

Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Plan consultation feedback.

We asked for your views on the proposal to implement an asset management approach for the upkeep of your highway network.

Thank you to all that took part.

We have reviewed the responses received and have provided some answers to common questions/observations below:

Comment: “the greatest cause for concern is the way potholes have been repaired; it has not been unusual for repairs to be undertaken in the rain so that the patching fails within a very short space of time. If the job were to be done properly the first time around there would be huge amounts of money saved by not having to make repeat visits”

Answer: At the centre of our asset management approach is the need to make sure we spend money effectively.

Alongside our asset management plan, we have developed a new risk-based Highway Maintenance Operation Plan which specifies the standards Suffolk Highways will operate to with regards reactive maintenance (i.e. maintenance which is triggered by safety concerns such as ‘potholes’ for which there is actually no agreed nationally accepted definition).

Our new approach provides us with the ability to identify and record for repair smaller defects which present less of an immediate risk to road users. As the risk is less, we are able to have slightly longer to repair them, allowing us to avoid adverse weather, group repairs at similar locations and deliver ‘right first time’ quality and lasting repairs.

Our asset management approach does not stop there. With a conscious increase in annual preventative treatments programmes, we aim to significantly reduce the number of potholes and other types of defects from forming in the first place.

Comment: “I am Clerk to a rural Parish and my Council is concerned about tighter funding leading to less work undertaken on the management of overgrown roadside vegetation and hedges”

Comment: “very much appreciate the NOT cutting verges back so much and would like to see them NOT cut back at all until August - September, save even more money and just do them once in September”

Answer: Suffolk Highways have to balance differing views!!

Our asset management approach needs us to hold better information on all of our assets. This enables us to have one set of data in one asset management system improving how we plan our service.

Our roadside nature reserves have been separately identified by the Council’s ecology team so we can tailor cutting at appropriate times, reducing the amount we cut.

For the remainder of our network our cutting regimes are based around safety requirements. Having greater detail on all our activities allows us to plan and coordinate, sharing costs where possible. For example, when we need to install expensive traffic management to safely cut grass in a central reservation, we will plan to clean the gullies at the same time.

Effectively coordinating our activities will reduce the impact of any funding reductions allowing us to maintain similar levels of service.

Comment: “It all sounds good and logical but experience to date does not encourage confidence in a decent service being delivered”

Comment “It is a worthy enough aim but the experience of highways services locally is that there is a vast gulf between what is said and what is actually delivered”

Answer: As part of Suffolk Highways’ transformation to an asset management approach we will be sharing performance data so that you can see what we are achieving and how our achievements compare with neighbouring authorities and others in the eastern region.

We are currently collecting performance data, some of which will emerge from the National Highways and Transport public satisfaction survey in November. We will start publishing this data soon afterwards so that you will be able to check in and see how we’re doing on the Suffolk Highways pages on the Council’s website.

Comment: “I have never seen preventative maintenance carried out on roads”

Answer: Preventative treatments such as surface dressing have always formed part of Suffolk Highways’ works programmes but we are significantly increasing the amount we do.

These treatments target roads that are in a fair condition, catching them before potholes and structural damage can occur and are a cost effective way of extending the life of the road network.

The implementation of a full asset management approach enables engineers to use condition information to identify more roads that are at the appropriate stage of deterioration for these treatments to have maximum benefit. This approach will reduce the overall cost of maintaining your roads over their life, ensuring improved safety and reducing our reliance on more costly and disruptive pothole and deep structural resurfacing repairs.

This year, using our asset management approach, we surface dressed over 6% of our entire road network (over 500 miles).

Comment: “I think all roads and pavements should be well maintained and repaired. Is it fair that a road in a shocking state can be left because you deem it to be low priority?”

Answer: Even using the most efficient form of highway maintenance, there's currently not enough money provided by central government to carry out everything that we'd like to do.

This means that we do have to prioritise where we invest your money to ensure that busier routes serving hospitals, transport hubs, business centres and commuter routes which support our everyday lives are considered first. This does not mean that other roads will not receive investment but it may mean that it takes longer for us to get to these.

Furthermore, our approach will not leave roads in an unsafe condition. Suffolk Highways’ new Highway Maintenance Operational Plan allows us to identify and repair smaller defects than the previous version of the Plan. This means that we will patch more, thereby improving the safety and serviceability of your roads.

Comment: “We do not see a problem with choosing the economically optimum material on the hundreds of miles of Suffolk’s roads but how that looks as a place to visit and the impression it gives of our town is far more important than the choice of materials”

Answer: We have to be mindful in selecting our choice of materials.

Expensive, premium paving materials significantly drain our limited maintenance budgets when they need replacing. It can often be difficult to source replacements

and, even if replacements can be found, there can be lengthy delivery times. Equally, coloured asphalt-based surface materials are not readily available in small quantities so are expensive for asphalt plants and suppliers to create – an issue that was probably not even thought about when the material finish was originally selected.

This invariably results in both Suffolk Highways and utility companies (who carry out around 50% of the roadworks activity on Suffolk's road network) little option but to fill in gaps with black, bituminous material. Depending on the surrounding surface finish, these temporary repairs may be permanently repaired once the matching material is available. This approach is not sustainable and not visually appealing.

However, this does not mean that we will only use an asphalt finish or one 'standard' type of paving slabs throughout Suffolk. Suffolk Highways recognise the diverse nature of Suffolk and is developing a pallet of materials from which engineers, town planners and developers can choose in some locations.

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