

Questions & Answers

Balfour Beatty; Public Realm Services Briefing Nov 2017

Provided below is a summary of questions raised at the November round of Members and Parish briefings. Any questions relating to specific locations are responded to direct to the originator.

Routine and Reactive Maintenance

- Where a road has multiple potholes, why doesn't Balfour Beatty repair these with a patch repair rather than individual pothole repairs?

The repair is dependent on the condition of the road and the budget available; there is a cost implication when considering doing all of the potholes on a road or just those defects requiring attention. Patching is not a good solution on roads in generally poor condition as the repair will not hold.

- Over the course of the last year numerous pothole repairs have been undertaken on a C road; surely this is not cost effective?

Across the county Balfour Beatty repair over 2000 potholes every month; however we do not have the capital budget to repair all of those through a resurfacing programme. Therefore we have to prioritise defect repairs based on safety and risk using reactive maintenance to keep the network safe.

- What is believed to be a considerable time for pothole repairs to last?

The repair longevity is dependent on the repair method used, the surrounding environment and some factors that are beyond Balfour Beatty's control. As a main contributor to pothole longevity, suitable drainage is essential to prevent water seeping in to the surface and creating potholes.

- Please explain why a team will undertake a pothole repair and then return weeks later to fix a neighbouring defect?

Within the updated Highways Maintenance Plan a risk based approach is taken to assess defects for repair, however defects can worsen between visits. BBLP are working on improving efficiencies and are reviewing the processes through workshops. In addition, due to restrictions with finance not all issues can be dealt with. As such, those defects that have reached an intervention level or those defects that increase the likelihood of risk are prioritised, for example a defect in the carriageway wheel track of a vehicle is prioritised over a less safety-critical defect in the middle of the carriageway. This risk based approach is due to be implemented to all local authorities by October 2018 and BBLP are prepared for this in advance.

- What are the parameters for deciding which potholes are repaired – If in the same area of road then why are some repaired but some left?

The Locality Steward for the area will complete a risk based assessment determining where in the highway the defect is, such as whether it is in the wheel track, a cycle track or a pedestrian route. A 'same size fits all' approach is not suitable and so the steward determines what holes are addressed and how, prioritising those that are in the wheel tracks to maintain the safety of the network. The repair technique is dependent on the condition of the road; for example, if the road is already cracked then some repair methods can worsen the condition.

- Why are roads that are in a poor state of disrepair patched and not resurfaced?

Our preference would be to resurface but we have a statutory requirement to respond to defects to make roads safe, with a limitation on resurfacing due to constraints on funding. The new Highways Maintenance Plan helps address urgencies, with Herefordshire being the first county to adopt a risk based assessment of surfaces. Repairs are dependent on when the defects reach a set intervention level; otherwise defects in an area are batched together for repair on a two monthly basis.

- Previously Velocity Patcher machines were on lease for pothole repairs, what is the chance of reintroducing this?

The use of a Velocity Patcher is efficient to fill a defect backlog and so we are looking at reintroducing this next year for rural roads with a programme to subcontract out. There is a need to balance the cost of this against the defects on the network and so we would potentially introduce this for a six week period. To do this, we would need to make reductions elsewhere to balance priorities and cost.

Potholes/ other defects should be reported through the 'Report it' section of the HC website or via phone 01432 261800. All enquiries will be inspected prior to any works.

The Highways Maintenance Plan, which details the level of service provided, has recently been reviewed and revised and can be found on the Herefordshire Council website:

<https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/info/200196/roads/707/highways/2>

- As the key strategic routes into Hereford are being resurfaced, what is happening with the A44?

The submitted challenge fund bid was driven by developing economic growth within the County and so was aligned to improve access to the Enterprise Zone. HC with BBLP are looking to submit the next challenge fund bid for improvements to the A44. If this bid is unsuccessful, the A44 is recognised as being of high priority for improvements as it carries high levels of traffic and so is seen as being a strategic route.

