

## Prioritisation of the Highways Capital Programme

To: Highways and Transport Committee

Meeting Date: 3 December 2024

From: Executive Director of Place and Sustainability

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: No

Executive Summary: This report sets out the processes by which planned maintenance schemes will be prioritised for inclusion and delivery in the capital programme. Such schemes are funded by grants made to the Council by the Department for Transport (DfT) and any additional capital investment that the Council decides to contribute towards highways maintenance. In 2024/25, there has been an additional £20m allocated for planned maintenance for highways and the current Business Plan includes a further allocation of £20m for 2025/26.

It is proposed that the prioritisation processes set out in this report shall be used for the formulation of the capital maintenance delivery programme from year 2025-26 onwards.

Recommendations: The Committee is recommended to:

- a) Approve the processes and scoring systems for the prioritisation of planned capital maintenance schemes from the 2025/26 financial year onwards, as set out in the report and Appendices 1 to 4 of the report;
- b) Note that the established politically proportional member engagement group will suggest and advise on changes to the scoring criteria and prioritisation process as required, and review the prioritised capital maintenance programme prior to it being presented to the Committee for approval; and
- c) Delegate Authority to the Executive Director of Place and Sustainability, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Highways and Transport Committee, to make any changes to the scoring criteria as set out in the appendices to this report, taking account of the advice from the member engagement group.

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# 1. Creating a greener, fairer and more caring Cambridgeshire

- 1.1 This report relates to the following Council's Ambitions. 1: Net zero carbon emissions for Cambridgeshire by 2045, and our communities and natural environment are supported to adapt and thrive as the climate changes.

The proposed prioritisation process is based on taking an asset management approach for maintaining the highway. This approach is based upon preventative maintenance treatments being applied to highways at the appropriate points in the lifecycle. Such preventative maintenance minimises the need for deeper, more expensive treatments to be applied at later dates.

It is these deeper treatments that are the most environmentally harmful, since they require greater use of materials (including virgin aggregates) and associated transport. These carbon emissions are exacerbated by road users having to travel further via diversion routes and having to wait at traffic control, such as traffic signals.

Given the above, the over-arching principles that inform these processes are a key factor in minimising the environmental effects and carbon footprint of the highways maintenance service.

Furthermore, the Council is continuing to explore ways to decarbonise the delivery of planned capital maintenance works, such as through the use of recycled highway materials and sustainable methods of construction.

- 1.2 This report also relates to Ambition 2: Travel across the county is safer and more environmentally sustainable.

The proposed processes consider objective condition data, promoting public transport routes and other factors, including accident statistics. The provision and maintenance of a safe highway network is a key objective of this report and the wider highways maintenance service.

- 1.3 This report also relates to Ambition 3: Health inequalities are reduced.

By promoting schemes where Active Travel provision may be improved, and improving access to public transport links, the Council can help create an environment that gives people the opportunity to be as healthy as they can be.

- 1.4 This report is also relevant to Ambition 6: Places and communities prosper because they have a resilient and inclusive economy, access to good quality public services and social justice is prioritised.

A properly maintained highway network is a key enabler for the transport of goods and passengers across the county and beyond. This is fundamental to the county developing and retaining a resilient economy.

## 2. Background

- 2.1 Programmes of highway maintenance schemes have been previously presented to the Highways and Transport committee for approval. The [last such report](#) was presented to the committee at its meeting held on March 2024.
- 2.2 Previously, these programmes of work have been formulated based upon asset management principles, the use of objective condition data and a range of other factors, including member and public reports, insurance claims, accident records and other relevant factors.
- 2.3 This report sets out more transparent processes for the formulation of these programmes, based upon weighted scoring of a range of factors relevant to each asset type. Potential schemes will all be put through these scoring systems, effectively providing a clear process whereby “long lists” of schemes are assessed and “short lists” derived, which will ultimately be the programmes presented to the committee for approval.
- 2.4 In previous years, the Department for Transport (DfT) has allocated a proportion of highways maintenance capital funds to local authorities via the Incentive Fund. Authorities had to submit a questionnaire against which they were assessed for this funding. A key element of the questionnaire was the development of programmes of work based upon asset management principles.
- 2.5 Should the Incentive Fund be continued, the processes set out in this report would help provide evidence of the alignment of the Council’s capital programme with asset management principles. This is likely to be a key factor in obtaining maximum capital funding via this source in the future.
- 2.6 Table 1 outlines the current proposed allocation for the capital highway maintenance budget for 2025/26, subject to the 2025/26 Business Plan being approved by Full Council.

