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ROAD AND BRIDGE MAINTENANCE 2013-14 AND HIGHWAY POLICIES

Purpose of Report

1. To approve the proposed roads and bridges major maintenance programme for 2013-14, and to make minor revisions to the Council's Highway Inspection Manual and Skid Resistance Policy.

Background

2. The Council has a duty to maintain the highway network, and proposes a substantial programme of highway resurfacing and reconstruction schemes for 2013-14. These are funded through the Local Transport Plan and from the Council's capital programme.
3. The Council carries out regular technical surveys using vehicle mounted laser equipment to assess road conditions on its classified road network, and carries out visual inspections of the unclassified roads. This information, together with accident data and local knowledge, is used to inform the selection of roads to be treated in the annual works programme. A major factor in improving road safety is to ensure the highway network has adequate skid resistance, and a programme of specialist testing is carried out on the main routes to identify potential problem sites.
4. The highway network is inspected regularly for safety defects. Where these are identified, they are assessed in accordance with the Highways Inspection Manual to ensure that the defect is given the correct priority for repair.

Main Considerations for the Council

Programme of Works 2013-14

5. The proposed programme of highway maintenance works for 2013-14 comprises surface dressing, surfacing with various materials, bridgeworks, major schemes to reconstruct carriageways, including addressing drainage, road markings and other safety issues. As well as the programme of carriageway maintenance the Council also carries out a programme of works to keep the Council's bridge stock in good condition. The schemes include reconstruction of bridges, strengthening, replacements of bridge decks and works to increase capacity.
6. The list of schemes for 2013/14 is included as **Appendix 1** of this report and has been prepared, taking into account the technical surveys and the local knowledge of the Council's highway staff, with support from consultants and the specialist knowledge of the contractors involved.

7. There is a backlog of maintenance required on the highway network nationally, and even though there has been considerable investment on improving the network in Wiltshire in recent years, it is still necessary to prioritise work according to need. Road safety is the priority, and addressing safety concerns has to take precedence over other factors, such as visual appearance of the road surface and ride quality.
8. The recent winters and flooding have had serious impacts on the highway network, with road conditions in a number of locations deteriorating sooner than originally anticipated. As a result, the schemes have had to be reassessed and adjusted to meet current conditions.
9. Extensive surfacing and repair work has been undertaken during 2012-13, which has improved the resilience of the network. There is significant funding approved by the Council for road maintenance in 2013-14, but it will not be possible to resurface all of those roads which may be unsightly or have a poor ride condition. The priority will be to address those sites where there are serious road safety concerns.
10. Members of the public, Town and Parish Councils, and others often make suggestions regarding roads in need of surfacing. In some cases these requests arise as a result of uneven or bumpy road surfaces causing poor ride quality or an unsightly appearance. Sites with serious skid resistance deficiencies, or with serious structural failure, may not be as obvious to road users, but are of greater concern to the Council as highway authority responsible for the safety of the network.
11. With the backlog of maintenance required on the network it is necessary to prioritise works, and it is not possible to meet all requests for resurfacing. However, reports of roads in poor condition are taken seriously, and sites are inspected to ensure the safety of the network. In some cases it may be necessary to monitor the site to determine whether preventative work will be required in a future year's programme.
12. The Council does receive requests to surface roads in porous asphalt and proprietary surfacing materials which can produce less surface noise from traffic. Whilst these materials can have benefits in some circumstances, they have often been found to have limited durability with regard to their life, requiring replacement more frequently than more traditional materials that have been tried and tested over many years. With the limited budget and the backlog of maintenance required on the network the Council does not generally use these materials.
13. The sites for treatment in this year's programme have been selected using the results of the specialist surveys of road conditions, with input from experienced highway engineers and the Local Highways and Streetscene teams, especially with regard to the minor and unclassified roads where the technical information is not as detailed. In all cases the most suitable materials are selected according to circumstances in order to achieve best value for money.
14. The highway network will continue to be monitored during the year and it is anticipated that an extensive programme of localised repairs and resurfacing will be carried out to address serious problems at other locations which it was not possible to include on the main surfacing programme.

Highways Inspection Manual

15. The County Council adopted the current Highway Inspection Manual in 2005. The document is used by staff inspecting the highways network to determine the priority for repairs to defects, including potholes, carriageway edge deterioration, footway defects and other safety problems. The document is important as it describes the maintenance standards for the highway network and may be referred to in the event of claims or legal action against the Council.

16. The policy has operated successfully since its introduction, and it is not proposed to make major changes, but a number of minor alterations are desirable and the revised document is included in **Appendix 2**. The latest version of the manual includes a number of improvements, including greater clarity regarding classification of carriageway and verge defects, defect dimensions set to reflect recent court findings, response times for debris, carriageway depressions, kerb damage, cracks in paving slabs reviewed and amended to reflect risk and other minor changes. Overall, the changes increase the standard of response with regard to serious defects such as potholes.
17. The changes proposed to the manual will have no significant cost implications, but will help ensure greater consistency of inspection and response to defects on the network. The document will be issued to relevant staff by the Council's Insurance Team. The operation of the manual will be kept under review, and further improvements will be made as necessary.

Skid Resistance Policy

18. The Skid Resistance Policy has been amended slightly, and the revised document is included in **Appendix 3**. The main change is that all accidents are now taken into account when assessing sites, rather than only those identified as being in wet conditions. It is expected that this will provide more consistent results as it reflects the descriptions used generally in the police reports. Other changes are minor alterations to the calculation processes to clarify and simplify them so that they align with the carriageway management software currently used by the Council.

Environmental Impact of the Proposal

19. The careful targeting of road maintenance at the sites in most need is an important aspect of making the best use of scarce resources. Where possible, opportunities for recycling in highway maintenance are taken, including recycling excavated materials, retexturing road surfaces to restore skid resistance, and using road planings to repair rights of way.
20. The renewal of road surfaces often reduces the noise caused by traffic and can improve the environment and quality of life for local residents, but safety needs to be the main consideration in selecting sites for treatment.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

21. No significant impacts anticipated.

Risk Assessment

22. Road conditions are important aspects of road safety, especially skid resistance and the repair of carriageway defects. It is important to carry out programmes of highway maintenance in order to reduce the risks of accidents and claims.
23. Having clear processes to assess and prioritise sites in terms of inspection and repair is important in order to reduce risks to road users, and to demonstrate that the Council is effectively carrying out its duty to maintain the highway network.

Financial Implications

24. Funding for major highway works is provided by the Government through the Local Transport Plan (LTP) funding and the Council's own resource within the Council's Capital Programme. The total funding (capital element) for highways in 2013/14 has been agreed by Council at £23.427 million (including land drainage and street lighting management system). Of this, highways maintenance and surfacing will be £14.692 million in 2013/14, which is an increase over last year's budget.
25. The budget also includes an original allocation of £3.200 million for bridge strengthening and maintenance. The road and bridge schemes identified in the works programme can be delivered within the identified budget.
26. The adoption of the revised Highways Inspection Manual and Skid Resistance Policy should not have budget implications with current funding levels. However, any changes in the level of highways maintenance funding in future years may require the policy to be reviewed and priorities reconsidered.
27. The carrying out of timely maintenance will extend the effective life of the highways asset, and reduce the need for more expensive unplanned and reactive maintenance in the future. It will also reduce the costs associated with accidents and claims which may otherwise arise.

Legal Implications

28. The Council has a duty under the Highways Act 1980 to maintain the highway network, and can achieve this by having a programme of planned maintenance based on identified need, and by having robust policies and processes to address identified problems.
29. The decisions made in carrying out road maintenance may have to be defended in court in the event of damage or injury, and having an appropriate inspection process and skid resistance policy is important in keeping roads safe and defending claims.

Options Considered

30. The proposed programme of works has been developed to address identified safety and carriageway structural problems. Substituting other sites in the programme could result in defective sites not being treated, with consequent safety and legal implications for the Council.
31. Road conditions are an important aspect of road safety, especially with regard to carriageway defects and skid resistance, and it is important to carry out programmes of surveys and highways maintenance in order to reduce the risks of accidents and claims. The Council carries out regular technical surveys, using vehicle mounted laser equipment and other specialist equipment to assess road conditions on its classified road network, and carries out visual inspections of the unclassified roads. This information is used to inform the selection of roads to be treated in the annual works programme.
32. Although the recent winters have resulted in significant deterioration of carriageway conditions in some locations, and there was flood damage last year, the overall carriageway conditions in Wiltshire have been improving in recent years as a result of the continuing investment. However, even with the current funding levels it is not possible to resurface all of those roads which may be unsightly or have a poor ride condition. The priority is to address those sites where there are serious road safety concerns.

33. In order to ensure consistent standards and an appropriate response to carriageway defects, the Highway Inspection Manual is used by the highways inspectors and other staff. This document sets out the priorities and response times adopted by the Council. The standards set are considered to be appropriate and are in line with the best practise and relevant guidance.
34. Ensuring the skid resistance of the carriageway surface is adequate makes an important contribution to road safety, and the Council has adopted a Skid Resistance Policy to assist in prioritising schemes.

Reason for Proposals

35. Highway maintenance funding needs to be targeted at those sites of greatest need, especially where there are serious safety concerns. The application of the suitable policies will assist the targeting of resources at the sites most in need of treatment.

Proposals

36. That:
 - (i) The schemes included in **Appendix 1** represent a realistic programme of road and bridge works across the county and should be adopted as the programme for implementation in 2013/14.
 - (ii) An appropriate carriageway inspection and repair process is important in keeping the highway network safe, and the Highway Inspection Manual, as included in **Appendix 2**, should be adopted.
 - (iii) The amended Skid Resistance Policy, as included in **Appendix 3**, should be adopted.
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The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this Report:

None