

**Wiltshire Council**

**Royal Wootton Bassett and Cricklade Area Board**

**Date of meeting**

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**Subject: Local Highways Investment Fund 2014 – 2020**

**Report Author: Parvis Khansari, Associate Director Highways and Transport**

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### **Executive Summary**

Wiltshire Council is undertaking a major programme of investment in highway maintenance over six years, which is delivering a significant improvement in the condition of the county's highway network.

The flooding in 2013/14 had an adverse effect on road conditions, but the additional investment through the Council's 'Local Highways Investment Fund 2014 – 2020' has arrested this deterioration, and the county's road conditions continue to improve.

The investment has been targeted at those roads in worst condition, and includes minor roads as well as the main roads. The programme is just reaching the end of its second year, and has already seen a substantial amount of work completed (see **Appendix 1**).

In 2016/17 it is proposed to increase expenditure on treating the smaller sites, many of which have been outstanding for some time, and to reduce the number of larger surfacing sites.

A list of potential sites for next year has been prepared for each community area (see **Appendix 2**). The site list is based on the existing condition of the roads and the anticipated deterioration in the future, and the area boards are invited to consider the proposals.

It should be noted that the list will probably need to be reviewed during the year as the rate of deterioration of individual roads does vary because of weather and local conditions.

There has been an extensive programme of integrated transport, traffic management and safety schemes carried out in recent years. (See **Appendix 3**). The Community Area Transport Groups (CATGs) have had a vital role in helping prioritise schemes.

The Council is in the process of identifying a 'Resilient Road Network' (See **Appendix 4**), which will form the core network where specific measures would be considered in order to ensure the continuing availability of this route in extreme weather conditions.

### **Proposals**

Area Boards are asked to note the work completed so far in connection with the 'Local highways Investment Fund 2014 – 2020', and consider the list of proposals for highway maintenance in their areas for 2016/17.

The Area Board are requested to note the proposed 'Wiltshire Resilient Road Network', and are invited to comment on the proposed network and any sections of the route of particular concern in their area.

### **Reason for Proposal**

Wiltshire Council has a major programme of investment in highway maintenance over six years, which is already delivering a significant improvement in the condition of the county's highway network.

The views of the Area Board are important in helping identify local priorities for road maintenance, and future programmes of work.

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#### **Purpose of Report**

1. To advise the Area Board regarding progress on Wiltshire Council's Local Highways Investment Fund 2014 – 2020, and to review the local highway maintenance priorities for 2016/17.

#### **Relevance to the Council's Business Plan**

2. The Council's Business Plan sets out the vision to create stronger and more resilient communities. It includes three key priorities and twelve actions that the Council will deliver over the next four years. One of the twelve actions is to 'invest additional money between 2014 -17 to reduce the historic backlog in highways maintenance'.

#### **Background**

3. Expenditure on highways maintenance declined substantially during the 1990's, and there was underinvestment in roads maintenance nationally for many years. There was an increase in spending from 2000/1, with the introduction of Local Transport Plan funding, but there was still a large backlog of maintenance required on the network.
4. In 2014 Wiltshire Council started a major programme of investment in highway maintenance over six years to bring about a significant improvement in the condition of the county's highway network.

#### **Main Considerations for the Council**

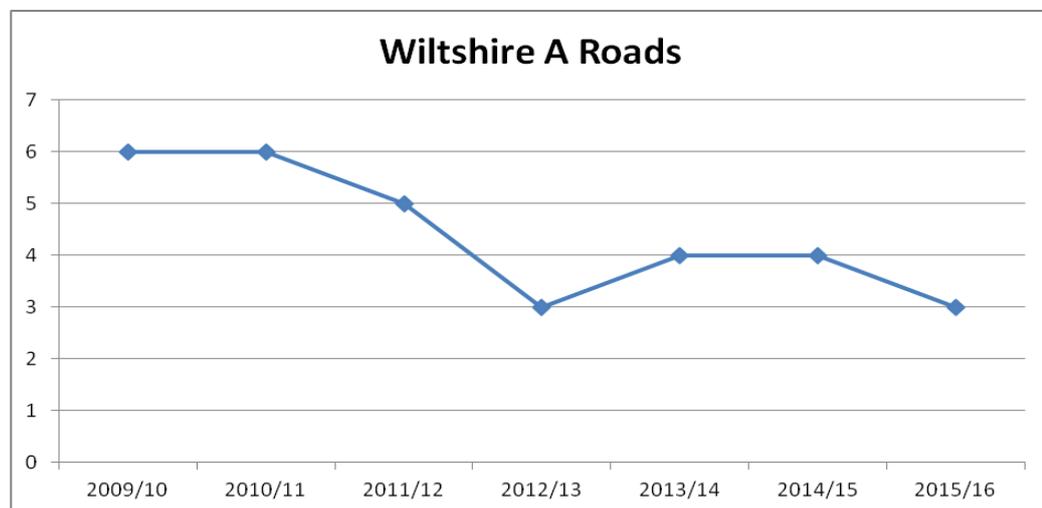
##### Local Highways Investment Fund 2014 - 2020

5. The investment is being targeted at those roads in worst condition, and includes minor roads as well as the main roads. Assessments based on road safety information and road condition data has been used to prepare annual lists of priority sites for treatment which are presented to the Area Boards for consideration.

