

## **SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD**

**MEETING - MONDAY NOVEMBER 7 2011**

### **CONDITION OF FOOTPATHS FOR WHEELCHAIR USERS**

#### **1. Purpose**

Following the Scrutiny suggestions, questions and comments received, this paper aims to provide a background understanding on the condition of footpaths in particular for wheelchair and mobility impaired users and what the Council does to improve and repair footways and to give an initial response to the comments raised. In turn, it is hoped that this paper will assist in determining any course of action which the Scrutiny Management Board may request.

#### **2. Background**

- 2.1. It is acknowledged that the condition of footways and the availability of infrastructure such as dropped kerbs and formal pedestrian crossings can be a barrier to resident's access to services and facilities. The following statement has been included in the Council's current Local Transport Plan 2011 – 2026:

#### **3.3.5 Promotion of Sustainable Transport Modes to Support Access to Key Services**

One of the concerns for many residents is the condition of footways and the availability of infrastructure such as appropriate crossing points. The lack of a consistent approach to the provision of dropped kerbs, for instance, on pedestrian routes in the older town centres is a particular problem. The Council seeks to make improvements to the footway network in association with routine maintenance operations and where practicable will develop, in consultation with residents through Town and Parish Councils, programmes for identifying targeted footway improvements for implementation as resources permit.

The above approach would be complimentary to work undertaken at a local level to promote walking in towns and villages, for instance the nationwide 'Walkers are Welcome' initiative. Wellington has recently been accredited as a 'Walkers are Welcome' town, acknowledging that the town is walker-friendly. As well as providing organised walks and other social events, the scheme allows communities to benefit from regular networking opportunities with other 'Walkers are Welcome' towns.

**2.2. Funding for Footway Maintenance & Improvements** - A key factor determining the ability of the Council to maintain and improve the condition of the highways network, including footways, is the availability of funding. The grant funding provided by the Department for Transport for all highways maintenance and integrated transport (highways improvements), through the Local Transport Plan, for 2010/11 to 2014/15 is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1 Local Transport Plan Capital Allocations 2011-2015 (000s)**

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14*	2014/15*
	£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
<b>IT Block</b>	2,115	880	939	939	1,320
<b>Maintenance Block</b>	2,432	2,832	2,743	2,661	2,506

\*Indicative allocations

2.3. The above allocations extend to expenditure on all highway activities, including carriageway and footways, street lighting, traffic signs and road markings and bridges.

2.4. Additional funding can be obtained from revenue budgets (reactive highway maintenance) and capital funding is obtained from other sources, e.g. Council capital. Footway (and other highway) infrastructure can also be improved through the planning application process, e.g. through a Section 106 agreement with a developer.

2.5. Currently the Highways & Transport capital programme includes £619k allocated to footway maintenance and £40k for footway improvements (£30k dropped kerb provision and £10k for new footway links). In addition footways in borough towns have benefitted from the regeneration schemes that have been delivered in locations such as Dawley, Wellington and Newport improving the condition of town centre footways.

2.6. A summary of the combined Highways & Transport capital programme (excluding regeneration schemes on the highway i.e. Oakengates) is shown in Table 2 below.

**Table 2 2011/12 Highways Capital Programme - Summary**

<b>Combined Summary</b>	<b>Funding Source</b>				
	<b>LTP (M)</b>	<b>Council Capital</b>	<b>LTP (IT)</b>	<b>Contributions</b>	<b>Totals</b>
Principal Roads: Maintenance	173				<b>173</b>
Classified Roads: Maintenance	994	590			<b>1,584</b>
Unclassified Roads: Maintenance		919	80	35	<b>1,034</b>
<b>Footway Maintenance</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>521</b>			<b>619</b>

Lighting Renewal and Maintenance	400				<b>400</b>
Barriers & Guard Rail: Renewal and Maintenance	25				<b>25</b>
Drainage: Maintenance		160			<b>160</b>
Structures: Renewal and Maintenance	700				<b>700</b>
Signing and lining renewal and maintenance	225	25	143		<b>393</b>
Miscellaneous Maintenance	125				<b>125</b>
New/Upgraded Infrastructure (footways)			184 <b>(40)</b>	127	<b>311 (40)</b>
Sustainable Travel			164		<b>164</b>
Safety Schemes	92		209	200	<b>501</b>
<b>Total by funding source</b>	<b>2,832</b>	<b>5,015</b>	<b>880</b>	<b>362</b>	<b>6,289</b>

### 3. Issues Relating to Footway Maintenance

- 3.1. The Council's draft Transport Asset Management Plan (TAMP) is the plan which identifies the value of the Council's highway assets, their current condition and what should be done in terms of whole lifecycle maintenance for each type of asset (i.e. carriageways, footways, street-lights, structures). There are approximately 1400km of footways in the borough and they are estimated to have a value of around £110m, which equates to around 12% of the total value of the Council's assets. These figures exclude public rights of way and footpaths that are owned by the Council but which do not have highway status (which includes routes such as the Silkin Way), where there are approximately a further 1000km of routes in the borough.
- 3.2. The current level of investment in planned footway maintenance is around 10% of the total capital available for highway maintenance and improvement schemes, but this is below the level identified in the TAMP. To improve the condition of the footways in the borough the TAMP estimates investment is required of around £1m per year for the next five years. The average design life of a footway is 25 – 30 years (i.e. you would expect a footway to need full reconstruction around every 25 – 30 years), at present levels of spend footways are likely to be reconstructed once every 50 – 60 years, this takes into account additional resources that have been made available for highway maintenance.
- 3.3. To put the information on footway assets and maintenance into context, the Council is responsible for around 1000km of carriageways with an estimated value of around £675m. Over the last three years the Council has spent an average of £2.6m per year on highway maintenance, compared to around £3m which is the annual figure for investment that the TAMP identifies to improve the overall condition of the borough's carriageways.
- 3.4. To limit the deterioration in footway condition over recent years the Council's planned maintenance programme has focussed on slurry sealing or surface dressing footways as opposed to full reconstruction to extend the usable life

of a footway. These types of maintenance allow more footways to be treated, but do not reconstruct the footway, the focus is on resealing the footway surface to prevent deterioration. This does provide benefit to all footway users, but limits opportunities for physical improvements for mobility impaired groups. It is likely in future years' planned maintenance programmes that the Council will have to consider doing more full reconstruction of footways, as the option of surface dressing has been used on a number of footways in the borough previously; this will mean that shorter lengths of footways are repaired/ replaced each year; to give an indication full reconstruction of a 'tarmac' footway is around £23 per square metre, surface dressing costs around £1.50 per square metre.

3.5. As part of the development of LTP3 the Council was asked to consider a target of having 100% of footpaths 'disabled accessible' in ten years. The LTP recognised that the Council should do all it can to make sure footways are accessible, but that a target of 100% was not appropriate. There are locations in the borough particularly in Ironbridge and the borough towns where historic and physical constraints mean that it is virtually impossible to provide a disabled accessible footway without buying private land.

#### **4. What does the Council currently do?**

4.1. In addition to the planned footway maintenance programmes the Council operates a dropped kerbs programme with a capital budget of around £30k per year (this has been maintained at this level even though the DfT capital budget from which it is funded has been reduced by around 55%). This programme is operated on a request basis, where residents submit a request for dropped kerbs and they are provided using the funding until the budget for each year is fully committed; the budget enables around 20 dropped kerbs to be provided per year. Where possible dropped kerbs are incorporated as part of other planned maintenance and improvement schemes, and sections of footway are often improved through schemes such as Safer Routes to School schemes.

4.2. Examples of dropped kerbs installed recently include: -

4.2.1. Wombridge Road – A number of dropped kerbs were installed along this road to help residents access the local shops.

4.2.2. Bridgnorth Road, Madeley – Dropped kerbs were installed as part of a footpath scheme to improve access for residents of Severn Gorge and the surrounding area to access nearby bus stops.

4.2.3. King Street – Wellington – Dropped kerbs were installed along the road to allow mobility scooter users to travel along King Street to reach PRH.

4.3. As part of regeneration schemes for the borough towns disabled groups have been consulted on footway designs. For example, in Newport the project team walked the route with a visually impaired resident to understand issues about navigating the town centre with a guide dog; comments from the site visit were used to improve the design.

4.4. The Council has secured around £3.5m of funding from DfT for sustainable transport projects in the borough, this includes upgrading the Silkin Way and

the link between Telford Central station and the town centre, which will provide improvements for disabled use. In addition the Council is developing proposals to make the Box Road two-way which will include providing more footways and crossing points in the town centre.

- 4.5. As part of developing the annual capital programme the Council has, wherever practicable, used a matrix approach for identifying and delivering integrated transport (improvement schemes) in order to secure value for money. In this way greater priority has been given to schemes that achieve more than one objective, from the mix of improving road safety, reducing congestion, improving access, improving the environment. We have also taken opportunities to combine works activities to reduce disruption to the public and minimise traffic management costs. The best example of this is the annual 'spring clean' on the A442 Queensway where activities such as sign cleaning and replacement, barrier repairs, grass cutting etc have been concentrated in a two week period under one Traffic Management regime (road and lane closures).
- 4.6. There is, however, scope to extend this approach to other activities across the highway network. An improvement we are therefore looking into the development of future capital works programmes is the introduction of a route treatment approach to maintaining the highway network. In this way, for instance, where carriageway repairs are identified on a stretch of road, we would seek to look at the condition, camber and width of footways and provision of drop kerb crossing points, traffic signs and road markings, street lights, barriers etc and bring these up to standard at the same time. Whilst this may result in larger but fewer highway schemes in the future, this would result in a more co-ordinated approach to highway maintenance and improvement across the Borough. Clearly, this approach may help improve the quality of the overall street, but will be constrained to the level of resources available which is the over-riding influence on what can be done to improve and maintain footways in the borough.
- 4.7. The Council is now doing more work in supervising utility company works to ensure that utility company reinstatements do not become footway problems of the future.

## **5. What do our residents tell us?**

- 5.1. The Council takes part in an annual National Highways & Transport (NHT) survey, giving detailed feedback on highways and transport issues in the borough. For 2011, the NHT survey shows that Telford & Wrekin scores well compared to other authorities on resident satisfaction with accessibility around the borough.
- 5.2. Feedback on footway condition shows the Council performing averagely compared to other authorities in terms of resident satisfaction, but satisfaction levels are around 50% (compared to around 30% for carriageway condition); around 65% of residents responding to the NHT survey were satisfied with where footways are provided.