

Title: Overview & Scrutiny Footways Review - Response to Recommendations

Purpose

To provide an update in response to the recommendations made by the Scrutiny task group for footways.

Introduction

A Scrutiny task group was formed to examine in detail the issues of footways. By examining existing policies, best practice approaches and factual information, the group developed a number of recommendations as below 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 are 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, how footways are identified for repair and how the County Council ensures quality assurance and value for money when repairing footways.

Response to recommendations

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

Response:

The County Council has put in place £2.5m for core asset based maintenance of footways for 2017/18. It is hoped that this level of funding will be continued. In addition, the current administration has invested a further £6m over a two year period for the improvement of footways. This funding is both asset based and linked directly with all WCC Members, individually, to enable a focussed approach around areas of greatest need in each Division, in part, tailored by the experience and knowledge from local Members. For example, less abled walkers, older residents and key high use locations e.g. community centres etc. It is anticipated that the aforementioned funding will ensure that footways in Worcestershire over a three year period fall below 25% requiring treatment.

2. 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.

Response:

WCC are already making significant inroads with the adoption of the new code of practice to meet the deadline of October 2018. Revisions to the new code of practice, in summary, are as follows:

- Highlights the improved provision for users that are elderly, with disabilities etc.
- Encouraging active travel such as walking to an alternative to the car.
- Rural footways being lost to grass ingress.
- Divorced footways and their management.
- Roadside trees and their impacts on footways regarding surface regularity and root damage.

The current core maintenance programme and increased investment programme for footways is focussed on the above priorities including key as follows:

- Liaison with Members to focus footway improvements in their Division where appropriate focussing on the needs of their communities including older people and people with disabilities etc.
- The annual programme of micro asphalt resurfacing contributes to the restoration of footways in a number of urban areas to help assist with active travel routes where appropriate.
- The annual programme of siding out works is mostly focussed around semi rural/rural footways identified in close liaison with local Members. Many of which, increase the opportunities for active travel where appropriate. In addition, this is significantly addressing grass ingress to increase the width of the footway where practicable.
- A programme of works on divorced footways and cycleways is underway and will continue for a number of years, which also take into account the issues identified in the new code of practice.
- The WCC tree policy is under review and will be brought forward in the coming months as part of this process of reviewing the new code of practice, taking account of roadside trees and their impact on footways.

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

Response:

An annual indicative programme for footways to be treated has been provided to each local Member in relation to their Division.

- 4. 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.**

Response:

See response to recommendation 1. Many of the identified footways from an asset management perspective and by local Members are 'quiet urban' footways.

- 5. 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.**

Response:

Once utility companies have completed their works, WCC carry out a site inspection. If there are any defects to be raised in accordance with the SROH, (Specification for the Reinstatement of Openings in the Highway) they are sent via Exor to the utility company. It is then inspected every 10 days at a cost of £47.50 per visit and this process carries on until the defect is rectified. If there is a dangerous defect, the utility company has 2 hours to rectify.

- 6. 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, how footways are identified for repair and how the County Council ensures quality assurance and value for money when repairing footways.**

Response:

WCC include the following measures in our 2017/18 footway programmes:

- Preventative maintenance – the additional investment identified above, will ensure that over a short/medium time frame, Worcestershire County Council will be providing for more preventative measures to improve the overall condition of footways, including for example, micro asphalt resurfacing.
- Overall condition of footways – please see response to recommendation 1.
- Improve footways less abled walkers – please see response to recommendation 2.

- New technologies – we are using efficient practices and new machinery for the majority of our siding out works in rural areas which have significantly increased the rate and speed of works being completed.
- How footways are identified for repair – WCC currently operates around the Department for Transport Well maintained Highways Code of Practice. In addition, WCC liaise closely with Local members to identify key areas where further maintenance can improve sections of footways for less abled walkers including older people etc. WCC will also be considering how to address this issue further as detailed in recommendation 2 above in light of the new Code of Practice.
- Quality assurance and value for money – WCC review works undertaken by Ringway in weekly contract management meetings to ensure KPIs are being met in relation to quality assurance and value for money. In addition, WCC include preventative maintenance such as micro asphalt linked to asset management of footways where appropriate to ensure value for money to improve the overall condition of footways.