6. Some roads need to be treated as priorities in order to address skid resistance and safety problems. As well as addressing the roads in worst condition, improvements are being made to the drainage and footways to bring them up to standard.
7. In addition to the larger sites, the Council has also been repairing smaller localised sites which are suffering from deterioration, or which need repairs. This programme of pothole and defect repairs will continue across the county in response to local damage identified through the Council's regular inspections or reports from the public and road users.

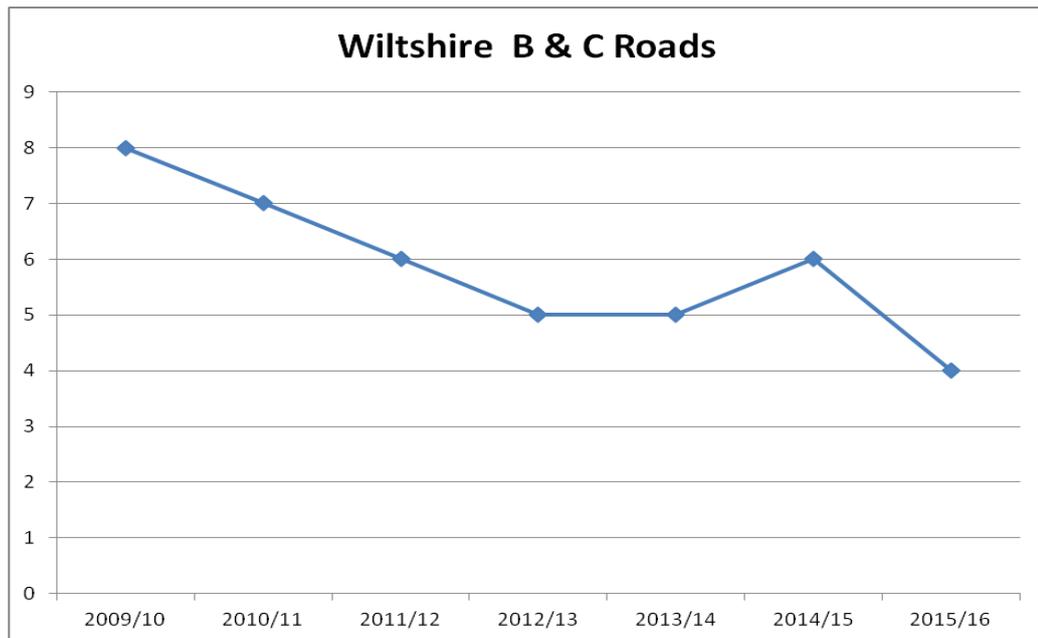
Condition of Roads in Wiltshire

8. The condition of classified roads is measured by technical surveys carried out using vehicle mounted laser scanners to a methodology established by the Department for Transport (DfT). These reflect the overall road condition and have been reported as National Indicators for a number of years.
9. The condition of the classified roads in Wiltshire has improved considerably since 2009/10. The flooding in 2013/14 clearly had an adverse effect on the road network, but the additional investment through the Council's Local Highways Investment Fund has helped stem this deterioration.
10. The investment made by the Council over the years has seen a reduction in the length of A Class road where treatment should be considered:



Percentage of A Class Roads in Wiltshire in poor condition

11. The B and C class roads have also improved. There has been a reduction in the percentage of road where treatment should be considered in recent years:



Percentage of B and C Class roads in Wiltshire in poor condition

12. The condition data on the unclassified roads is not as robust as for the classified roads, but indications are that these roads are also starting to improve. Data is being collected on the unclassified road network using the same methodology as for the classified roads, but this will take a few years to achieve the same level of detail. Initial analysis of this data indicates that approximately 6% of the surveyed unclassified network is in poor condition.
13. The road conditions in Wiltshire have been compared to other south-west counties. Conditions of the A class roads in Wiltshire, based on the 2013/14 figures published by DfT, are broadly similar to those in Dorset and Somerset, but not as good as those in Devon and Cornwall. The B and C Class roads, which are an important part of the network in Wiltshire, have been better than those of the adjoining counties for a number of years.

