

Cabinet – 18 December 2019

Repairing and Maintaining Roads

Portfolio: Councillor Andrew - Regeneration

Related portfolios: Councillor Butler – Clean and Green

Service: Planning, Engineering & Transportation

Wards: All

Key decision: Yes

Forward plan: Yes

1. Aim

- 1.1. **To identify extra funding to boost the approved highway maintenance programme** for the Council's road network, facilitating the provision of safe and reliable journeys for customers and local communities.

2. Summary

- 2.1. The Council maintains 842km of roads and associated infrastructure with an estimated value of £3.3bn. The Borough's classified road network has benefited from significant investment in recent years and 80% of these routes are now considered to be in good condition.
- 2.2. Walsall's local communities are bound by 691km of unclassified roads which connect families and provide essential routes to education, work, local amenities and businesses. In respect of these roads, 20% are currently considered to be in poor condition. Based on the current budget and maintenance strategy, this figure is expected to double in the next 10 years.
- 2.3. In October 2019, the West Midlands Combined Authority [WMCA] submitted a Department for Transport [DfT] Challenge Fund Expression of Interest [EOI]. The EOI is seeking £19.8m investment for the region's unclassified road network with a specific focus on those roads and footways that lead to and link bus routes.
- 2.4. The motivation and rationale behind the bid is that by improving the condition of the unclassified network and making public transport more accessible, footfall in

the Borough's district centres is likely to increase and therefore residents, communities and local businesses can all benefit.

- 2.5. Of the £19.8m being sought by the six authorities¹, £3.9m is being requested on behalf of Walsall Council. If successful, the Council will need to provide £500k match funding to secure the DfT capital.
- 2.6. This paper proposes the adoption of an optimised maintenance strategy and addition investment in road maintenance to improve the condition of the Borough's locally important, unclassified road network.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. That the Council adopt an optimised approach to all road maintenance, focusing on investment in preventative treatments that are implemented at an earlier stage before more costly deep structural repairs become necessary.

If the Challenge Fund bid is successful,

- 3.2. That the Council invest £500k to secure the additional DfT funding and improve the condition of those unclassified roads that provide communities with essential routes to education, work and local amenities.

4. Report detail – know

Context

Introduction

- 4.1. The Council as the Local Highway Authority maintains 842km of roads and associated infrastructure including drains, bridges, signs, lines and safety barrier. The estimated value of the Council's local highway network is £3.3bn, as such this is the most valuable asset the Council owns. The highway network enables safe and reliable journeys, supports social and economic prosperity and in doing so provides opportunities for individuals and communities to fulfil their potential. The Council is committed to the effective management of our highway network not only now but for future generations.
- 4.2. In April 2019, the Council published its Highway Asset Management Strategy. Asset management has been widely accepted by central and local government as a way of using knowledge and forward planning to manage the local highway network efficiently and effectively. By taking a risk-based, long-term approach to investment, the Council can make the best use of the resources available and ensure that the right interventions take place at the most effective time.

¹ Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall Metropolitan Councils and Wolverhampton and Coventry City Councils

- 4.3. Aging assets, increasing traffic volumes and heavier vehicles mean that an ever increasing number of repairs, renewals and improvements are required. There are currently outstanding and unfunded carriageway and footway repairs at around 300 locations across the borough. The estimated cost to carry out the repairs at these locations is £16.6m.

Network deterioration

- 4.4. Walsall's classified road network has benefitted from a significant cash injection that has elevated overall condition. Around 80% of the Borough's A, B and C roads are considered to be in a good state of repair and unlikely to show signs of decline for several years to come. The unclassified network binds local communities, connect families and provide essential routes to education, work and local amenities. These roads, which total 691km in length, have not received the same level of investment and this is reflected by the current condition.
- 4.5. Approximately 20% of Walsall's unclassified roads are now considered to be in poor condition and in need of deep structural repairs. A further 35% of these local routes have been identified as needing shallower, preventative treatments to slow the rate of deterioration. Based on the current budget and maintenance strategy, the proportion of unclassified roads in a poor condition is expected to more than double in the next 10 years.
- 4.6. In general and regardless of classification, the optimum approach to road maintenance is to treat a greater proportion of roads more frequently. This means that preventative treatments are implemented at an earlier stage before more costly deep structural repairs become necessary. If the Council fully embraces the optimum approach, the overall condition of our unclassified road network will improve over time. However, the rate at which it improves will be entirely dependent on the level of investment.

