

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

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| TO: | STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT PLANNING & TRANSPORT COMMITTEE | | |
| DATE: | 23rd MARCH 2023 | AGENDA ITEM: | 8 |
| TITLE: | HIGHWAY ASSET MANAGEMENT ANNUAL UPDATE REPORT 2022/23 | | |
| LEAD COUNCILLOR: | COUNCILLOR A PAGE | PORTFOLIO: | CLIMATE STRATEGY AND TRANSPORT |
| SERVICE: | ENVIRONMENTAL & COMMERCIAL SERVICES | WARDS: | BOROUGHWIDE |
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 To update the Committee on the progress of the investigatory level safety defect criteria (potholes) in relation to highway carriageway defects, following approval on 14th March 2022.
- 1.2 To seek Committee approval to amend the Policy for the management of Advertising Boards (A-Boards) on the public highway.
- 1.3 To update the Committee on the Annual Status Options Reports (ASOR) for structures, carriageway and pavements.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the Committee notes the progress of the investigatory level safety defect criteria (potholes).
- 2.2 That the Committee approves the updated Policy for the management of Advertising Boards (A-Boards) on the public highway, as set out in Section 4 of this Report.
- 2.3 That the Committee notes the update on the Annual Status Options Report (ASOR).

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 To secure the most effective use of resources in the delivery of high quality, best value public service.
- 3.2 To make travel more secure, safe and comfortable for all users of the public highway.

- 3.3 To provide a public highway network as safe as reasonably practical having due regard to financial constraints and statutory duties.

4. CARRIAGEWAY SAFETY DEFECT INVESTIGATORY LEVEL CRITERIA UPDATE

- 4.1 Reading Borough Council approved an amendment to an actionable carriageway defect from having a minimum of 50mm depth over an approx. area of 300mm x 300mm to a minimum of 40mm depth including using a risk-based assessment criteria.
- 4.2 The Highway Inspector will also action defects of a smaller size if they are concerned that leaving that defect would pose too great a risk when taking into account various criteria including the location within the highway, traffic and pedestrian volumes and the classification of the road.
- 4.3 The table below clearly shows a significant decrease in actionable defects over the last Financial Year (2022/23).

| Financial Year | No. of Actionable Carriageway Defects |
|-----------------------|--|
| 2016/17 | 5,020 |
| 2017/18 | 3,116 |
| 2018/19 | 3,863 |
| 2019/20 | 3,680 |
| 2020/21 | 1,913 |
| 2022* | 899 |

*Full calendar year

- 4.4 It is noted that customer contacts reporting carriageway defects has significantly decreased over the last two calendar years with 512 reported carriageway defects during 2021 and 271 during 2022.
- 4.5 It is also noted that the Council's £9M Capital Investment into residential roads and pavements over 3 years (2020/21 to 2022/23) has addressed the residential roads in most need. This programme has undoubtedly reduced the demand on actionable carriageway defects/pothole repairs, which, along with the service improvements mentioned above, enabled the transition to addressing defects of a lesser depth manageable. This has improved efficiency within the Highways & Drainage Operations Team, as well as customer satisfaction, road safety and defending public liability claims. Analysis of our performance compared with our standard defect repair times has shown that the Highway Works Team are exceeding the performance standard for repair times, (defects are being repaired quicker than required), which shows that there is currently capacity to continue with this lower investigatory level criteria.
- 4.6 The Highways Asset Management Team have also made further efficiency savings by adopting a cloud-based management tool that improves speed of data transfer and also allows a saving of over £1,000 per asset management tablet, which is being reinvested back into the service.
- 4.7 The Annual National Highways & Transport MORI Residents Satisfaction Surveys for 2022 has shown an improvement with 141 national indicators being above average

and 90 indicators improving, with the biggest improvement in how the Council is dealing with the potholes / damaged roads indicator.

- 4.8 The Highway Works Team are repairing the statutory pothole safety defect repairs within repair timescales and the vast majority of 28-day repairs orders are being completed within the first week of issue. This has created capacity within the team to not only manage the statutory repair work, but also take on additional income generation opportunities.

