

Appendix 1. Minutes 19 November 2020.

Mr Andy Wilde Interim Head of Highways, Shropshire Council.

5200km of network, the vast majority being rural. Insufficient funds available for maintenance. Slowing down the rate of deterioration is a constant challenge.

Rural network is inspected once a year. Defects marked up in accordance with Shropshire Council Policy, and orders placed for the contractor, KIER. A new system, using teams of Highway Rangers, has been set up. Before an inspection, Rangers check roads using self-delivery model "*Find and Fix*"; driving down each road, finding and fixing defects including potholes, grips into ditches, cleaning signs, cutting back hedges, similar to the former Lengthsman system. As a result, fewer defects are recorded when road is inspected - a more cost-effective way of maintaining the asset.

There is a maintenance backlog. Highways Maintenance would like to spend less on potholes and more on preventative maintenance. It is trying to get into a smarter position, investing earlier and more wisely.

Surfacing dressing is a very cost-effective way of maintaining the asset.

In 2020 the Department for Transport confirmed an £8m award for surface dressing giving 3 to 4 weeks for the work to be mobilised. With 170 sites county wide, this was a massive undertaking, the largest surface dressing program the county has undertaken. No warning was given that these funds were coming. No time was available to consult the public or to notify them of where works would take place. Time constraints forced Highways Maintenance to select sites which didn't need preventative maintenance, and although it may appear roads with little wrong with them were chosen, the surface dressing will safeguard them for the next 10 to 15 years, giving more time to plan, prepare, and target roads which the community consider a high priority. This is the reason why stretches such as Black Hall to Cwm Cole were repaired, rather than areas considered a higher priority by residents and the Parish Council.

The South of the county has suffered due to lack of awareness of drainage and how it needed to be maintained. However, the service is evolving, and doing things differently from 12-18 months ago.

Feedback from the community is important and it is intended that it should form part of the Highways Maintenance Plan.

Comment: Although surfacing dressing on stretch between Black Hall and Cwm Cole is looking great, the drainage problems were not fixed before the work was done. Each autumn water runs over the road as larger pipes are needed in the culvert. There is also an open culvert which was completely blocked, allowing water to flow onto the road and causing the initial damage. Two years ago, at a Parish Council meeting, the Portfolio Holder said £27m was to be allocated to drainage mapping. Clearly drainage is not being maintained before roads are re-surfaced.

Answer: There are now two in-house jetting and camera surveying teams, providing ability to mobilise more quickly into locations such as those described. Usually a contractor plan is agreed 8 months in advance. Ideally, more notice would have been given by the Department of Transport; a survey completed and culvert replaced before surfacing dressing, but the requirement was to spend the money. Two teams worked together; one doing preventative work, another the surface dressing. Due to weather constraints, the surface dressing team caught up with the preventative team, forcing a decision whether to stand down a crew charged at £16,000 per day or surface dress roads that had not had the prep work done. The Portfolio Holder did make the commitment, but since then the

gully emptying model has changed. Gullies are now emptied once a year, whether they need it or not. A rural ditching programme has been reinstated this year. A local contractor has been engaged to complete ditching and grip work. This is vital to the asset – poor ditch and grip maintenance contributes to the poor state of the roads.

Comment: If inspectors are coming in December 2020 / January 2021 may parish councillors go out with them, to confirm which roads are a priority to residents, which would inform decisions in the event another award is made at short notice?

Answer: Engagement with the community is important, and local knowledge often far superior. However, the Inspection Team is purely fulfilling its statutory function – gauging potholes – if 40mm deep it is a pothole, if less than 40mm it isn't. It would be better to engage with the Area Technician, Alan Merrick, and/or the Highways Manager, Andrew Keyland. (Noted: Mr Wilde will ask Andrew Keyland to be in touch.) Residents are encouraged to log problems on the Shropshire Council website. The information is sent on to the Area Technician who will investigate and follow up.

Comment: Two councillors toured the parish with Alan Merrick in the spring, highlighting the worst sections, why did Mr Merrick have no input into which roads were surface dressed?

Answer: Because time was too short. Local areas now have a discretionary capital budget, called a Minor Works Budget. Some of the problems flagged up to Mr Merrick may fall into this category. Mr Wilde will liaise with Mr Merrick to consider residents' concerns and what can be targeted out of the discretionary fund.

In-house drainage teams give more flexibility to deal with broken pipes, dig downs, and troublesome issues. It has been difficult to get this type of work completed by KIER. Through a combination of changes at KIER and the self-delivery model it is hoped improvements will be seen. The frustrations of residents are understood and accepted.

Comment: The Parish Council is aware of how to report defects on the Shropshire website, and it tries to encourage residents to use this system. As there are only about 100 households in the parish, the number of complaints may not be high, despite the roads being in very bad condition. There is a real concern that these very rural roads will never rise up the list as insufficient complaints are logged.