Winter maintenance

- You indicated there are no new roads on the gritting routes this season? How do I get a road added? There is a lane that is a school bus route that we have already suggested.

We undertake an annual review of all routes and if you feel there is an alternative route that should be added this should be raised in the first instance through your locality steward.

- Where grit bins have been damaged by sub-contractors, will they be replaced?

Yes, we ask that we are made aware of these incidents so we can then arrange for the bin to be replaced.

- Is Balfour Beatty satisfied with the relationship with Highways England?

Yes, we have a good relationship with Kier as the contractors for Highways England, for instance we base several of our gritters at their base in a reciprocal arrangement.

Supporting communities

- Could old grounds maintenance equipment such as hand tools etc. be donated to volunteer groups?

In theory yes, but that would need to be cleared through HC as the equipment belongs to them.

- The Parish Council are looking to purchase a Speed Indicator Device, who should be approached for this?

The PC can approach either the Locality Steward or the Locality Liaison Co-ordinator.

- Four villages have clubbed together and used s106 money to purchase a SID, but the speed checks needed prior to installation are roughly £500 for each village which seems prohibitive. Why is it so expensive?

We can look into this case specifically but any discount would be minimal as the cost includes a site visit to assess the suitability of the location as well as the commissioning of a speed survey in each village. Herefordshire Council took the decision last year that the SID programme should be self-funded with the agreed principle of full cost recovery.

- If a parish chooses not to participate in the Lengthsman scheme, where can the parish find a list of services that BBLP must provide?

The annual plan is available online and lists what services BBLP provide. However this is being reviewed and is in the process of being developed ready to be available from April.

- With the lengthsman grant funding for 2018/19 being reduced to zero, does a parish council still need to be part of the lengthsman scheme? Could some of the easier tasks (such as work to the verges) be undertaken by the parish council members or volunteers?

This depends on whether the verge is part of the highway or if it belongs to the landowner whose land it adjoins. BBLP would strongly advise against unqualified individuals from working on the network, although the grant funding is reducing to zero in the next financial year, permissions will still be required. It's previously proven beneficial where a lengthsman co-ordinates with the Locality Steward regarding what works are planned to be undertaken to ensure that works by the parish council or works by BBLP are not duplicated or do not clash.

- Does the parish Lengthsman have to be self-employed or a contractor, or can a parish team be trained to undertake these duties – If so, will BBLP offer the training?

It is the decision of the parish whether to subcontract the Lengthsman duties or use parish council members. BBLP can look at how the Lengthsman induction can be provided differently to let the Parish Council know what is required of the Lengthsman scheme as we recognise it can be more efficient to employ directly rather than subcontract.

Drainage, ditches and enforcement

- BBLP are supposed to have serviced the village gullies twice this year; however this can neither be confirmed nor denied as there is no evidence of this. Can the village be notified in future when the gullies will be cleaned so it can be witnessed?

BBLP operate a gully programme that covers the whole county at a rate of one locality per month, this programme is published to the Locality Stewards and so if requested this information can be provided. As the gully cleansing progresses, more gullies are being discovered and so the current 12 month programme is being reviewed to extend this to 18 months.

- It's understood that BBLP try to enforce ditch and gully cleaning by landowners, however historically Herefordshire Council have told land owners that the council will look after everything within six yards of the highway and so BBLP have no right to enforce the cleaning.

Where there are verges that belong to the adjacent landowner, the responsibility for ditch and gully cleaning lies with the landowner. Herefordshire Council have the duty to drain the highway of water but the clearing of ditches is an exercise of power rather than an exercise of duty.

- It would be helpful to know the duties and enforcement rights that Herefordshire Council have?

Herefordshire Council does have the ability to enforce landowners to clear ditches but work with landowners as much as possible as enforcement is considered the last option.

- 45 years ago, Herefordshire Council was responsible for clearing under the bridges that were over streams or had walls that were six foot tall or more. Where does responsibility for this lie now?

This is dependent on specific examples. BBLP are not aware of the legislation where the six foot high rule was enforced.

