

WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL

18 JULY 2024

CABINET MEMBER FOR HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT: COUNCILLOR PHIL LARRATT

Report Title Additional Capital Funding for Highway Maintenance

Report Author Nick Henstock, Assistant Director Highways and Transport

List of Approvers

Monitoring Officer	Catherine Whitehead	22/05/24
Chief Finance Officer (S.151)	Martin Henry	22/05/24
Communications Lead/Head of Communications	Becky Hutson	22/05/24

List of Appendices

NONE

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To seek approval from Council to provide for an additional £10million of Capital Funding for the purpose of increased highway maintenance.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 West Northamptonshire, in common with local authorities across the country, is experiencing a decline in the condition of its highway network in general. This is down to several factors, car use, the size and weight of cars continues and, the cost to fix failing roads continues to increase whilst harsher weather becomes more common and allocated funding reduces or fails to keep up as the demand on spare budgets becomes ever more stretched. Overall highway condition has been identified as one of the most significant issues for the Council to address as part of its key

corporate priorities for better connected communities and thriving towns and villages, as well as one which our resident's reference most commonly.

- 2.2 It is currently estimated that to halt the decline in the condition of the highway network an additional £8 million is required each year above the current allocation. Any additional funding above this figure should result in an improvement in the overall network condition and a reduction in the backlog figure (in real terms). Historically the Council has received central Government support for pothole maintenance over and above the final settlement as part of the budget. Unfortunately, this was not the case this year and following a second very wet/cold winter, the road network has further deteriorated.
- 2.3 Last year the Council did make significant investment in new machinery which has improved the efficiency of the road maintenance in terms of the quality and longevity of the repair as well as value for money.
- 2.4 The Additional funding therefore builds on this investment and will be used across the network including an extension to the intended surface dressing programme, a micro asphalt programme, an increased road resurfacing programme and a footway surfacing programme. The funding will also allow for a small number of bridge maintenance schemes where the use of the bridges is currently limited due to their structural integrity as well as resolving issues around drainage across West Northants. It is also proposed to utilise some of the funding to carry out a trial of an innovative surfacing technique (in-situ recycling) that reuses the existing material to reduce both cost and overall carbon emissions and if successful would enable more sustainable repairs to the authority's rural network.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 It is recommended that Council approves the recommendation of Cabinet to provide an increase in the capital programme of £10 million additional funding/borrowing to deliver additional Highway Maintenance.

4. Reason for Recommendations

- The additional funding will fund a programme that will slow the decline of our network and in many areas see improvement.
- The programme has already been confirmed as deliverable as part of the continuity planning by officers during this year's budget setting.
- There is little mobilising costs and delivery can be combined with existing work programmes and via the already let, Highways Maintenance Contract.
- The additional funding will allow repair of the worst affected areas as well as prevent the further decline of our most vulnerable areas prior to the next winter season.
- There is a clear indication from both members and residents alike that the condition of our roads is a top priority and that there is mass support for both increased funding and removing obstacles to repair.

