

Place Select Committee Scrutiny Review of Highways Asset Management (including Potholes & Flooding)

Executive Summary

This report presents the outcomes of the Scrutiny Review of Highways Asset Management (including potholes and flooding).

The aim of the review was to evaluate the opportunities for maintaining the Highways Infrastructure Asset as efficiently as possible, both now and in the future. This was set within the context of increasing demands, financial pressures, and climate change issues.

The Select Committee's key findings were as follows:

- Management of the Highways Infrastructure Asset includes the repair and maintenance of highways, including potholes, as well as structures, streetlights, footpaths, illuminated signs/bollards, public rights of way, gullies and traffic signal junctions/crossings
- A single capital budget is allocated for the maintenance of the Highways Infrastructure Asset, which is also occasionally supplemented by ad-hoc additional funding streams, however, the variable nature of this means that it can be difficult to plan for the long term
- The existing budget is not sufficient to manage the Highways Infrastructure Asset at a steady state. Therefore, we are currently managing a deterioration of the asset, utilising the principals of asset management
- Moving forward over the coming years there are some significant structural schemes that will need to be undertaken as a priority
- The above points may result in future Residents' surveys increasingly demonstrating areas of dissatisfaction within highways infrastructure asset management
- There are a variety of processes available to manage and maintain the highway and repair potholes, which include patching and resurfacing
- Alternative processes have been examined as part of this review. For example, surface dressing, spray injection patching, and crack/pothole sealing
- The introduction of alternative processes and resources, such as rubber roads, will form an important part of the Council's environmental sustainability and carbon reduction strategy in the context of the current and projected effects of climate change and innovative environmentally friendly measures will continue to be explored and utilised where appropriate
- Surface water flooding is a particular issue in areas of the Borough with older style gullies, which often lack sufficient capacity to deal with intense periods of

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rainfall, which due to the impacts of climate change are expected to intensify and become more common. These older gullies are generally replaced as part of wider resurfacing schemes, however, it may be possible to accelerate their replacement via a programme based on evidence / priority

- The Council's Highway Operational and Asset Management teams are currently investigating 'invest to save' options. Currently being utilised on a trial basis is a product known as Roadmender. This equipment if used by suitably trained operatives has the potential to reduce the cost to repair potholes from circa £50 per pothole to approximately £30-£35 per pothole. There are other potential invest to save options that could be developed and considered over future months
- Some Committee Members have already started to communicate the pressures the Council are under in respect of managing the highways infrastructure asset to residents. Wider communication of this information may prove valuable to all local Ward Members to allow them to communicate this to residents, as and when issues are highlighted. Other methods of communication are used both during the planning of schemes and once a scheme is complete, with the level being commensurate with scale of the scheme. These scheme communication methods include press releases, webpages, scheme boards, residents' letters and post scheme satisfaction questionnaires
- The most common issues reported tend to focus on road/footpath condition, gullies and streetlights. Whilst there has been a general reduction in the number of issues reported there have been instances of short term increases due in the main to adverse weather events. With regards to how issues are reported, the use of the online 'Report It' system has shown a steady increase over the last five years with a corresponding decrease in the number of in person contacts
- The Highways Safety Inspection regime includes scheduled annual inspections and reactive inspections in response to the reporting of an issue. All inspections are based on a hierarchy of need, priority, and uses. This also assists with determining a timeline for repairs
- The Council collaborate with other Local Authorities, both regionally and nationally, on funding opportunities and to share best practice and policy development
- In terms of new developments and asset adoptions, the Council liaise with developers from the planning stage through to the construction stage. The 12-month adoption period commences after the final surface has been laid and a joint inspection has taken place and any issues or faults have been rectified

Conclusion

There are challenging times ahead in terms of infrastructure asset management:

- Climate Change is becoming more and more prevalent
- The key focus for SBC is 'keeping the borough moving'.
- Communication with internal stakeholders and residents / businesses is imperative moving forward

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- Major schemes (structures) will have major traffic impact but little visual benefit from a residential, travelling public perspective
- Public awareness is also important. This means getting the message 'out there' whilst trying to retain resident's satisfaction levels
- SBC will continually review / refine what is being done to ensure maximising efficiencies. The Council will also ensure bidding for additional funding at every opportunity
- The use of new technology and more sustainable materials also needs to be considered

Several high-profile structures needing maintenance over next few years. Drawing on the maintenance of Mandale Bridge as an example, this is a £2m scheme for which the public have only seen a small proportion of the works.

Climate change also means that there needs to be a focus on the decarbonisation of the transport network via various methods/treatments. Planning for and responding to extreme weather events also needs to be considered. There is an increased likelihood of extreme weather events and material choices need to reflect anticipated temperature increases. Therefore, there should be a greater use of new materials such low temp asphalts, recycled rubber, plastics etc. together with investigating invest to save opportunities.

Recommendations

1. That options to utilise, alternative interventions, processes and resources, such as the use of recycled rubber materials, are considered and where appropriate are implemented both as part of delivering more maintenance interventions and contributing towards the Environmental Sustainability & Carbon Reduction Strategy.
2. That options to 'invest to save' are explored and costs and returns are calculated.
3. That options are included, where appropriate, to build on existing collaborative work or procure collaboratively with other Tees Valley authorities to advance innovation, adopt alternative processes and materials, improve efficiency, harmonise standards and maximise integration.
4. That a communications plan is devised and agreed to ensure that all elected Members are made aware of the current Highway Infrastructure asset management processes and current pressures experienced by the Service.
5. That a proactive programme of gully replacement is considered and implemented based on priority, need and available resource.
6. That, recognising that correspondence has been sent to local MPs urging them to lobby Central Government for additional funding, their response and any further actions are kept under review.
7. That, in order to raise awareness of funding issues, the final scrutiny report is shared with the Tees Valley Combined Authority Transport Advisory Group.