Grounds Maintenance/PROW

- Herefordshire Council cut the budget for weed spraying a few years ago, but is there now any money that has been made available for this?

There is no financing in the current plan to provide this service.

- PROW footpaths are regularly overgrown with vegetation. Is this lack of maintenance a budget issue?

Unfortunately we don't have budget to rectify all defects but all PROW enquiries should be referred to the locality steward who will inspect and raise jobs as necessary.

Major Projects

- Do we know how many routes will be selected for consideration for the bypass?

No specific numbers as yet – the routes will be presented to cabinet members in December, with consultation in the New Year.

- Where can the video of the City Link Road be found?

The video can be found on the Hereford2020 website along with further information and other future projects.

Community Commissioning Model

- Will the process be clear?

Yes, all the guidance will be in the toolkit which is under preparation and will be distributed to those who are interested. A briefing note is being prepared to ascertain interest.

- Does this mean that whoever pays is in effect jumping the queue which means other works do not get undertaken?

No, we still have the annual plan to deliver, and any work delivered under the CCM will not delay that and will be resourced in addition.

- Can you confirm that Balfour Beatty are not required to deliver the project on the ground.

Yes that is correct, the commissioner can consider other providers as long as they are competent to do so but you will still require authorisation to undertake the works.

- When will the Parish Councils have to start paying money towards a Commissioning Model project? For example, would the initial site investigation cost money upfront? There's a concern the project budget could be spent prior to the work beginning on site and then no finances will be available for the works themselves.

Although the site assessment by the Locality Steward is not chargeable, there may be elements required that do have an associated cost, such as traffic assessments, however it's likely that the majority of the project costs will be in the delivery. BBLP will provide approximate costs and/or percentages for each element of a project but are nervous to provide accurate figures as there may be factors that are unknown until work begins on site. As it will be Herefordshire Council that hold a project's budget until the works are complete, the council will be taking an element of budget risk.

- If a parish council have taken advice from the police for improvements, what if BBLP don't agree with the advice given or if this advice does not suit what is offered in the commissioning model?

As the highways authority, we like to think that we are aligned with police advice. If the parish council is not satisfied, this can be escalated through Herefordshire Council.

- Although the Commissioning Model look good on paper, who pays if the project runs over-budget?

This is dependent on the arrangement between the parish council and the chosen contractor, the contractor can hold the risk but the parish council can also be exposed to this. To limit this risk, BBLP will provide approximate figures for works in advance but this does not guarantee that there cannot be an overrun. BBLP will also be absorbing the design liability and CDM (Construction Design and Management Regulations) risk, whereas should there be a financial risk Herefordshire Council should be able to help as the council will hold the project budget.

- If CDM applies to volunteers then this will be a deterrent. Therefore there needs to be some give and take.

The parish council are under no obligation to undertake works through the commissioning model however CDM applies to all. By holding the CDM design liability, BBLP do not intend to deter volunteers, just limit risk.

- If a parish were to look at resurfacing a road within their area, would HC or BBLP match fund this?

This has happened on other schemes, however resurfacing is very expensive and so it is very rare that a PC could afford to match fund this but we can look to innovations to support the community, such as the commissioning model. We would like to never say never to a PC looking to undertake the resurfacing though and so we would support them if they were to look in to the opportunity of a bank loan or seeking match funding from developers. It is worth noting however that Section 106 money from developers cannot be used for resurfacing, but there are ways to be creative to still use this money to improve the roads.

Traffic management

- Does BBLP have a way to license traffic lights? The lights can be in place without works being undertaken, the lights break or the lights are left up after work has been completed.
The in-house licensing team meet quarterly with the main utility providers and are active to address any issues. Any roadworks are regularly inspected however should there be an issue with traffic lights this can be reported either via Herefordshire Council website or by telephone. If a person is unsure about whether traffic lights have been left in place when the work has finished, using roadworks.org website can show start and finish dates for when the traffic lights are licensed to be in place.

Please log any reports or service request at Herefordshire.go.uk or call 01432 261800