Answer: It is hope that with Find and Fix teams working ahead of the annual inspection, an improvement will be seen in these roads. Llanfair Waterdine is the type of place a contractor may struggle to get to – and whether they hit target dates is monitored. Residents may be able to point to places where defects have been marked up but not repaired. Highways Maintenance is trying to get all these roads treated by in-house gangs who go along a stretch of road and deal with everything they find, looking hedge to hedge to see what work needs to be undertaken. Local communities have been frustrated by the KIER contract as it has not delivered in the way that was needed, and works important to parish councils have not been completed.

Comment: Re road closure on Powys side and volume of diverted traffic. Even though traffic was not officially diverted through Llanfair Waterdine, anyone who knows the roads or has a satnav will take this route. The road has been significantly degraded in the last 3 or 4 months, if we were not meeting remotely due to COVID and you had driven here tonight, you would have had to slow down to a snail's pace to drive through some of the potholes, and the unofficial passing places are

quagmires. There will probably be more road closures on the Knighton to Newtown road, sending more traffic through the village. How do we prioritise this as it is a mess?

Answer: It would be best to make representations to the Area Technician.

Mr Wilde offered to send a team to do bespoke inspection and route assessment. If there are problems that were not there 6 months ago, they will look at what remedial action can be taken.

Comment: Re area where recycling vehicle went off the road. Road Closed signs were put up as it is considered dangerous, but as no physical road closure put in place, heavy vehicles were still going through. It is agreed that this remains a danger. The Parish Council does not want the road closed; it wants the area fixed.

Answer: Mr Wilde confirmed Mr Andrew Keyland is aware of this problem.

More enquiries are received from areas in the south, linked to the condition of the roads. There are insufficient resources to deal with this. The area covered by Mr Merrick will reduce in size due to a restructure. There will be 16 smaller areas rather than 12 larger ones. Resources in the south of the county have not been sufficient to deal with issues experienced. Area Technicians have been overloaded and have struggled to cope with demand. This is the reason for some of the delays in resolving issues highlighted.

Comment: Foreman of team repairing the bridge on the Powys side said that someone from Shropshire council had asked for funding because the diversion from a Powys road was ruining a Shropshire road.

Answer: Very difficult, as the same thing happens when Shropshire shuts a road, and traffic utilises Powys highways. Shropshire does try and liaise with Powys over maintenance, but Powys's investment priorities are often slightly different.

Comment: The B road which serves the valley is of great significance. It is the major link between the top end of the valley and Knighton. It is used by English and Welsh residents alike. Severe flooding in August 2020 meant that 3 bridges were out on the main road, and significant damage caused. It was disappointing to be told by Andrew Keyland that none of the diverted traffic should be coming through Llanfair Waterdine, and signs were put up. The reality is most people do not follow the official diversion which would take them on a 20-mile route to back to Beguildy, which is only 5 miles up the valley. No-one with a satnav or knowledge of the roads would follow this route.

The link from Knighton on the Shropshire side all the way up to The Panny above Dutlas is a crucial piece of road for the wellbeing of the whole community in this valley. It needs to be properly upgraded with suitable passing places. This road is needed by the emergency services; school busses, and people going about their work. It is crucial the significance of this road is taken more seriously by Shropshire Council.

Answer: Mr Wilde will speak to Andrew Keyland about this. It is very difficult to ensure road users follow official diversion route. Shropshire Council has to divert traffic onto a like for like road, but these are often quite significant diversions, and people find alternative routes.

Comment: As a resident living in the western part of the parish, I am heavily affected by the road closure and diversion of traffic. My property is inches from the side of the road, and vehicle numbers have gone from 2 or 3 cars a day to sometimes 2 or 3 a minute. Cars are travelling at excessive speeds, nearly hitting residents on more than one occasion. The road is well beyond the need for surface dressing. It is significantly degraded, and you would struggle on parts of it even in a

4-wheel drive. It is now affecting other council services we receive. As it is not considered safe to send the refuse lorry on this road, we have to bag up all waste for smaller cars or vans to collect. No rubbish has been collected for nearly a month.

Answer: Mr Paul Beard looks after the waste department. Mr Wilde will speak to him and the area manager, and ensure the Parish is updated.

Comment: Could a Traffic Working Group be set up and a stakeholder relationship established as has happened in Clun?

Answer: Officers have struggled to find the time to have monthly meetings with parish councils. Mr Wilde suggests liaising with the Area Technician and is happy to be involved himself.

Comment: The Chairman reported a drainage problem, where water is being diverted into a resident's garage. Who is the best person to contact about this?

Answer: Please provide the location and the resident's contact details. Mr Wilde will ask Mr Jonathan Stigwood, from the in-house reactive drainage team, to be in touch. Mr John Bellis looks after land drainage, but Mr Stigwood will assess what is causing the problem first.

Mr Wilde concluded by confirming that he would be happy to attend a Parish Council meeting again if it would be of value. He confirmed that feedback is very helpful in developing the service.

The Chairman and Councillors thanked Mr Wilde for joining the meeting.

End.