

Public comments on the HMOP consultation exercise

We asked for your views on Suffolk Highways' new Highway Maintenance Operational Plan (HMOP). Thank you to all that took part.

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

I am extremely concerned at the implications of the proposed policy relating to trees, particularly those on verges adjacent to the highways. Statements such as: *"Felled trees will not automatically be replaced"*, *"There will be a presumption against replanting tree trees in urban areas"* and *"Any dead, diseased or vandalised trees that are removed from the highway will not be automatically replaced"*.

Suffolk County Council officer response:

The quotations referred to above are from some early draft versions of both the Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Plan (HIAMP) and Highway Maintenance Operational Plan (HMOP) documents which formed part of the July 2016 Suffolk County Council Cabinet papers. Both documents were revised prior to the HMOP consultation exercise to address these concerns to read:

"For any tree that must be removed from the highway due to being dead, diseased or vandalised every attempt will be made to plant a new tree in a location that requires the minimum amount of root protection/containment, accords with the Highways Act 1980 and has the potential to flourish in appropriate ground conditions. This would preferably be in wide highway verges away from all metalled highway surfaces or in non-highway locations (such as local amenity, landscaped areas). This approach should also be followed for new tree provision in general".

Agree there should be a risk assessment approach to repairs. However, I would not like to see it result in "quieter" rural roads totally ignored.

Estate roads look like they are going to be left.

It is not satisfactory that rural roads, already in need of repair and having been on the maintenance schedule for some time, will now be further down the list.

Suffolk County Council officer response:

Suffolk Highways maintain around 6,500km of highway network so the approach is to define timescales that can be met across the entire county, irrespective of whether the work is in an urban or rural environment.

For example, a deep 400mm diameter pothole on a 60mph 'A' class road would represent a greater risk than that posed by a similar sized pothole in a residential cul-du-sac. This does not mean that the pothole on the 'quieter' road is ignored; we

would still repair the defect but in a slightly longer timescale. In reality, a carriageway defect on a less trafficked road had to be a minimum of 600mm x 600mm x 50mm to warrant reactive maintenance intervention under the previous HMOP. Under the new HMOP, a carriageway defect measuring just 100mm in diameter on a local urban road has the potential for being treated through reactive maintenance. So, rather than 'totally ignoring quieter rural roads', the opposite is true insofar as the new HMOP is proactive in dealing with emerging defects.

In principle, it seems a good plan. However, the Council needs to be flexible in dealing with defects.

Suffolk County Council officer response:

Over the last decade or so, highway maintenance has moved to repairing defects when they get really bad. The new Suffolk Highways' HMOP approach is to tackle defects at an early stage when they pose less of a risk to users and to prevent them getting worse.

Whilst we are identifying smaller defects for repair we maintain the flexibility, where appropriate to assign a quicker response time to be assigned to a repair. This is entirely in keeping with the risk-based approach that central government expect local authorities to have in place by 2018, to accord with the new 'Well-Managed Highway Infrastructure' Code of Practice launched by the Roads Minister at the end of October 2016.

The HMOP document list a number of categories but how do I know what category my road is?

The changes are not based on comprehensive enough assessments. The category of road does not reflect the speed or volume or class of vehicles travelling over it. The apparent increasing trend of Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) routing on minor rural roads represents high impact usage which clearly compromises the condition of the road surfaces and edges.

Suffolk County Council officer response:

More detailed descriptions on how Suffolk Highways categorise roads, footways and cycleways (including consideration of HGVs) to help us prioritise highway maintenance can be found on our web pages by following the link below (now added to the HMOP document):

www.suffolk.gov.uk/categories-of-roads

In the past Highways have never been co-operative nor even bothered to answer on-line, emailed or telephone reports of Highways requiring attention.

Suffolk County Council officer response:

All customer reports are now channelled through our on-line reporting tool (whether directly or input by one of our customer service team following a telephone or email report). This allows customers to receive updates on what we are proposing to do and the timescales within which we will do it. The highways online reporting tool was highly commended in the V3 Digital Technology Leaders Awards 2016 and was a runner up in the O2 Next Gen Digital Challenge Awards in recognition of its enhancements and ongoing development.

This is ridiculous how can Suffolk County Council be having a consultation on this when it was approved by Cabinet months ago?

Suffolk County Council officer response:

In July 2016, the Cabinet was asked to support the approach and direction of both the HIAMP and HMOP documents to confirm the contents was consistent with the Highway Asset Management Policy and Strategy documents that it had approved on 10 November 2015.

Additionally, Cabinet agreed that both documents should be made available to the public and other stakeholders for comment and for appropriate changes to be made prior to the final documents being published on the Council's website.

I have never seen the state of the roads as they are today in Beccles, potholes everywhere.

Suffolk Highways' HMOP allows us to identify smaller defects for repair. Defects such as potholes can be reported by using our online reporting toolkit:

www.suffolk.gov.uk/report-a-pothole

All highways in Suffolk are the subject of regular routine inspections which are now carried out in a far more consistent way through the new HMOP. Any potholes meeting the intervention criteria will be rectified but those outside of the criteria will continue to be monitored through the regular inspections. The focus of highway maintenance is to ensure that the local highway network is safe to use rather than aesthetically pleasing. Reasonable steps are nonetheless now being taken to undertake maintenance on roads at an earlier stage in their overall deterioration, wherever available funding allows.

It sounds a sensible and pragmatic approach is being taken to managing the highways - at long last. However, I have severe doubts about the ability of the team to work to and deliver this plan effectively.

I would support this proposal as long as Highways actually keep to it.

Suffolk County Council officer response:

As part of Suffolk Highways' transformation to an asset management approach, we will be sharing performance data so that anyone 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 emerged from the National Highways and Transport public satisfaction survey in November. We will start publishing this data soon afterwards so that anyone is able to check in and see how we're doing on the Suffolk Highways pages on the Council's website. However, since the trial of the HMOP began at the start of May 2016, the number of occasions on which reactive maintenance has been identified by the public or highway inspections has fallen month on month.

Standards of workmanship are generally not impressive; there are backlogs to be cleared.

All work should be thoroughly inspected and guaranteed for at least one year by the contractors.

Suffolk County Council officer response:

We strive to drive up the quality and efficiency of the works we undertake so we now photograph all of our defect repairs to both complement site visits by our works supervisors and reduce the need to inspect every element of completed work – and this keep costs at a more sustainable level. Since the introduction of the new HMOP in May there has been a significant reduction in the proportion of temporary repairs to carriageway defects (down from 21% in May 2016 to 3% in September 2016)

The defect repairs we complete are guaranteed for up to a year so, if on the rare occasion something does fail, the cost of these subsequent repairs are borne by Suffolk Highways' highway maintenance service provider.

This service provider does not wish to be burdened with these costs so is constantly improving repair techniques and identifying new materials which are supported and approved through our Material, Specification and Innovation group.

We are spending money on road surfaces but not tackling long terms problems with drainage on the same roads so the improved surface will be compromised.

Suffolk County Council officer response:

Suffolk Highways in 2016/17 has heavily invested in both the carriageway and drainage infrastructure to prevent deterioration and structural damage which is costly to repair.

From a drainage perspective, we have almost doubled investment this year to around 1/10th of our annual maintenance budget, prioritising locations where

properties are being flooded as well as key locations on the highway network. This investment in drainage is set to continue whilst there are issues for us to investigate and resolve. In addition, an enhanced programme of drainage grip cutting has commenced to address localised rural highway flooding.

Further details of our future works programmes are available on our website:

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/roadworks/roadworks-in-suffolk/>

It does not appear to address the major fault with the current system which is that a repair team is told it can only repair a pothole of a certain size so if they go out to a hole that meets the criteria, but there is a smaller one next to it that doesn't, the latter is ignored. This means the small one that could have been quickly and cheaply filled while the team was on site, is left to become a big one that needs more work and may even grow to compromise the repair next to it.

Suffolk County Council officer response:

As part of our risk-based approach, we are now taking the opportunity to identify and record those defects that, in isolation, do not meet our intervention criteria for repair – this ensures that those scheduling repair work are aware of the presence of these potential future works.

When and where possible, Suffolk Highways works schedulers are grouping repairs in the same location together – even if the timescale for remedial treatment may vary from one defect to another. On the rare occasion where such grouping is not possible – perhaps due to the serious nature of a particular defect where a temporary ‘make safe’ response is more appropriate or there is limited time to effect more overall repair due to traffic constraints - the remaining defects will be programmed for patching at a single return visit.

Over time, the identification and repair of smaller defects will reduce the number of occasions where large defects occur, reducing the risk and improving the safety of your roads.

