

**COUNCIL**  
**12 NOVEMBER 2015****REPORTS OF CABINET MEMBERS WITH RESPONSIBILITY**

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**Report of the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways**

1. I am sure that members will agree that it has been an exceptionally busy year for the Highways and Transport Service and I am pleased to present my annual report to Council highlighting our key areas of work.

**Major Projects**

2. County Councillor Simon Geraghty and I have worked closely together on the following schemes. Let me start with our highest profile project – the **Worcester Southern Link Road**.

3. Improvements to one of the most heavily used sections of Worcestershire's road network are ongoing, with work now focused on Phase 3, which has started with the improvements to Norton roundabout. Phase 3 will see the dualling of the road between Whittington and Norton roundabouts. This phase also sees the completion of the dualling of the section between the Ketch and Norton. These improvements will continue until summer 2018, costing approximately £33 million.

4. The £9 million works at the Ketch, another phase of the Southern Link Road leading to overall dualling of Whittington to the Ketch, were completed this summer. Lessons learned from the Ketch are now being implemented to ensure we have a strong client function that will ensure our contractors deliver to time, quality and cost within established industry standard processes.

5. However the majority of these major works at the Ketch over a twelve-month period were carried out successfully and with relatively little disruption for such a heavily-used road.

6. We are also working currently on the new **Hoobrook Link Road** in Kidderminster, which will provide a connection between Worcester Road and Stourport Road including a new bridge across both the River Stour and the Worcester-Birmingham canal and through the former British Sugar site. This road will provide better access, link two key employment corridors, promoting economic growth and relieving congestion. This £16 million scheme is progressing well and will open in summer 2016.

7. Works are also underway on the creation of the new **Worcester 6 Business Park** on the eastern edge of the city. Sited close to junction 6 of the M5, this £120 million high tech park will eventually create 5,000 new jobs to boost the local economy. Much needed highway improvements are now underway, including widening Pershore Lane and Plough Lane roundabout and the construction of a new roundabout which will provide an entrance to the new park. This scheme will also improve general access to the M5 motorway.

8. Staying in Worcester, we have also recently completed, imminent at time of writing, the first phase of a major development to enhance **Cathedral Square**. This has included realignment of the highway to create an extended pedestrian area, including a better pedestrian crossing facility over to the cathedral and improved turning facilities, bus and taxi bays and landscaping.

9. Works are now awaiting the refurbishment of the adjacent Cathedral shopping complex, after which the new public pedestrian area will be completed. There will also be new lighting columns, street furniture and public art which will complement the surrounding development of restaurants and businesses, creating a vibrant new quarter for the city.

10. Following on from our previously successful city centre refurbishments in the High Street and Angel Place, we have also recently completed £¾ million worth of improvements at the **Cornmarket**. Work has included: a new paving area around the clock, improved lighting, new planters, street furniture, new kerbing and the drainage has been improved. Finally, the exit from the Cornmarket car park has been realigned, creating a larger area for use during events such as the Victorian Christmas market.

11. Road widening and improved traffic signals have been installed at **Middle Hollow Drive** in Warndon and nearby the road has also been widened and a new pedestrian crossing facility created at **Woodgreen Drive**.

12. In **Tenbury**, we have completed a £600,000 public realm enhancement scheme which focused on improvements along Market Street and Church Street. The enhancements have included new paved footways and kerbing, raised tables to reduce traffic speeds but also to allow greater opportunities to cross to access shops, businesses and services. We have installed new street furniture including planters, bins and bollards. This is Phase 1 of a much wider scheme that will follow. A major £2million public realm refurbishment of various streets in **Kidderminster Town Centre** is ongoing, this is being managed by Wyre Forest District Council. This will result in a more attractive and pleasant town centre environment which can only benefit the local economy.

