
Meeting: Executive
Date: 31 May 2011
Subject: Consultation on Central Bedfordshire's draft Approach to Road and Footway Maintenance
Report of: Executive Member for Sustainable Communities - Services
Summary: This report seeks Executive approval to consult the wider community on the draft Approach to Road and Footway Maintenance.

Advising Officer: Gary Alderson – Director, Sustainable Communities
Contact Officer: Basil Jackson – Assistant Director, Highways and Transport
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: All
Function of: Executive
Key Decision No
**Reason for urgency/
exemption from call-in
(if appropriate)** N/A

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

The Central Bedfordshire priorities supported in this paper are:

- Creating safer communities.
- Managing growth effectively.

Central Bedfordshire's vision is to be "globally connected, delivering sustainable growth to ensure a green, prosperous and ambitious place for the benefit of all". The context for this is growth, including 27,000 new jobs and 26,000 new homes by 2026. Our focus is to deliver a highly attractive, well-connected prime location for businesses, and ensure that a choice of transport is available to take people to employment, education, healthcare, shops. The upkeep of roads and footways is an integral part of realising the economic vitality of our town and village centres.

Financial:

In common with other local authorities, the available budget for road and footway maintenance under the Comprehensive Spending Review 2010 is insufficient to provide a maintenance programme which would deliver the lowest whole life cost of the highway asset.

The implication for Central Bedfordshire is that in comparison with other authorities, the Council may move from being a top quartile performer into a lower quartile. Where users have enjoyed well maintained local road and footway networks in the past there may be observable deterioration in standards.

The Council has a revenue budget of £6.6 million and a capital budget of £8.3 million to maintain 1315km of road, 21000 street lights and 348 bridges. The Authority will also be implementing 32 Integrated Schemes (e.g. road safety, bus priority etc) during 2011/12.

The draft approach explains the maintenance challenges facing Central Bedfordshire as a highway authority and examines the options for a sustainable approach to road and footway maintenance. The consultation needs to draw out the implications of change in network conditions against a standard of safety which the Council is bound to operate by.

Legal:

The Highways Act 1980 requires highway authorities to maintain public highways to keep them open for public access and to remove obstructions which may affect the use and safety of the highway.

A failure by the highway authority to maintain a public highway can be subject to legal action for enforcement and, if the state of repair of a highway is a contributory factor in a road traffic crash, this can result in a claim for damages against the highway authority. It is therefore important for the Council to have effective arrangements in place to maintain the highway network for which it is responsible.

Risk Management:

The programme of work coming out of the proposed consultation process will be managed through our framework contractor, Amey. The company has appropriate staff resources both within this contract, as well as resources that can be called upon from outside of the contract, to manage any programme we require.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

N/A

Equalities/Human Rights:

Public authorities have a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and to foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics; age disability, gender re-assignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.. When developing the highways programme, consideration must be given to developing well designed and well managed streets that don't act as barriers to movement. The needs of different street users, must be carefully balanced including the needs of disabled and visually impaired people in particular. Disabled people place a high priority on the provision of dropped kerbs and accessible pedestrian crossings. An accessible highway network is crucial for allowing equality of opportunity. An Equality Impact Assessment will be developed to ascertain the adverse impacts these proposals may have on different groups of people.

Community Safety:

Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 the Council places a statutory duty on the Council: without prejudice to any other obligation imposed on it, it shall be the duty of each authority to exercise its various functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. The provision of safe, well-designed, and accessible and walking and cycling routes helps to promote reassurance for people accessing these facilities and with good design supports a reduction in the potential for crime and disorder.

Sustainability:

The effective maintenance of our highway network is a key part of accommodating Central Bedfordshire's growth agenda and ensuring that we are "open for business". A good, well-connected public transport network encourages patronage and provides the alternative to travel locally without using without using the private car.

RECOMMENDATION:

that the Executive approve the proposal to consult the wider community on the attached draft Approach to Road and Footway Maintenance, including seeking the views of Overview & Scrutiny, before reporting back to a future Executive meeting.

Reason for Recommendation(s): To involve the community in developing a draft approach for the maintenance of roads and footways.

Executive Summary

The draft approach explains the maintenance challenges facing highway authorities and examines the options for a sustainable approach to road and footway maintenance. Any adopted approach will depend on the desired outcome and this may include providing for growth, maximising public satisfaction, obtaining least cost or any combination of these.

Background

1. Over the last 100 years the local and national highway networks have expanded enormously to cope with the demand for an ever increasing volume of heavy vehicles necessary for economic growth. Over the same period however, existing roads have not had the investment necessary to bring them up to the construction standards necessary to cope with the stresses of modern traffic and frequently fail under the weight of traffic, particularly in exceptionally wet, dry or cold conditions.

Issues

2. Ideally, the maintenance regime for local roads should ensure that all maintenance is planned and ad hoc maintenance is the exception rather than the rule. This would provide the least whole life cost for a well maintained road and reflects practice on the national trunk and motorway network where revenue expenditure on potholes and patches is minimal.

3. Given that there are insufficient capital funds to provide the ideal level of maintenance, then roads will deteriorate and revenue expenditure will increase, resulting in a combination of higher whole life costs and lower quality road surfaces.
4. In the current economic climate it necessary to develop an approach for maintenance which provides best value with the available budget. This could be, for example, to allow some roads to deteriorate so that the strategic roads in the road network may be maintained more efficiently. Alternatively, the maintenance budget could be spread evenly across a wider network with an acceptance that the condition of roads, particularly strategic roads, will be lower.

Conclusion

5. The draft approach explains the maintenance challenges facing highway authorities and examines the options for a sustainable approach to road and footway maintenance. Any adopted approach will depend on the desired outcome and this may include providing for growth, maximising public satisfaction, obtaining least cost or any combination of these.
6. Member and public acceptance of changes to the Council's approach to maintenance are key if the Council is to ensure that acceptable outcomes can be implemented. This report therefore seeks approval to consult the wider community on the alternative approaches set out in the attached draft. Consultation will take place with ward members, parish councils and stakeholder groups, including the voluntary sector over a 13 week period. Exhibitions will be held at key locations around the district during the consultation period, including Priory House and Watling House. A report of the findings and any draft recommendations will be brought to the relevant Overview & Scrutiny Committee for their advice before a report is brought to Executive for decision.

Appendices:

Appendix A - Draft Approach to the Maintenance of Roads and Footways

Background Papers: (open to public inspection)

None