received each year, and past experience indicates that achieving both agreement on the principle of naming a road and consensus on the proposed name can be difficult. These have now been replaced by the Levelling up and Regeneration Act 2023.

3 Current Status

3.1 Officers are sympathetic to the aim of improving clarity where unnamed rural roads create genuine practical difficulties. A locally led process could allow communities to bring forward proposals in a structured way, supported by evidence of local need and local support.

3.2 However, this is not currently an issue that generates a significant volume of correspondence to the Council. Officer advice is that enquiries about changing or introducing road names are received at a very low level, typically around once or twice a year. This indicates that, while the issue is important in some local circumstances, it is not presently a widespread service pressure.

3.3 The Network Management Team is already managing a broad range of operational and statutory responsibilities. Any work to develop a new policy or guidance note would need to be considered against existing workloads and priorities, including the need to support development control, coordinate highway works, manage road adoption matters and maintain existing street naming and numbering services. Given the current programme of work, officer capacity would not be available to start this work before the next financial year.

4 Implications and Impact

4.1 The main benefit of taking work forward would be to provide clarity for members, parish and town councils, residents and officers on how requests relating to unnamed roads

should be made, assessed and progressed. This could reduce uncertainty and help ensure that any future requests are considered consistently and transparently.

4.2 There are also practical and legal considerations. Naming or renaming a road can affect property addresses and may be opposed by some residents or businesses. Any process would need to define who should be consulted, what evidence of support is required, how objections would be handled, and how the Council would satisfy itself that the statutory requirement for sufficient local support has been met.

4.3 There would be officer time and Legal input required to develop any new process. This would include reviewing the legislative position, preparing criteria, updating internal procedures, agreeing consultation expectations, and ensuring appropriate liaison with Royal Mail, emergency services, statutory undertakers and other organisations that rely on accurate address and street data. If this work is prioritised, it would displace other programmed Network Management activity, with those projects needing to be rescheduled into future financial years.

4.4 The Highways Improvement Group is therefore asked to consider whether this work should be treated as a priority for officer resource, progressed only if a clear and manageable scope can be agreed, or deferred until a later point when wider street naming and numbering arrangements may need to be reviewed as part of local government reorganisation. In making this assessment, the Group should note that prioritising this work would not create additional capacity; it would require the reprioritisation of existing work and the deferral of other programmed projects.

5 Next Steps

5.1 The Group is invited to comment on whether officers should undertake further work to develop a proportionate policy or guidance note for considering requests to name existing unnamed rural roads.

5.2 If members consider that further work should be undertaken, officers could prepare a short options paper setting out possible criteria, consultation requirements, governance arrangements, legal considerations, and indicative resource implications. However, this work could not commence before the next financial year and would need to include an assessment of which existing programmed projects would be delayed to release the necessary officer capacity.

5.3 Possible approaches include: taking no further action at this stage; preparing light-touch guidance for parish and town councils on the information required to support any future request; or developing a more formal policy framework in the next financial year, subject to legal review, available officer capacity and the deferral of lower-priority programmed work.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Unnamed rural roads can create practical difficulties in some areas, and the Council recognises the value of involving parish and town councils where there is local evidence that a name would assist residents, visitors, delivery drivers or emergency services.

6.2 At the same time, current correspondence levels are low and the Network Management Team is managing significant existing pressures. The Group is therefore asked to advise whether this matter should be prioritised for further work from the next financial year, progressed only in a limited and proportionate way, or deferred until there is stronger evidence of demand or a broader review of street naming and numbering processes. Should members deem this work to be a priority, it would require existing programmed projects to be pushed back into future financial years.

7 Appendices

None