### **Smaller Schemes**

13. As well as the major schemes mentioned above, a substantial number of smaller improvements have been delivered, including:

- Key Corridors and Redditch 'Choose How You Move' infrastructure
- Cycle route safety enhancements on Barbourne Road, Taylors Lane, in Droitwich and at Hanley Castle
- Bus hard standing improvements and new shelters at Broadway Road, Evesham, Tanhouse Lane, Redditch, Broadwas, Birmingham Road, Alvechurch, Oldbury Road, Worcester and Whittington
- Accident site lining modifications at Saltway, Droitwich
- Walking scheme improvements including finger post signing scheme in Worcester and Alvechurch
- 70 sets of dropped kerbs installed throughout Worcestershire to improve access particularly for the mobility impaired.

## **Highways Maintenance**

14. Turning to everyone's favourite, highways maintenance, we have this year carried out an enormous amount of work to maintain and improve our network and keep the travelling public moving and safe.

15. To date in the financial year, we have repaired over 13,000 potholes and expect to have completed around 28,000 by March 2016. An extremely efficient highway inspection regime to locate and schedule repairs to defects is in operation and we continue to see more people report issues via our greatly improved and interactive 'Report It' feature on the Council website, which I detailed in my report last year. Our £4.5 million summer surface dressing programme, our biggest ever, saw us seal and dress over 150 miles of carriageway across over 300 roads, extending the life of road surfaces to minimise future maintenance costs. Major routes treated include the A449 between Worcester and Kidderminster, the A38 at Droitwich, the A44 towards Pershore and large sections of Redditch ring roads. We continue, of course, to undertake major resurfacing schemes at over 100 locations including:

- A456/A491 Hagley
- A449 Chester Road North, Kidderminster
- A4189 Warwick Highway, Redditch
- Bromsgrove Road, Romsley
- Sutton Park Road, Kidderminster
- Houndsfield Lane, Wythall
- Blackwell Road, Burcot
- Twatling Road, Barnt Green
- Stoke Bliss, Tenbury
- A38 Foregate and Tything, Worcester
- A449 Powick
- A4538 Spetchley
- Worcester Road, Pershore
- Leamington Road, Broadway
- And many more.....

16. We have undertaken around 55 major footway resurfacing schemes with the assistance of members' divisional funding and these I know prove extremely popular with us all. In addition to the many miles of tarmac that we lay each year I would also like to remind councillors of our cyclical maintenance activities that are also vitally necessary:

- We clean approximately 105,000 drainage gullies annually
- We have carried out over 40 major flood mitigation schemes
- We undertake around £800,000 worth of grass cutting and verge maintenance
- We attend to around 900 fallen or damaged trees
- We clean and repair 300 road signs each year, and
- Spend £½ million on white lining and cats eye replacement.

All vital highways maintenance work, work that can often go unnoticed.

17. Turning to highway drainage, further significant progress has been made with the implementation of the programme of capital highway drainage improvement schemes with over 70 being completed over the last 12 months, reducing flood risk to properties and key sections of the highway. In addition work has begun on a programme of major LEP-funded highway flood adaptation schemes which include raising New Road in Worcester and the A4104 in front of the Marina at Upton-on-Severn. On a smaller scale of maintenance, we have repaired over 200 broken gully connections in the last 12 months and emptied almost 18,000 gullies since April 2015.

### **Other Schemes**

18. A range of other flood alleviation schemes have been completed or brought closer to completion, representing a significant inward investment in Worcestershire. The schemes include the following:

- Callow Brook, Rubery – flood attenuation
- Green Lane, Catshill – flood attenuation
- Badsey Brook, Broadway – flood attenuation
- Upper High Street, Broadway – culvert replacement
- Bournheath - water course, surface water and sewerage infrastructure improvements
- Perdiswell, Worcester – culvert repairs.

19. Many more schemes are being submitted to the Regional Flood & Coastal Committees for inclusion in its 6-year rolling programme. This gives an opportunity to seek further external funding.

### **Management of Utilities and Events**

20. Our Streetworks Team continue to manage the many utility schemes around the county and schedule works to minimise disruption as best as possible. Major schemes this year have included numerous water and gas main replacement schemes around Kidderminster and current Severn Trent Water works in the Rainbow Hill area of Worcester.

21. We also have to contend with unscheduled water main bursts, emergency gas leaks, failure of electricity supplies and works by telecoms companies as part of the excellent Worcestershire Superfast Broadband project. All of these are co-ordinated around our own maintenance works mentioned earlier which takes an incredible amount of planning. We look forward to the implementation in 2016 of a tougher Streetworks Permit Scheme, giving us extra powers in the management of utility works.

22. We have also again managed several high profile and potentially disruptive events on the highway which are a great boost to tourism and economy in the county yet require a great deal of traffic management and planning. This year we have seen the second **Worcester 10K** race and **RunBikeRun** event managed by Steve Cram, the **Pearl Izumi Tour Series** cycle race return to Redditch and the **Aviva Tour Cycle Ride** starting in Worcester and circuiting much of the county, through Martley, Malvern, Pershore, and Droitwich. Worcester Carnival, various Remembrance Day parades and the Victorian Christmas market all require careful planning.

23. Highways England continue to undertake schemes along the **M5 corridor** which impact greatly upon our highway network. We have seen widening of Junction 4 (Lydiat Ash) and traffic lights installed at Junction 7 (South Worcester) and works are currently underway at Junction 5 (Droitwich). The whole section of the M5 between Junction 4A (M42 split) and Junction 6 (Worcester North) is being upgraded to a managed motorway in the style of the M42 by Birmingham Airport.

24. Whilst these improvements are to be welcomed, there will be extensive ongoing roadworks for some time which will inevitably cause issues on our network at times. Pinch point improvement works at Junction 6 have now been delayed until September 2016 because of the presence of Great Crested newts.

### **Street Lighting**

25. Our scheme to switch to part-night lighting continues and to date, around 11,200 lanterns have been converted to part-night operation (midnight to 6.00am). The majority of the north of the county has been completed with the exception of Stourport which is ongoing. The programme of implementation is currently working around Worcester City as well as in Wychavon and is due to move into Malvern around late November. Energy saved so far is £151,000 p.a. and carbon emissions charges saved are in the region of £10,000 p.a.

26. Additionally, LED lanterns (Low Energy) are being installed during planned renewals and maintenance, highway improvements and in new developments. Taken together, the target of £500,000 savings is on target.

27. I would remind members that we are only switching off on average two out of every three lights in residential roads during the early hours of the morning and not at all on main traffic routes. Where the police tell us there is a need for lights to remain on then they do so. In the vast majority of cases, no-one has noticed these changes.

### **Winter Maintenance**

28. The new winter season is now with us and preparations have been completed over the summer months to ensure the county is in the best possible position to maximise resilience against winter weather. The entire gritting fleet has been fully serviced and prepared for the harsh environment in which they work and the salt barns are full, giving a total of 17,000 tonnes. This prudent approach to stocking gives Worcestershire a better degree of resilience than the nationally recommended position for the start of the season giving sufficient salt for over 100 precautionary gritting runs. We have never before started a winter season with so much salt in stock.

29. Gritters are now equipped to deliver a more effective and efficient salting operation.

30. We continue to invest in the gritting fleet and have purchased 2 new smaller 10 tonne vehicles which are better able to deal with narrow roads and urban streets. Following our annual review of the previous winter operations, optimisation of routes has been undertaken to improve efficiency.

31. All of our 1,200 grit bins have been filled in preparation for winter and we have fitted them with new numbered identification plates to facilitate easier reporting by the public of low content levels or damage. We also continue to expand our Green Grit Bin

programme with parish councils, which complements our existing stocks of yellow bins and sees more minor roads receive treatment when necessary.

## **Rail**

32. Members will recall that the County Council is involved in discussions to be part of a consortium that would be more involved in helping to specify and manage passenger railway services in the West Midlands. The previous practice has been for the Department for Transport to specify and manage rail franchises with the role of local authorities simply as providing advice and assistance where possible. There is now an opportunity for the County Council, as part of any consortium, to be more deeply involved in the operation of the rail services in Worcestershire so that they become better suited to serving businesses and residents' travel needs.

33. The consortium includes fourteen local authorities from the region and considers that there is scope for many improvements to rail services in the area, if stakeholders from the vicinity are ultimately able to take a franchise management role, rather than the Department for Transport overseeing this.