5. Report Background

- 5.1 The highway network in West Northamptonshire, in common with many local authorities, has been in a state of managed decline for several years. This means that based on the current level of funding (local revenue funding and central government capital funding) the condition of roads and footways in West Northamptonshire has been getting worse year on year.
- 5.2 A calculation was undertaken to understand the level of additional capital investment required to improve the carriageways and get them to a satisfactory level of maintenance/condition, this was last undertaken in 2023 identifying a figure of £8million per annum.
- 5.3 To reduce the Maintenance Backlog, it is necessary to spend more than £8million additional to the current budget each year.
- 5.4 An additional sum of £10million would allow for:
- An extension to the programmed surface dressing programme
 - A micro asphalt programme.
 - An extension to the planned carriageway surfacing programme
 - A footway surfacing programme
 - Additional bridge maintenance schemes
 - additional drainage works.
 - And a trial of inset carriageway recycling
 - Investment in machinery that will make our maintenance more efficient.
- 5.5 Surface dressing (commonly referred to as tar and chippings) is a low-cost surface treatment that allows the carriageway to be sealed preventing the ingress of water and so preventing the formation of potholes. This increases the life of the carriageway and if carried out at the appropriate time will delay the need for more expensive resurfacing by at least 10 years. Prior to the surface dressing taking place defects in the carriageway surface will be repaired. Surface dressing is weather dependant and must be carried out during warmer dry conditions.
- 5.6 Micro asphalt is an alternative surface treatment that in addition to the properties of surface dressing can fill minor carriageway defects at the time of treatment and so generally can be utilised on roads in a poorer original condition. It is less weather dependant than surface dressing but cannot be utilised in wintry weather.
- 5.7 Carriageway surfacing normally will include the removal of the current surface layer before replacing the surface layer, in many circumstances it is necessary to also remove and replace lower layers of the carriageway in addition to the surface. Carriageway surfacing can be carried out in all but the coldest conditions providing the removal and replacement can be carried out in the same shift.
- 5.8 In-situ carriageway recycling is a method of reconstructing carriageways and involves the breaking up of the surfacing, new cementitious material being added to the resulting material to enable it to be re-laid to form a new road surface.

5.9 Progress will be monitored by the Property and Assets Board with updates to the Capital Approvals Board on a quarterly basis.

6. Issues and Choices

6.1 West Northamptonshire Council could decide not to fund this increase to the capital programme which would result in the continued decline in the overall condition of the highway network.

7. Implications (including financial implications)

7.1 Resources and Financial

7.1.1 Delivery against this project will be monitored throughout the financial year and the service will liaise with the Capital Finance Team to ensure that all activity charged to this budget is capital in nature.

7.1.2 There will be a resulting charge to revenue for borrowing costs as a result of creating this additional £10m capital budget. The additional cost to the authority's revenue budget for undertaking this work is will average around £470k p.a.

7.1.3 The funding will be managed as two phases of £5m the first phase will commence in the summer and focus on preventative maintenance which will enable those areas that are vulnerable to harsh weathers are protected prior to winter. The second phase will focus on traditional resurfacing and will be fully designed and priced for delivery alongside the delivery of phase one and will aim to be on site between Dec 24- Mar 25.

7.2 Legal

7.2.1 There are no specific legal implications arising from the proposals.

7.3 Risk

7.3.1 There are no significant risks arising from the proposed recommendations in this report.

7.3.2 However, there are risks associated with not proceeding with the proposals contained in the report. Should the investment not be made then the condition of the network may continue to worsen, continuing resident dissatisfaction and a negative perception of West Northants as place to visit and or do business.

7.4 Consultation and Communications

7.4.1 Engagement with residents through the Council's customer complaints and feedback processes and monitoring of traffic defects continues to show strong support for further investment to be made in improving highways.

7.4.2 Subject to approval of this funding, the objectives and outcomes of this additional investment will be communicated to residents and local communities via the Council's corporate

communications channels. WNC and Kier will continue to work together closely to inform and engage the public and other key stakeholders on the works which will be carried out if the additional funding is allocated. with key stakeholders and the public via the established channels.

7.5 Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny

7.5.1 This proposal has not been discussed by Overview and Scrutiny.

7.6 Climate Impact

7.6.1 This proposal will result in a negative impact with regards to emissions due to the processes involved in highway maintenance much of which is due to the materials involved in repairing carriageways and footways. It is not possible to quantify this until a programme of works is agreed.

7.7 Community and Poverty Impact

7.7.1 The programmes of work that are carried out because of this additional funding will be carried out across the whole geographic area of West Northamptonshire. Additional investment in West Northamptonshire's roads will provide a positive impact on local communities and support the Council towards achieving its corporate strategic priorities for better connected Communities and thriving towns and villages through an improved highways network. Better roads are a factor in mobility across the authority and as our new corporate aims are to ensure equity for all living in West Northants, investment in the roads should be seen as a vital investment.

8. Background Papers

8.1 Report to Cabinet 11 June 2024