

Highway Maintenance Update – SW Wilts

November 2022

I'm sorry that I can't be present at the LHFIG meeting in person due to current illness.

We are in the winter season now with gritting taking place when temperatures fall low enough at the beginning and end of the day; the combination of regular rainfall followed by frosts and the application of road salt, is likely to accelerate wear and tear to road surfaces and lead to larger numbers of potholes forming unfortunately. To deal with this our pothole and hot materials gangs use premium grade tarmac materials through the autumn and winter months to try and make repairs last longer and cope with wet conditions etc.

At this point of the year all the process's that rely on fair summer weather and higher ambient temperatures have had their programmes concluded, so Surface Dressing, White Lining, Spray Injection/Jet Patcher works etc will not take place again until late spring/summer of the new financial year 2023/24, assuming budgets are again made available for that to happen.

Some of you may be aware that our Term Maintenance Contractor Ringway who currently delivers all highway maintenance works, were unsuccessful in re-bidding for the contract recently. Consequently Milestone Ltd will be replacing them from the 1st of April 2023 going forward. Although there will be some inevitable minor disruption due to the mobilisation and de-mobilisation respectively by the contractors involved, highway maintenance service will continue to be delivered throughout that period and in the future. Existing operatives will be transferred to the new employer under TUPE regulations and that will of course include the existing parish stewards.

Reactive Surfacing works are continuing to take place in SW Wilts which involve local hand patching and minor machine lay of hot tarmac materials, with good results being achieved at local sites such as Teffont Evias, Broad Oak Farm Semley and Rookery Lane Swallowcliffe, where hard and repeated lobbying including by elected members and some parish councils, have secured works that have been needed for some while. Reactive works at Place Farm in Court Street Tisbury have unfortunately delayed due to difficulties with the

diversion routes for the required temporary road closure clashing with other programmed closures, but these are expected to be overcome and the works re-scheduled shortly.

The major maintenance major scheme list which is administered centrally, caters for those sites where the defects or near end of life carriageway conditions dictate that full scale resurfacing or reconstruction works are required to restore good carriageway condition at an individual site.

The major scheme list has now been expanded to include a rolling programme that extends up until 2030, meaning that sites that have already been identified can be prioritised and programmed as and when budget and resources become available between now and that date. The rolling nature of it also means that if “new” sites of high priority (like on a high speed road) are identified, they can be added and the running order will inevitably be shuffled around.

Recent budgetary constraints due to the inflationary pressures on all of us have had significant effects on local authority budgets and the major maintenance one is no exception. So the increased costs of bitumen, fuel, construction materials, labour and national insurance etc have resulted in some schemes having to be put back to a later date; an example of this in our area would be the C25 Hindon Lane Tisbury, where likely resurfacing will now be moved back into the next financial year, at the earliest. The imminent scheme for Lower Road Quidhampton should proceed as planned hopefully for the end of January, beginning of February 2023 however.

Sites for Surface Dressing (tar and chip) which is the preferred surface treatment for rural roads, continue to be chosen and managed by our consultants Atkins from survey and inspection data that they collate and analyse, rather than by WC staff.

Before leaving the subject of major maintenance provision, I can confirm that I have again submitted a number of sites for any new verge overrun damage programme for the new financial year 2023/24, for rural roads, with The Raceplain Road at Netherhampton as a local priority. With regard to the latter the major maintenance team having assessed that, are currently of the opinion that the extent of works required does not justify priority treatment. I'm not happy with that and am working on “Plan B” accordingly!

Also the very dry summer just passed has resulted in many rural roads across the county that “sit” over shrinkable clay sub-grade becoming damaged by heat stress, with cracking and heaving evident as a result to various degrees of severity. The prevalence of shrinkable clay in the Knoyles and Mere areas in particular has resulted in me bringing those to the attention of the major maintenance team and asking for action. However both this programme as well as the one for verge overruns is currently un-funded within major maintenance, so hopefully funds will be made available in the next financial year to take those initiatives forward.

Other required major works and schemes regarding improvements to highway drainage continue to be passed to that team by me, resulting in a small number of CCTV drainage investigations currently taking place across the area, such as in Teffont Magna this week; commitments to fully investigate and potentially replace the suspected collapsed highway culvert at Broad Oak Semley and the clearing of silt in the Culvert under The Dene in Hindon (once the bridge parapet recently damaged again by an HGV is repaired first) – have been secured from that team.

Turning to more routine local maintenance operations, Annual now Autumn season verge cutting has been under way for a few weeks now with our sub-contractor Simon Jackson and our local WC tractors cutting both grass and some hedges where the council have responsibility that are also on gritting routes, where the gritters sometimes struggle with available road width.

Once the grass cutting has been completed the intention is to get the tractors mechanically cutting drainage grips, both known priorities, as well as those identified by the parish stewards.

The local Gully Tanker crew continue to empty gullies on the schedule, with priority given to high risk and high speed roads first, as well as doing ad-hoc emptying and jetting responding to specific incidents and concerns, such as in Wilton, East Knoyle, Hindon and Mere recently, to name a few.

In addition the Vactor tanker with a traffic management crew has just paid the area one of it’s quarterly visits and worked on a number of sites and post-flooding issues such as the A350 Turnpike at East Knoyle and Station Road Semley. This resource has recently been joined by an additional machine “Vactor 2”, whose additional power and jetting facilities will hopefully increase effectiveness in clearing any blocked drainage runs.

David Button 25/11/22