34. A West Midlands Rail Limited company has now been established as a company limited by guarantee with a board of directors appointed from each of the constituent partner authorities. This is to provide local democratic strategic guidance for the specification of the new West Midlands rail franchise being let by the Department for Transport during 2017. As part of the governance a Leaders' Rail Group meets every three months and the most recent meeting was held in Birmingham during September, which I attended on behalf of the County Council.

35. Members may be interested to know that a report is being presented to the Cabinet in November asking them to approve Worcestershire County Council joining West Midlands Rail Limited as a member and to approve the overall governance arrangements.

36. At the same time Worcestershire County Council is currently heavily involved in three infrastructure schemes to dramatically improve the travelling conditions for rail passengers following the successful schemes at Malvern Link and Worcester Foregate Street completed during 2014.

37. Bromsgrove Station – Members will know that the replacement Bromsgrove railway station is being built by a partnership of the County Council and Centro, the West Midlands Passenger Transport Executive. Construction work is taking place at the site with the car park now nearing completion, fencing works complete, access roads underway and platforms taking shape. The foundations for the station building and lift shafts are also now complete and the new footbridge will be craned into site in December.

38. The new station is scheduled to open to the public during the spring of 2016.

39. Worcestershire Parkway – Members will be aware that the Planning and Regulatory Committee in August 2015 granted planning consent for the new Worcestershire Parkway railway station.

40. The new station will be built to serve the Cotswold line and the Birmingham to Bristol line when it comes into use, and will include:

- A car park with a capacity of up to 500 spaces (including disabled parking) designed to current standards in terms of lighting, CCTV, ticketing, customer facilities and information
- A fully accessible modern station building with toilets, ticket desk, and a retail facility
- Secure cycle storage, motor cycle parking and electric car charging points
- Bus stops
- Taxi rank and drop off/pick up point
- Roundabout access to the station from the B4084.

41. The County Council wishes to commence construction in 2016 with a view to opening the station during 2017 and is now entering the tendering phase to appoint a firm to undertake the work.

42. Kidderminster railway station – The Greater Birmingham & Solihull LEP and Worcestershire LEP have now allocated £4.3million to this scheme to redevelop Kidderminster Station including access and forecourt enhancements and a new station building.

43. The project includes representatives from the Severn Valley Railway who are interested in how the scheme can complement their operation. It includes Diamond, which is interested in how to serve the station with their bus services and it includes London Midland who operate the station.

44. Some interesting ideas for the station are coming forward through discussions with businesses and station users surrounding the scope for the project.

45. An initial review of the project has now taken place and the next steps are to commission the detailed design for the forecourt and to commission the architect to design the railway station building. This is currently underway.

### **Public Transport**

46. The Transport Logistics and Operations Team have been very busy over the summer arranging home to school transport for over 6,500 students, many on commercial and subsidised public bus routes. This work has included the introduction of a new online application system for students and the implementation of new working process to deal with this, this has gone smoothly and feedback from the schools has been positive.

47. For the last 12 months the Team has been looking at how we consult and engage with the private sector transport operators of all sizes both local and national to build better relationships and deliver efficiencies through greater collaborative working as well as maintaining quality and we are currently working towards the establishment of a Local Bus Quality Partnership to help us formalise these new working relationships.

48. The Team has been successful in obtaining a grant through the DfT's Total Transport Fund to carry out a feasibility study within the south of Worcestershire to look at innovative ways of delivering transport in rural areas by developing more integrated services with public, private and third sector transport providers.

## **Road Safety Team**

49. All road safety education is delivered by instructors who also deliver Bikeability cycle training and pedestrian training in schools with well over 8,000 pupils having been trained this year. In addition a new walking bus has been launched for Astwood Bank First School.

50. All school crossing patrol sites are being regularly reviewed in consultation with schools and the local community ensuring that they are in the right place to support that area.

51. In conclusion I would hope that members can see that the Highways and Transportation service remains one of the most important, busy and high profile areas in the Council. I wish to place on record my appreciation and thanks to all the staff in the BEC Directorate for the help and assistance given to me. More importantly, however, and despite sometimes negative headlines the service has continued to make improvements for the people that live, work and travel throughout Worcestershire. It is the general public that we are here to serve.

## **John Smith OBE**

Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways