

ITEM 4

Norwich City Council

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Briefing paper for meeting to be held on 24 June 2010: Scrutiny committee: concerns regarding the condition of roads in Norwich and especially those that have suffered damage last winter

Introduction

Through an agency agreement with Norfolk County Council, the council is responsible for the maintenance of the adopted highway network in the city. The agreement requires the council to deliver this service in accordance with statutory requirements, the relevant codes of practice and County Council policy. The council inspects the highway for defects, arranges routine maintenance (such as repairs to potholes) and programmed maintenance (such as re-surfacing).

Potholes are symptomatic of a road's condition and the level of traffic it experiences. Roads in poorer condition and/or more traffic, particularly heavy vehicles, have the greatest tendency for potholes. The occurrence of potholes is exacerbated by water percolating into the structure of a road and freezing. The expansion created by the freezing creates weaknesses in the road.



a) What is the definition of a pothole

b) What are the established response times

The definition of a pothole is provided in the [Norfolk Transport Asset Management Plan](#) (TAMP). Much of the TAMP including intervention levels and inspection standards are itself based on the guidance provided by the code of practice for highway maintenance management published by the UK Roads Board.

Potholes are repaired according to:

- The type of road (e.g. principal vs. residential link roads);
- The character of the location (e.g. urban vs. rural); and
- The severity of the defect.

The above characteristics determine the repair response time which ranges from within 2 hours for the most severe defects (e.g. a pothole of more than 100mm on any carriageway) to repair on an opportunity basis with no particular time limit (e.g. potholes between 13 and 29 mm – below 13mm is not considered a defect). The standards vary between carriageways and footways.

Full details of the minimum intervention standards are shown in [appendix D](#) of the TAMP.

c) How are potholes located

Potholes are identified in two ways. The council has 3.5 FTE highway inspectors who inspect the entire adopted public highway network in the city on a regular basis.

In general, the City Centre, the main radial routes, and the ring roads are inspected monthly. Nearly all other roads are inspected quarterly with the exception being some of the roads and paths with least traffic (such as minor cul-de-sacs) which are inspected annually.

In addition, if someone contacts the council or the council is otherwise made aware about a highway defect, an inspector will investigate the concern and order any repair works accordingly.

d) How many pothole problems in Norwich are reported per week/month/year

This information is not readily available, as requests for service are identified simply as highway maintenance issues. In addition, pothole problems may come through as part of general correspondence, outside Comino (e.g. via email), dealt with by NCAS (out of hours) or as part of an insurance claim.

How many repairs are carried out in Norwich per week/month/year

This is not information the council normally collects, however 2008/09 information was collected to help inform the transfer of contracts between CityCare and May Gurney. In 2008/09, there were 170 emergency (2 hour) pothole repair orders and 4,547 non-emergency repairs (within 24 hours, 14 days or 21 days). Note that some of the orders may have been for more than one pothole.

There is no readily available information on the number of patching repairs (see m) below).

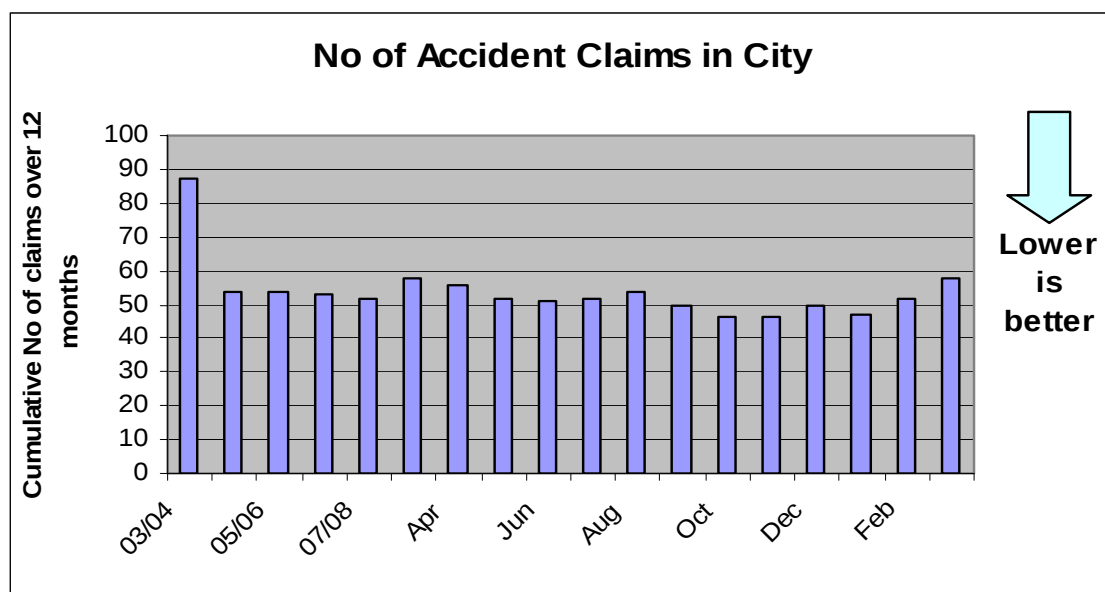
e) Is there a road hierarchy

There is a road hierarchy as defined in [Appendix C](#) of the TAMP. Depending on the location's position in the road hierarchy, determines the intervention level (see above)

f) How many claims for damage to vehicles as a result of encountering potholes does the council receive per year and how much does it cost to settle these claims

Highway damage claims are monitored in total (i.e. including pothole and other forms of damage). The number of these damage only insurance claims is around 1 per week; in the year ending March 2010 there had been 58 claims versus 56 in the year ending April 2009. There is some evidence of an increase in claims towards the end of the year.

There were also 58 damage only claims in 2008/09. The number of claims has reduced from 89 in 2003/04.



g) Do problems reported on line and by phone have the same response time

Response times are the same for all forms of contact.

h) What other methods are available for reporting pot holes and damaged surfaces

The council is made aware of pothole issues via third party systems such as [FillThatHole](#) (Cyclist Touring Club [CTC]) and [FixMyStreet](#) (mySociety.org). The CTC system provides an alternative way of measuring highway authority performance.

i) How quickly are potholes repaired

The speed of repair is determined in accordance with appendix D of the TAMP (See also a) and b) above)

j) How long is a pothole repair expected to last

k) How is the decision made as to how permanent or temporary the repair will be

The objective is to try to ensure that all pothole repairs are permanent using Hot Rolled Asphalt (HRA).

However, for more urgent repairs (within 2 hours or 24 hours), this may not always be possible. For example, plant may not be readily available or the level of traffic using a road may dictate a more quickly laid solution. In some circumstances, therefore a temporary solution such as slow curing bitmac may have to be used, although this is not common practice. This does not have the longevity of HRA but it can be laid more easily – without specialist plant – and more quickly. Both HRA and bitmac can fail if laid in the wet.

Alternatives to slow curing bitmac which are purported to have greater longevity and can be used in wet weather are being trialled although they tend to be more expensive.

Where the work is programmed (14 or 21 day repairs), HRA is nearly always used. However, if the road is programmed for re-surfacing, slow curing bitmac or similar may be acceptable.

l) If the repair is temporary when is it replaced with a permanent repair

As soon as practically possible, albeit taking account of weather, traffic management considerations and the need to ensure value for money by programming works wherever possible rather than taking an *ad hoc* approach.

m) How many of the 'new' potholes are actually failed repairs

There are no records kept of this, however, experience suggests that the number is relatively few. However, whilst a repair itself may last the need for it in the first place is usually down to the general deterioration in the condition of a road more generally. In such circumstances there may need for further repairs adjacent to the original pothole.

Where there are a number of potholes in close proximity or a likelihood of further failures close to the original a larger area will be repaired. This is known as patching.

Where condition deteriorates very significantly neither pothole repairs nor patching is cost effective and resurfacing is required.



Witard Road: due to be resurfaced in July 2010 from winter deterioration funding

n) Is there a special budget for funding pothole repairs

The County council allocate budgets for both pothole repairs and patching. The table below shows actual expenditure for the last few years together with this year's budget.

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Potholes	£52,390	£42,006	£121,232	£77,000
Patching	£562,095	£702,237	£530,200	£558,000
Total	£614,485	£744,243	£651,432	£635,000

Note that expenditure between budget heads may be varied during the course of the year according to need. These variations are offset against other routine maintenance expenditure such as gulley emptying, winter maintenance and road markings so that overall expenditure at the end of the year equals the original budget (or as close to as possible).

o) Is the person who reported the pothole kept informed on progress

Unless the correspondent asks to be informed of progress, the standard response is along the lines of acknowledging the concern, saying that the issue will be investigated and repairs ordered accordingly. This is similar to the approach taken by the County Council. Progress reports are generally not provided and to do would require more officer time and so add to cost. In addition, the fee for routine maintenance is limited to 5.5%.

p) Are repaired potholes inspected regularly to ensure the repair is still intact

Repairs are re-examined as part of the regular inspection process. The highway inspectors are adopting a new computerised highway inspection process which will flag failed repairs specifically as part of the inspection process so that this can be taken up with the contractor accordingly.

q) What are the lessons we can learn from experience in dealing with road/pothole repairs regarding methods and materials

Potholes are symptomatic of a more general deterioration in a road. Therefore, the most effective way of dealing with road/pothole repairs is timely programmed maintenance such as re-surfacing. Such a preventative approach is behind much of the TAMP. The following table shows resurfacing expenditure in Norwich since 2007/08:

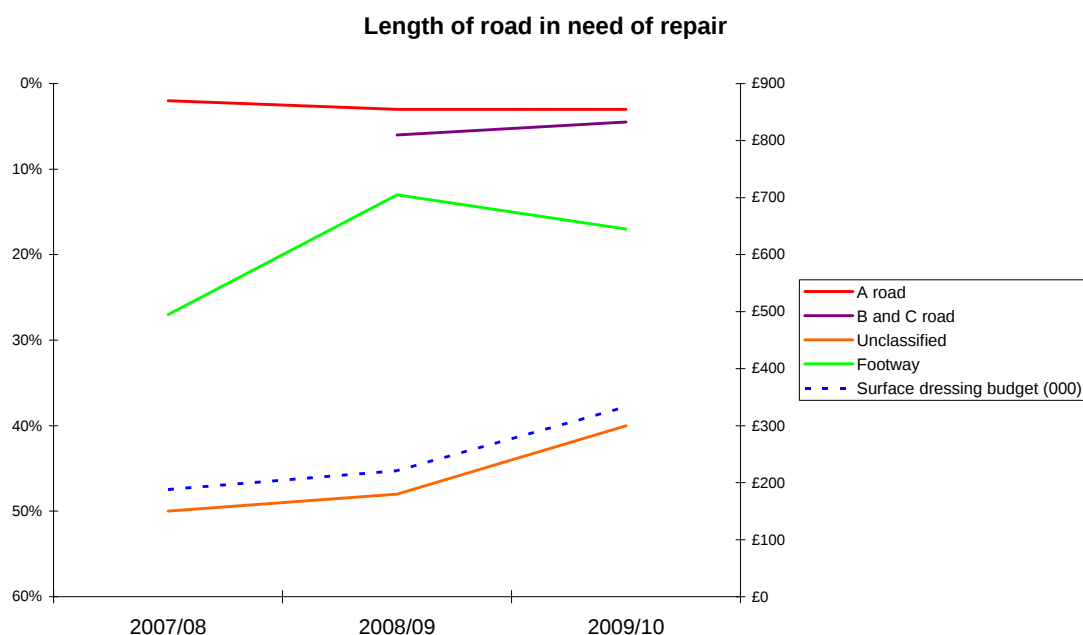
	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Principal road resurfacing	£340,303	£254,431	£523,858	£1,416,188
Non-principal resurfacing	£95,864	£333,768	£409,933	£226,613
Cat 1&2 footways	£115,470	£200,345	£238,592	£102,600
Cat 3&4 footways	£860,741	£656,110	£689,685	£730,075
Surface dressing	£188,052	£221,109	£333,402	£277,575
Winter deterioration funding	£0	£0	£230,495	£282,000

Re-surfacing deals not only with pot-holes and similar defects but it will also address other issues important to road users (such as smoothness which is important to cyclists and wheelchair users). However, it is expensive and

road maintenance budgets are likely to be under severe pressure in the coming years.

A cheaper technique that at least addresses water penetration, the main cause of potholes and similar failures, is surface dressing. This is cheaper than re-surfacing by a factor of 10. Surface dressing can be difficult to lay in narrow streets with high levels of on-street parking and it does not address comfort. It is also inappropriate to use where a road's condition has become very poor.

However greater use of surface dressing with a targeted and prioritised approach to re-surfacing has achieved a steady improvement in unclassified roads – the majority of the network in Norwich – surface condition in recent years (see graph below):



NB total length of road in the City is as follows: A roads 47 km; B roads 7 km; C roads 45 km; U roads 284 km; Footways 555 km

r) Are new roads constructed in such a way as to minimise pot hole damage accruing/to be more durable

Road construction is much more durable nowadays with deeper construction and use of higher quality materials. However, the majority of the roads in the City date back from an earlier age and are of much less substantial construction using poorer materials.

s) How is road hierarchy determined and does this effect road quality issues

The road hierarchy is determined by traffic generators, traffic volumes and availability of alternative routes. The hierarchy determines both the inspection regime and the response standard.

t) How does the council deal with the issue of potholes on unadopted roads

There are two types of unadopted road: those which are never intended for adoption and those which are intended to be in due course as part of new development. Pothole repairs are the responsibility of the land-owner in the case of the former and the developer (pending adoption) in the case of the latter.

Potholes in unadopted roads owned by the council are dealt with by housing property and asset and city management respectively on a reactive basis.

u) How does the council process a resident's reporting of a pot hole in an unadopted road

The council will draw the matter to the attention of the land-owner (in known) or developer so that they can take action accordingly

v) How does the council follow up with potholes in unadopted roads to ensure developers are maintaining their commitments

The council will inspect the road prior to issuing an interim certificate and then usually 12 months later after a maintenance period before formal adoption. Any defects will be drawn to the developer's attention and satisfactory repair is required prior to either issuing the interim certificate or adoption. The responsible for carrying out repairs is the developer's responsibility whether they are identified by the council or a member of the public. The developer is liable for any claims prior to adoption.

Whilst defects do occur in newly constructed roads pending adoption, with improved methods of construction it is unusual to find potholes occurring.

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