#### Highways Maintenance Programme

14. There has been considerable maintenance work carried out on the highway network in Wiltshire in the last two years as part of the Council's Local Highways Investment Fund. The list of local sites completed is included as **Appendix 1**.
15. During 2015/16 there were a number of sites which it was not possible to complete. These were primarily surface dressing sites, sometimes referred to as 'tar and chip', which is a cheap cost effective way of treating rural roads. However, it does need the underlying road structure to be in good condition as it provides a thin surface to improve skid resistance and seal the road construction, but does not add significantly to the strength to the road.

16. In the event the extent of structural repairs required on some of the minor roads proved larger than anticipated, and some surface dressing sites had to be deferred. The process has to be carried out during a short period in the summer, and it was not possible to complete the full programme of works last year.
17. There were a few sites which had to be postponed because of public utilities work. This was to avoid the road being dug up soon after being laid. The intention is that any public utility mains and cables should be laid completed before the road is resurfaced.
18. A list of potential sites for next year has been prepared for each community area (see **Appendix 2**). The site list is based on the existing condition of the roads and the anticipated deterioration in the future, and the area boards are invited to consider the proposals.
19. In view of the general improvement in road conditions, and the current financial restrictions, it is proposed to defer some of next year's investment until following years. This will reduce the number of larger surfacing sites being undertaken next year, but those where road safety is a serious consideration will still be prioritised.
20. The new contractual arrangements following the end of the current highways contract has enabled the Council to establish a direct contract with the surfacing sub-contractor. This has seen an improvement in service with more certainty of delivery with a good quality of work.
21. An area where delivery has improved significantly in recent months is with regard to the smaller sites where there is localised damage and potholes. These can be particularly difficult because they often need road closures and diversions to enable the works to be carried out safely. Programming these works, and integrating them with works by other on the network, is a challenge, but good progress is now being made.
22. It is proposed to increase the budget for this type of work substantially in 2016/17 in order to address some of the smaller sites which it has not been possible to progress in recent years. It is intended that the local Highways staff will have greater input in identifying priorities, potentially with the CATGs also being involved. The procedures will be developed in more details over the next few months.
23. The Council has been carrying out footway and drainage works in conjunction with many of the surfacing sites, but there is a requirement to develop a programme of footway works. Condition data has been collected for the urban footways over a number of years, and is expected to be substantially completed this year. This will enable a programme of footway major maintenance to be identified for consultation and potential implementation in 2017/18.

#### Integrated Transport Schemes

24. The CATGs have proved particularly successful at identifying and prioritising local transport issues, and a number of schemes have been delivered in recent years, with many more being developed for future implementation. See **Appendix 3**.
25. It is proposed that this process should continue with the budgets for this type of work continuing for next year. The Area Boards are encouraged to use the CATG process to deal with local concerns.
26. The Council analyses the injury accident records in order to identify sites with particular accident problems. These sites are reviewed and where appropriate improvements are proposed. These will continue to be developed, with the CATG kept informed of progress.

#### Resilient Road Network

27. The major maintenance work is improving the condition of the highway network and making it more resilient to extremes of weather. The flooding during 2014 affected a number of key routes in the county, and there is a need to identify a core network where specific measures should be considered in order to ensure the continuing availability of the route.
28. The Council already has an identified network of main roads which is the priority to keep open in the event of an extreme snow event. This comprises the busiest main roads, and is about 10% of the network. Once these have been cleared other roads are then treated in accordance with local priorities and conditions. There is a much more substantial network of roads which is subject to precautionary salting when ice is forecast.
29. It is proposed that the core network (See **Appendix 4**) should be designated the 'Wiltshire Resilient Road Network', and should be reviewed to determine whether specific measures are necessary to ensure its continued availability in adverse weather conditions of all types.
30. Any comments on the proposed resilient network, or areas of concern, would be appreciated, especially with regard to any sections of the route which may be considered particularly vulnerable. The Area Board may wish the CATG to consider the proposed network.
31. Extending the length of roads to be included in the core network would not be feasible because of resource limitation with regard to snow ploughing or specific works to improve resilience. If the proposed resilient network is too large it could divert funding away from other roads on the network.

#### **Safeguarding Implications**

32. Does not apply.

#### **Public Health Implications**

33. Increased investment in road maintenance has benefits for public health. The improved road surfaces, better skid resistance and associated safety improvements help reduce the numbers killed and injured on the road network. These improvements complement the other measures to improve road safety, such as traffic calming and speed limits, being introduced through the Local Transport Plan funding and the Community Area Traffic Groups.
34. The improved road surfaces, particularly on the minor urban roads, will be of benefit to cyclists and pedestrians. At present the condition of some of the urban roads may discourage cycling as cyclists are adversely affected by poor road conditions and uneven or damaged surfaces. The proposed investment would support the strategy to encourage cycling as set out in the Local Transport Plan.
35. Roads in poor condition in urban areas can result in disturbance and noise for residents, especially on busier routes carrying heavy goods vehicles at night. Better road surfaces should result in reduced background noise in residential areas, with potential mental and physical health benefits.
36. The Council monitors road collision data in order to focus safety improvements at those sites with the worst accident records. With the additional funding this process will continue, and where appropriate other alterations to signing, drainage, street lighting or road markings could be incorporated into resurfacing work and schemes to improve safety.

### **Environmental and Climate Change Considerations**

37. The road network is particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. In recent years we have seen the effects of a series of severe winters which have resulted in damage to the roads and an increase in the number of potholes. In 2014 flooding damaged a number of roads in Wiltshire, and increased deterioration.
38. In the longer term a more robust highway network, with roads in better condition, would require less reactive maintenance and reduced travelling to respond to potholes and localised defects. A planned maintenance regime would enable the traffic disruption to be kept to a minimum. With unplanned maintenance the delays to traffic and associated fuel consumption could be considerable.
39. The identification of a Resilient Road Network for the county will help identify the key areas where measures may be required to ensure the continuing availability of main routes in extreme weather conditions.

### **Equalities Impact of the Proposal**

40. The improvements in road safety anticipated with increased investment in road maintenance would be expected to benefit all road users, but

especially the more vulnerable, including pedestrians, cyclists and other non vehicle users.

41. The highway network is important to local businesses, and to public transport operators. The delays due to un-programmed maintenance and road repairs have been identified as concerns by local businesses. The high profile programme of works to address road conditions will help send the message that transport is important in Wiltshire and could help to promote inward investment and job creation.

### **Risk Assessment**

42. There are serious risks in connection with road maintenance. These include the safety and reputational aspects of those killed and seriously injured on the highway network. In order to reduce these risks the Council has approved highway inspection and skid resistance procedures in place, but in order to keep the network in safe condition it is important that the highway network has adequate investment, and the safety issues are prioritised.
43. The road condition data collected thorough the technical surveys is used to focus investment on those sites where there is most need and greatest risk. As well as the safety benefits this approach also ensures that best use is made of the limited available funding in order to keep the asset in optimum condition.

### **Risks that may arise if the proposed decision and related work is not taken**

44. The risks to the Council from lack of road maintenance are in terms of claims against the Council as the result of accidents, or in extreme cases prosecution as a result of particular incidents. As well as the safety and cost aspects, there are also significant reputational implications of such events.
45. Not carrying out highway maintenance would lead to declining public satisfaction in the future as road conditions remain the same and no progress is made on improving them.

### **Risks that may arise if the proposed decision is taken and actions that will be taken to manage these risks**

46. There is a risk that the proposals will not deliver the improvements in road condition anticipated. This risk will be managed by using the technical data to focus the necessary investment on those sections of road where work is required to meet safety requirements, and on those places where it would improve road conditions the most. Effective asset management will reduce this risk and make sure the investment is effective.
47. There is a risk that the investment will not increase public satisfaction with the service. In view of the initial results from those authorities which have made a substantial investment it would appear that satisfaction levels will

improve with the investment. However, a programme of publicity, branding and public involvement through the Area Boards will help raise awareness of the project, and will help to reduce this risk.

### **Financial Implications**

48. The Council's approved budget has included increased investment to deliver the Council's Business Plan with regard to road maintenance. This has been £24 million for the past two years. It is proposed that £3 million of next year's expenditure will be moved in to future years in view of the improving road conditions and current budget pressures.

### **Legal Implications**

49. The Council has a duty under the Highways Act to maintain the county's roads. The highway inspection procedures, policies and improvement plans ensure that this duty is fulfilled. The increased investment and improved road conditions is helping the Council meet its responsibilities with regard to road maintenance.

### **Options Considered**

50. The Council reviews its proposed road maintenance programme annually in order to make best use of the latest information and take into account deterioration of the road conditions because of weather or other factors.

### **Conclusions**

51. The conditions of the road network are important to the public, and this is reflected through the People's Voice and NHT surveys. There has been expenditure above anticipated LTP funding levels in Wiltshire which is improving the condition of Wiltshire's highway network.
52. The Highways Investment Fund 2014 – 2020 over the six years will provide a significant improvement to the condition of the network, including improving the condition of the unclassified roads, and improving safety on the classified roads. The involvement of the Area Boards to help identify local priorities for treatment is important.

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## **Background Papers**

The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this report: None

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Highways Major Maintenance sites 2014 – 16

Appendix 2 – Potential Future Highways Maintenance Sites

Appendix 3 – Recent local CATG Schemes

Appendix 4 – Resilient Road Network