

Highway Maintenance

Highway maintenance work each year can be broadly divided into three distinct elements;

- Reactive repairs
- Cyclical maintenance
- Planned works

Reactive repairs are undertaken to deal with safety hazards such as potholes (there is a separate article about potholes in this newsletter); cyclical works which are necessary to keep our roads functioning and include operations such as grass cutting for visibility. Both types of works concentrate on repair or keeping elements of the highway working and available for use.

Planned work, on the other hand, includes elements of work to replace or extend the life of the highway, with a view to improving journey experience, and minimising the costs of reactive and cyclical maintenance. This may involve resurfacing roads, renewing footway surfaces, or introducing drainage to remove flooding issues. Regrettably, there is never sufficient funding to do everything road users and the Council would like to do, therefore there are several ways that these works are prioritised.

Reviewing what we do

The last year has been an interesting and challenging year in delivering planned works. The pandemic affected progress early in the year with many items of work suspended and a rethink on how certain operations could be done safely. Despite this, in terms of investment in the network, it has been a very busy year where we have delivered more planned works than ever before.

Although the service is performing well and can demonstrate this to the Government and consequently receive additional funding, we are a learning organisation and we are conscious that there are times when things don't always go as we had hoped they would. It's important that we take time to understand what happened and how we could do things differently as we move forward. This leads us to make changes to how we work and to test new ways of working. In the last year we've been doing that on a pilot basis, firstly in the West of Devon, and then more widely throughout the County.

New ways of working

Our purpose in relation to planned works is to increase the resilience of the road network by selecting the most appropriate treatments and undertaking these works effectively. We've developed a number of principles that will assist us in doing this based on learning. We recognise that there are three distinct elements that come together to deliver planned works effectively.

Firstly, we need to use machine-based condition data from surveys so that we have an objective view of the network. Secondly, we need to compliment this with visual route inspections by our Neighbourhood teams to verify the degree of fitness for purpose and add to our knowledge, all to compliment and confirm which roads and footpaths we need to pay attention to. Finally, and very

importantly, we need to take advantage of views from customer perspectives, particularly those of our parish and town councils.

Parish and town council involvement

We are very interested to understand which roads are important locally and how these compare with our perceived hierarchy. In addition, we're interested to share our intended advance programme and understand what repairs would be of most value to communities. During the last year, through some of our work in piloting this approach, we have found that very often all these views are consistent in developing a future programme. Sometimes there are inconsistencies and the valuable knowledge and discussion with communities reshapes the programme. The pilot work has demonstrated the importance of dialogue in being transparent on why we promote certain works above others.

Next steps

We are in the process of producing forward programmes, for each of our six neighbourhood teams based across the county, of the planned work programme we would like to achieve in the forthcoming years. We are very interested too get some discussion with parishes as this emerges. Once this is ready our local teams will contact parish and town councils. The intention is to publish these programmes publicly. As ever, funding these works is uncertain in the future and this year for instance, we are already seeing a significant fall in the funding available compared to last year. Although we have a plan of what we want to achieve because funding is unclear, we are less certain on actual delivery dates over the next few years.

Once schemes have been designed and added to the annual plan, the information is available to view on the [council website](#). At any time, users may see works we have recently done, those that are currently underway and what we plan to do next.