Wider Benefit

- 4.7. Focused investment in the Borough's unclassified road network will have wider benefits for the local economy and public health. For example, improving access to active and sustainable travel options supports attempts to deliver congestion relief, public health improvements and arrest the general decline in high street footfall. In 2018, the vacancy rate in Walsall was reported to be 26%, over 100% higher than the national average.
- 4.8. Footfall in the West Midlands has declined by 3.6% annually over the last few years. Improving the roads and footways will allow greater access to the district centres and help to reverse this decline. The proposed investment will facilitate better connectivity for cyclists, walkers and bus users. This will result in better access, drive up footfall and reduce vacancy rates

Options

4.9. The following three options are proposed for consideration

Option One	£0 per annum additional investment in road maintenance + Existing maintenance strategy	Proportion of unclassified roads [%]	
		2018	2028 [Forecast]
	Green [Good Condition]	45%	34%
	Amber [In need of preventative treatment]	35%	21%
	Red [In need of structural repair]	20%	45%

Option Two	£500,000 per annum additional investment in road maintenance + Optimised maintenance strategy	Proportion of unclassified roads [%]	
		2018	2028 [Forecast]
	Green [Good Condition]	45%	70%
	Amber [In need of preventative treatment]	35%	21%
	Red [In need of structural repair]	20%	9%

Option Three	£1,000,000 per annum additional investment in road maintenance + Optimised maintenance strategy	Proportion of unclassified roads [%]	
		2018	2028 [Forecast]
	Green [Good Condition]	45%	74%
	Amber [In need of preventative treatment]	35%	21%
	Red [In need of structural repair]	20%	5%

4.10. Based on deterioration modelling carried out in 2018, an additional £500k investment in roads year on year for 10 years using the optimum strategy could reduce the proportion of unclassified roads in poor condition by 11%. If this investment was increased to £1m per annum, it is anticipated that in years' time, just 5% of unclassified roads would remain in poor condition with 75% considered to be in good condition.

4.11. If the Challenge Fund bid is successful, this investment can be accelerated considerably with a significant cash injection in the first 12 – 24 months.

Conclusion

- 4.12. As reported in March 2019, the Council typically spends £5m on carriageway resurfacing each year. This comprises of a combination of Department for Transport, Council Capital mainstream and one off Capital Bid allocations for projects such as the Black Country Route carriageway maintenance and the Town Centre Enhancement Schemes. To maintain a steady state of carriageway condition, this level of investment needs to be maintained for the foreseeable future.
- 4.13. If the Council is to begin tackling the backlog of unfunded schemes, improve the overall condition of the Borough's local road network and support economic and public health improvements, additional investment is required in Walsall's unclassified road network.

Council Corporate Plan priorities

- 4.14. The local highway network provides a vital role in the Borough's economic prosperity. Resilient and reliable highway infrastructure connects the District Centres and attracts investment, creating employment and providing opportunities for individuals and communities to fulfil their potential.
- 4.15. The Borough's roads provide valuable access to services, amenities and social activities. In doing so, it enables residents to live with greater independence and make a positive contribution to the communities around them.
- 4.16. A safe and resilient highway network provides the Boroughs young people with access to work, education and training opportunities, giving them the best start in life and supporting them to achieve their potential.
- 4.17. In 2017, the Council published Transport in Walsall. The Strategy for the Borough outlines a five-year vision and objectives; these include promoting public transport, increasing active travel and improving air quality. Much of the Borough's bus route network is accessed via the unclassified roads and adjacent footways that connect residential areas. Of the 300 sites identified above, 280 are on the unclassified road network including routes used by local communities to access Walsall's network of public transport services.
- 4.18. The Walsall Plan outlines the Council's strategy for Health and Wellbeing 2019 - 2021 and focuses on three overarching priorities. Investment in the Borough's unclassified road network, and doing so in a way that facilitates active and sustainable transport, will contribute to two of these, namely "On the Move and Smoke Free" and "Walsall Town Centre"
- 4.19. Improving the condition of unclassified roads and footways will facilitate cycling and walking and improve access to public transport services. This will not only

encourage residents and communities to become more active but also encourage the workforce of Walsall to lead by example.

- 4.20. Improving the Borough's offering for walking, cycling, and easing accesses to public transport will in turn facilitate access to the Town Centre. If we can increase footfall, businesses will be encouraged to invest and contribute to an environment that local people can be proud of and benefit from.

Risk management

- 4.21. The Council has a statutory obligation to maintain the network in a safe condition. If injury, loss or damage arise due to the condition of the highway, then the Council can be held accountable unless they can demonstrate that they have taken reasonable action to maintain highway safety.

Financial implications

- 4.22. The budget for highway works comprises of Department for Transport [DfT] funding and Walsall Council Capital investment. This funding pays for the maintenance, repair, renewal and improvement of all adopted local roads, footways, drainage, structures, signing, white lining and safety barrier.
- 4.23. In 2019/20 DfT funding is made up of the Local Highways Maintenance Funding – Needs Element; Local Highways Maintenance Funding – Incentive Funding and the Pothole Action Fund. The total value of the Walsall allocation is £2,502,600. The Council have more than doubled the budget for highway maintenance with additional investment of £2,600,000 although this is £200,000 lower than in previous years.
- 4.24. Further funding has also been provided for specific projects, most notably £450,000 for resurfacing on the Black Country Route and the ongoing District Centres project that has a total value of £4,000,000.
- 4.25. In October 2019, the Council submitted a joint bid with other members of the West Midlands Combined Authority for Department for Transport Challenge Funding. The bid focused on investing in the unclassified road network and specifically local bus routes with £3.9m requested for the Walsall highway network. If successful, Walsall Council will need to provide match funding totalling £500k. The investment proposed in this paper will provide appropriate match funding if the Challenge Fund bid is successful.
- 4.26. The match funding required forms part of the 2020/2021 draft Capital Programme (which is also on this agenda).

Legal implications

- 4.27. Walsall Council has statutory obligations under the Highways Act 1980 under section 4(1) of the Highways Act 1980 (the “HA 1980”) the Council as the Local Highway Authority is under a statutory duty to maintain highways maintainable at public expense.
- 4.28. Under s16 Part 2 of the Traffic Management Act 2004 (England), the Council as the Local Traffic Authority is under a statutory duty to manage the local road network to keep traffic moving.
- 4.29. Well-managed Highway Infrastructure: A Code of Practice is non-statutory however it will be deemed to be guidance of best practice by the courts. The Council will be required to demonstrate a robust decision-making process, an understanding of the consequences of those decisions, and how the associated risks are managed to ensure highway safety.

Procurement Implications/Social Value

- 4.30. Highway repairs and renewals are procured via the Highway Infrastructure Services Contract [HISC] with Tarmac.
- 4.31. Tarmac have made a number of social value commitments that are monitored as part of the contract arrangements. These include volunteering, work experience placements and an apprenticeship opportunity. If Challenge Funding is secured, the additional investment in the HISC may present opportunities to enhance existing social value commitments.

Property implications

- 4.32. The recommendations in this report have no direct implications on any property of the Council. However, investment in highway repairs and renewals will deliver improvements in highway condition, minimising the risk of exposure to the Council for claims.

Health and wellbeing implications

- 4.33. A safe and resilient highway network provides access to services, amenities and social activities. In doing so, it enables residents to live with greater independence, provides access to work, education and training opportunities and supports them to achieve their potential.

Staffing implications

- 4.34. None identified as a result of the recommendations contained in this report

Reducing Inequalities

- 4.35. No protected characteristics or groups have been identified as a result of the recommendations contained in this report.
- 4.36. Highway repairs and renewals are identified, planned and delivered in accordance with the Council's Highways Asset Management Strategy and Highway Maintenance Management Plan. These documents support the Council's equal opportunities policies by providing a well-managed transportation network that benefits all members of the community and improves accessibility, including those with disabilities. The way the highway network is managed and maintained can have a significant bearing on improving social inclusion.
- 4.37. Continued implementation of highway asset management principles will bring improvements to the way in which the Council manages the highway network. Improvements to the condition and management of roads and footways can have a positive impact on crime prevention. By maintaining a pleasant, clean and well-maintained appearance, highway users will generally feel more safe and secure and be encouraged to make better use of the network facilities available to them.

Consultation

- 4.38. Public consultation is not considered to be necessary for the enhancement of highway maintenance.

5. Decide

- 5.1. Cabinet are requested to consider the content of this report and decide on the level of additional funding to be made available for the enhancement of the approved highway maintenance programme.

6. Respond

- 6.1. Subject to Cabinet approval of the recommendations, Highways and Environment officers will:
- a. Review the list of unclassified road schemes submitted in support of the Challenge Fund Expression of Interest.
 - b. Prioritise the schemes based on condition, safety and local importance.
 - c. Include the prioritised list for approval by the Council alongside the 2020/21 Road and Footway Resurfacing Programmes
 - d. Deliver the programmed schemes using the Highway Infrastructure Services Contract with Tarmac and their local supply chain.

7. Review

7.1 Subject to Cabinet approval of the recommendations, Highways and Environment officers will:

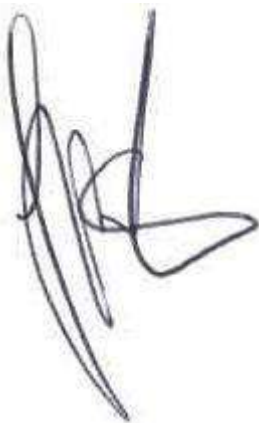
- a. Present the 2020/21 road and footway resurfacing programmes to Cabinet for approval in spring 2020 [The Head of Planning, Engineering and Transportation has delegated authority to prepare such programmes].
- b. Monitor highway in accordance with existing budget monitoring processes
- c. Monitor scheme programming and delivery a monthly basis
- d. Review enquiries, compliments and complaints to measure customer satisfaction
- e. Use asset condition indicators to demonstrate the improvement in highway network condition

Background papers

Walsall Council Highway Asset Management Strategy [April 2019]

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9 December 2019



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11 December 2019