PROPOSED AMENDMENT FOR MANAGING ADVERTISING BOARDS ('A-BOARDS') ON THE PUBLIC HIGHWAY

- 4.9 The Council adopted an 'A-Board' Policy on 21st November 2018 to manage A-Boards on the public highway within the Town Centre and Shopping Precincts.
- 4.10 The Policy has had varying degrees of success. Following the Covid-19 Pandemic and the subsequent need to support business recovery, the enforcement of the 'A-Board' Policy was reduced but this inadvertently created incidents of obstruction for pedestrians and other users of the public highway. In view of this, enforcement is to be tightened and increased to ensure compliance with the Policy.
- 4.11 The Area Highway Inspectors, who ultimately enforce the Council's 'A-Board' Policy, will regularly monitor 'A-Boards' on the public highway as part of the routine cyclical highway inspections; in the Town Centre this is carried out fortnightly. If non-compliance with the Policy is identified, the Highway Inspector will, in the first instance, raise the issue with the business owner who will be asked to immediately comply with the Policy as required and will be warned that if there is a repeated (second) offence the A-Board will be removed and taken to the Council's depot where it will be stored. Upon its collection, a fee equal to one year's Licence renewal fee (currently £80) will be payable to the Council by the 'A-Board' owner. An 'A - Board' will be stored at the Council Depot for 12 weeks after which it will be scrapped / recycled if it has not been claimed by the owner.
- 4.12 Council Members, Reading's Economy & Destination Agency (REDA) as well as members of the public can report any concerns with specific 'A-Boards' to the Highways & Traffic Services Team and the Highway Inspectors, Highway.Inspectors@reading.gov.uk, will act accordingly by investigating and taking appropriate action as required to ensure compliance with the Policy.
- 4.13 In order to address non-compliance concerns and to continue supporting businesses, appropriate amendments / updates to the existing Policy are necessary and are included in Appendix 1 to this Report - the updated 'A-Board' Policy.
- 4.14 The proposed amendments are as follows:
- Removing any ambiguity regarding the siting / location of the 'A - Board' on the public highway
 - Ensuring that the public highway is not obstructed and that the 'A-Boards' are sensibly positioned to maintain a clear pathway for all users of the public highway
 - Agreeing the number of 'A-Boards' permitted per applicant
 - Increasing the application fee and annual renewal fee

- Detailing the enforcement action for non-compliance of the 'A-Board' Policy
- Specifying that the Council's decision on A-Board applications is final, in its capacity as the Local Highway Authority

HIGHWAY ASSET MANAGEMENT BOARD (HAM BOARD)

- 4.15 The Highway Asset Management Board met on the 14th December 2022 and reviewed the Annual Status Options Report (ASOR) for structures, carriageways and pavements.
- 4.16 The ASORs are an Asset Management tool and used by the Council to report on the condition, the asset value and future funding requirements of public highway maintainable structures, carriageways and pavement assets.
- 4.17 The ASORs include the historical investment in maintaining these strategic highway assets and are used to calculate future funding requirements to ensure that the assets are maintained in a reasonable and serviceable condition (steady state).
- 4.18 The ASORs assist the Council by targeting available funding to assets in greatest need, thereby extending the life of the asset before it becomes necessary to carry out more expensive reconstruction.
- 4.19 The updated and approved ASORs will be brought back to this Committee for information and formal publishing later this year.
- 4.20 The Carriageway ASOR will show the improvements in the residential roads condition indicator, where the Council has achieved over 77% good condition (green) following the £9M Council funded Residential Roads & Pavements 3-year investment programme (2020/23), an improvement from 35% good condition (green) prior to this investment.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 Reading Borough Council's vision is:

To help Reading realise its potential - and to ensure that everyone who lives and works here can share the benefits of its success.

- 5.2 The Highway Asset Management Policy, the Well Managed Highway Infrastructure: A Code of Practice and the Adopted Lower Investigatory Level Safety Defect Criteria in relation to highway carriageway defects will contribute to Year-2 (2023/24) of the Council's 3-Year Corporate Plan - 2022/25 objectives of:

- Healthy environment - Keeping the town clean, safe, green and active
- Inclusive economy - Enabling the infrastructure to continue to support the economy
- Thriving Communities - Remaining financially sustainable and to ensure everyone has an equal chance to use the public highway

- 5.3 TEAM Reading values:

Together - Collaborative working approach between the Council, contractors and the public

Efficiency - Continue to explore efficiency savings within the Highway Asset Management Plan

Ambitious - Investing into the public highway

Make a Difference - Providing a safe inclusive public highway for all users

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The Council declared a climate emergency at its meeting in February 2019 and as such recognises the need to minimise the climate impacts of its decisions. A climate impact assessment of this decision has been conducted which suggests a 'net low negative' impact. Highway maintenance is an energy intensive activity and some carbon emissions from the process are inevitable, but a number of steps are being taken to mitigate these impacts as far as possible as set out below.
- 6.2 The Council on 15th October 2019 formally adopted of the 'Unite Construction Charter' where the Authority supports the 'Get Britain Building' campaign, which is aimed at supporting and sustaining the British construction industry. As a result, all relevant construction contracts will be required to comply with the Authority's Sustainable Buying Standard for Highways and Construction Materials, which requires structural steel and other relevant materials to be covered by BES 6001 Responsible Sourcing of Construction Product certification, or equivalent.
- 6.3 Tenders for any subsequent contracts that are necessary will be invited to submit Environmental Implications proposals which will form part of the quality element of the tender evaluation. A social value quality submission will also be required to be submitted with tenders and evaluation.
- 6.4 Tenders also needed to include carbon reduction targets and improved sustainability within tender returns. The intent is to reduce the amount of carbon used to produce the materials at source, using recycled materials, lower temperature bitumens, reducing the uncontrolled waste in the environment to reduce pollution of the natural environment, use of electric vehicles and plant, as well as how they will achieve their carbon reduction targets.
- 6.5 The Council is committed to a tree planting programme to increase canopy cover, improve biodiversity and reduce localised flooding. The Council is committing up to 1% of the value of the road resurfacing programmes towards this initiative.
- 6.6 The Reading Climate Emergency Strategy, which was endorsed by the Council in November 2020, highlights the importance of adapting to climate impacts as well as reducing the emissions which are driving climate change. The Council will regularly review design standards for roads, in conjunction with industry bodies, to take into account the extreme weather events (both extreme heat and extreme cold) to ensure sustainability of the public highway network.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 7.1 Section 138 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 places a duty on local authorities to involve local representatives when carrying out "any of its functions" by providing information, consulting or "involving in another way".

- 7.2 The public can report highway defects to the Council, including road and structures condition concerns, which are assessed and included within the annual review of the highway assets that inform the 'Annual Status Option Reports' (ASOR) with the proposed high priority schemes brought to Committee for consideration and approval should they meet the assessment criteria.
- 7.3 The Highway Asset Management Policy includes managing community expectations about how the Council manages its Highway Assets. As progress is made on implementation of Asset Management new policies and standards will be made available on the Council's website once approved by the Highway Asset Management Board.
- 7.4 The Highway Asset Management Policy is also available on the Council's website.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 8.2 The Highway Asset Management Policy and Well Managed Highway Infrastructure: A Code of Practice are part of procedures to maintain the Council's existing public highway network. The lowering of the investigatory level safety defect criteria in relation to highway carriageway defects will reduce risk to all users of the public highway. The installation of pedestrian dropped crossings as part of the pavement investment programme is improving access for all users of the public highway. There is no overall reduction to service delivery at this time only how those service requirements are met. Should any future updates/amendments be required, which result in service delivery changes, an equality impact assessment will be carried out.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Council, as Highway Authority, has a duty under the Highways Act 1980 to carry out highway maintenance and maintain public highway structures.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The proposed Highway Asset Management Programme as determined by the Highway Asset Management Policy will be fully funded by the Council's Highways & Traffic Services Revenue Budgets, as well as the Local Transport Block Funding (Integrated Transport & Highway Maintenance) settlement for 2023/2024). The improvements set out in this report are a result of the Council's investment in the repair of roads and from asset management efficiencies and service improvements.

10.2 The adoption of the new investigatory policy in relation to carriageway safety defects has not resulted in higher-than-expected repair costs and will continue to be met within the existing Revenue and Capital Budgets.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 None.