Asset Type	Indicative allocation
Carriageway & Footway Maintenance including cycle routes	
Carriageway Structural	£11,950,000
Carriageway Preventative	£7,800,000
Carriageway In situ	£950,000
Soil Affected Roads	£2,500,000
Footway/cycleway Structural	£6,800,000
Footway/cycleway Preventative	£3,000,000
Highway Drainage	£4,000,000
Safety Fence renewal	£400,000
Signs and Lines	£1,000,000
Rights of Way	£465,000
Bridge Strengthening	£3,137,000
Traffic Signal replacement	£1,708,000
Total	£40,576,000*

Table 1: Proposed allocations for each asset type for 2025/26

- 2.7 This table excludes funding of approximately £5.5m, set aside for the following areas which are assessed on a site-specific basis (in the case of the ringfenced A14 funding), or reactively throughout the year:
- A14 de trunk funding for improvements required for the A1307
  - Capitalised road patching, (a long list of potential patching sites based on asset data reviewed through the sifting process for schemes will be included in the March 25 report to H&T. This allows greater visibility of the locations where patching work may be spent dynamically throughout the year).
  - Locally determined minor capital schemes.
  - Asset management including surveys
- 2.8 A key outcome of the revised prioritisation process will be greater transparency in relation to the prioritisation for the capital programme. This will provide Members and the public with assurance that all schemes have been considered using objective scoring criteria.
- 2.9 A further outcome will be programmes of work that demonstrably align with the Council's vision, strategic framework, and approved highways asset management policies. The scoring mechanisms will reflect these policies and will produce programmes of work that are appropriate for the long-term stewardship of the highway network for which the Council is responsible.
- 2.10 To aid transparency and understanding, several Member engagement activities have been completed prior to this committee meeting, with further engagement planned if the new process is approved, as follows:
- Process presented to the existing Member Engagement Group on 4 November 2024 for comment and review.
  - Process presented to all Members on 28 November 2024.
  - A briefing session is planned in early December for all town and parish Councils following the committee meeting on 3 December 2024 to make them aware of the new process.
  - The existing cross-party Member Engagement Group is proposed to be engaged prior to the Committee meeting in March 2025 to review the prioritised lists as they start being populated.

### 3. Main Issues

- 3.1 The prioritisation processes set out in this report are proposed to be applicable to capital funded highways maintenance schemes. Such schemes include the following:
- Structural carriageway maintenance
  - Structural foot & cycleway maintenance
  - Signals
  - Structures
  - Drainage projects (not including gully emptying)
  - Rights of Way
  - Safety fencing
  - Surface treatments including surface dressing, micro asphalt and slurry seal on paths and cycle routes.

3.2 It is not the intention that these processes be applied to revenue funded maintenance activities, which include reactive, routine and cyclical activities, such as pothole repairs, grass cutting, and gully emptying for the following reasons:

- Pothole repairs and similar maintenance activities are assessed as issues arise. The budget is spent throughout the year and repairs are prioritised based on risk categories as set out in the Highway Operational Standards.
- Grass cutting is programmed as a countywide programme of work, and as a result wouldn't be suited to a prioritisation process (all grass will be cut twice a year in accordance with the service standards set out in the Highway Operational Standards).
- Weedkilling is programmed as a countywide programme of work, with 2 sprays per year being undertaken across the county.
- Gully emptying is programmed as a countywide programme of work, and as a result wouldn't be suited to a prioritisation process (100% of the known gully network is emptied / cleansed every two years). However, the Council aims to move to a more risk-based and asset management led approach once the whole gully network is mapped.

3.3 Whilst objective condition data a key criterion by which potential capital schemes are identified, this is only one of many criteria. Member and public observations and requests generate potential schemes, as do insurance claims and highway inspections by officers. It is proposed that all such potential capital schemes be subject to these prioritisation processes.

3.4 For many asset types, several different treatments are likely to be possible. For instance, issues identified with a carriageway might be best addressed via a preventative surface treatment, such as surface dressing or slurry sealing, or might require a deeper treatment, such as resurfacing or reconstruction.

3.5 It is therefore important that the prioritisation processes ultimately assess potential schemes against the most suitable interventions. It is proposed to have some pass/fail condition criteria included in the scoring systems, based upon the condition of the asset. Table 2 provides a summary of how each road is assessed, using a 1 – 5 grading system which is based on the condition of the asset.

Category	Description	Potential maintenance treatment options
Grade 1	Defect free	Pavement is not considered for maintenance
Grade 2	Signs of wear and indicators of risk	Light maintenance (e.g. minor patching)
Grade 3	Serviceable	Localised interventions or mid-life preventative maintenance (e.g. surface dressing, localised patching, crack sealing)
Grade 4	Functional Impairment	Rehabilitative maintenance, perhaps full carriageway. (e.g. resurfacing, large scale patching, edge haunching)

Grade 5	Structural or severe surface impairment	Structural maintenance (e.g. full carriageway resurfacing or reconstruction)
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Table 2: Asset condition data banding

For example:

- A potential carriageway scheme might fail the condition criterion for structural repair if its condition were not sufficiently bad based on the most recent asset data available, (Grade 3 or lower in above table). The asset condition data would be reviewed yearly to assess if this remained the case.
- It is proposed that for carriageway schemes on classified roads, where existing asset condition data shows that up to 70% of a given route is graded 1-3, and 30% graded 4-5, then this will be prioritised for structural repair.
- It is proposed that for carriageway schemes on unclassified roads, where existing asset condition data shows that up to 40% of a given route is graded 1-3 and 60% is graded 4-5 then this will be prioritised for structural repair.
- Those roads which are in the 71 – 100% range for condition data graded 1-3, and 0 – 29% range for condition data graded 4-5 will not be prioritised or scored for a structural repair.
- The potential scheme would then be assessed against other treatment types, with the condition thresholds being less onerous, and may be more suited to a surface treatment.

- 3.6 In the prioritisation document, all criteria will be scored out of 5, with some double weighted. Weighting reflects the importance of the criterion to the asset. For example, footways that provide access to public transport services are double weighted for this criterion to reflect their alignment with the authority's strategic framework ambitions.
- 3.7 Whilst the resultant scores for each potential scheme will be the primary arbiter for those that are included in the capital programme, special circumstances are considered in terms of network availability and co-ordination with other works. For instance, it might be that a scheme is promoted to year 1 of a programme because there is alignment with another project which would enable both to be delivered together reducing overall network disruption, allowing any savings to be realised or there may be a significant safety implication.
- 3.8 It is anticipated that this approach will generate a considerable number of schemes for officers to sift and score from the initial condition thresholds identified in paragraph 3.5 of this report. For instance, there may be as many as 800 discreet carriageway schemes to consider and sift initially, some of which may be assessed as more suitable for alternative treatments and therefore may be reassigned to area teams to be addressed via minor patching works. Appendix 1 provides a visualisation of how schemes are sifted by officers, and how they may be dealt with, depending on whether they qualify as a scheme or are more suitable for more minor repairs.

3.9 The detailed scoring criteria and weightings for each asset type and treatment are set out in Appendix 2 of this report. Appendix 3 shows a worked example for carriageway structural schemes.

3.10 Key next steps include:

- Assuming this prioritisation process is approved, it is proposed that this process be used to develop a three year forward capital maintenance programme and an indicative programme for the following two years.
- This would be presented to the committee for approval in March 2025.
- Final approval of future year's programmes will be key decisions, which will be presented to the committee for review and approval each year.
- This will ensure further forward visibility of schemes and allow a multi-year planned approach to delivery, allowing investigation and design activities to start earlier to enable delivery much sooner in the financial year.

## 4. Alternative Options Considered

4.1 Continue with the current approach where the development of such programmes relies upon officers' engineering judgement and knowledge of the network. Whilst this has produced programmes that have proven effective in managing the network in accordance with the Council's asset management policies, this process lacks sufficient transparency.

4.2 An alternative method for formulating programmes is to prioritise using condition data only and treat carriageways and other highways assets on a "worst first" basis. This is the antithesis of the asset management approach, in which treatments are applied at the correct points in the lifecycles of assets. The adoption of a "worst first" approach has been disregarded because:

- It does not represent value for money in terms of whole life cost and would lead to unsustainable deterioration of the county's highways.
- Adoption of the "worst first" approach would inevitably lead to risks to highway users from an increase in potholes and other defects. These defects would require reactive treatments that are funded from revenue budgets.
- Thus, the adoption of "worst first" principles would place unsustainable strain upon revenue budgets and create increased demand on the highway's maintenance service from residents, communities, and the travelling public.

## 5. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

5.1 The proposed prioritisation processes would provide a transparent method for the formulation of highways maintenance capital programmes of schemes.

5.2 The resultant programmes would represent the best use of the funding available for such works and would demonstrably accord with the Council's highway asset management policies.

## 6. Significant Implications

### 6.1 Finance Implications

This report proposes a methodology on how best to allocate funding for non- reactive capitally funded maintenance work. This approach will be used to produce proposed programmes of work which will be presented to a future meeting of the committee as a key decision to review and approve.

### 6.2 Legal Implications

There are no significant implications for this priority.

### 6.3 Risk Implications

There are no significant implications for this priority.

### 6.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

These processes ensure that programmes are developed in accordance with approved Council policy, specifically the asset management approach as set out in the Highway Operational Standards (HOS).

Any key changes to the HOS are subject to updated Equality Impact Assessments.

The HOS sets out that highway repairs and treatments may be prioritised where those with protected characteristics might be adversely impacted.

These processes contribute to the provision of an inclusive highway network.

An Equality Impact Assessment is attached at Appendix 4 to this report.

### 6.5 Climate Change and Environment Implications (Key decisions only)

The prioritisation regime has been developed with carbon reduction in mind, promoting carbon reducing processes and methods above other more traditional methods, that are incorporated into the delivery of the capital highway maintenance programme, and further by prioritising Public Transport and Active Travel routes.

Paragraph 1.1 above highlights key environmental improvements that the implementation of this Policy will include.

## 7. Source Documents

### 7.1 [Highway Operational Standards 8 Feb 2024 \(cambridgeshire.gov.uk\)](https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk)