

Overview & Scrutiny

Footways Review

Update Report of the Footways Scrutiny Task Group

In a notice of motion agreed at Council in November 2014, Council recognised the importance of walking as part of a healthy lifestyle and that in addition safe footways were especially important for the elderly to access local shops and services. At the time, there were concerns that the county's footways revenue budget of £800,000 in 2014/15 and beyond would be inadequate to maintain footways and that the inspection criteria was insufficiently rigorous to identify where the surface was unsafe for less able walkers.

As a result of the concerns expressed by Council and the Budget Scrutiny Task Group a Task group was created to examine in detail the issue of Footways.

The Scrutiny Task Group as part of its review started to look at existing policy, some best practice approaches and gathered some evidence through interview sessions with officers. In addition, the Task Group looked at a variety of footways in various conditions with officers from Worcestershire County Council.

Unfortunately due to matters arising the review has failed to reach a consensus over the content of the final report from the task group. It has therefore been agreed that the task group will present this update report to OSPB at the earliest opportunity.

The task group set out to review the following areas, but the task remains incomplete:

- The existing and predicted condition of Worcestershire's footways
- The criteria for intervention and whether it is sufficient to make footways safe for less able walkers
- Current spending on footways – how funding is prioritised and allocated
- are current spending plans sufficient to maintain or improve current condition across each category of footway
- Whether increased investment now might lead to savings in the future
- The potential impact of plans for increased integration of Public Rights of Way work with highways work

As a result of the findings of the review the task group wish to make the following recommendations for consideration:

Recommendation 1: The Cabinet should maintain a level of funding to ensure challenging targets to secure an ever reducing percentage of footways requiring treatment below 25% ensuring continuous improvement.

Recommendation 2: Economy & Environment Scrutiny Panel should consider the Department for Transport Guidance on Well Managed Highways Infrastructure and make any subsequent recommendations to OSPB as soon as possible.

Recommendation 3: An annual indicative programme of footways to be treated should be provided to each local member.

Recommendation 4: An element of budget spends should be piloted to be focused around category 3 'Quiet Urban' footways in discussion with the Local Member and the local Highways Liaison Officer.

Recommendation 5: The Council should exercise its existing policy to impose fines on Utility Companies at every opportunity when they do not repair footways as required within the set timescale.

Recommendation 6: OSPB to consider including Footways on its 2017/18 work programme with a specific purpose of reviewing ways to improve provision of preventative maintenance, increase the overall condition of footways, improve footways for less abled walkers and examine how new technology can be utilized to improve key rural footways identified as agreed with local members.