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Welwyn Hatfield Highways Liaison Meeting
2 March 2022

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the WELWYN HATFIELD HIGHWAYS LIAISON MEETING held on Wednesday 2 March 2022 at 7.00 pm via Microsoft Teams.

PRESENT:	County Councillors	T. Kingsbury (Chairman), M. Artemi, P. Zukowskyj
	Borough Councillors	D. Bell, J. Boulton, B. Fitzsimon, G. Hayes, A. Hellyer, T.Kingsbury (as above), F. Marsh, J. Quinton, J.P. Skoczylas, P. Smith, C. Stanbury, R. Trigg, F. Wachuku, P.Zukowskyj (as above)
	Parish Councillors	Ayot St Peter Parish (P. Lee)
OFFICIALS PRESENT:	County Officers	Highway Locality Manager HCC (P. Gellard) Team Leader Flood Risk Management HCC (AHardstaff) District Service Agent (M.Craig) Ringway, Service Development and Communications Manager HCC (R.Payne) Senior Asset Manager & Team Leader HCC (P.Simpson)
	Borough Officers	Environment and Parking Bereavement Manager (K.Roberts) Parking & Playground Services Manager (E.Robova) Democratic Services Assistant (V. Mistry)

6. INTRODUCTION AND CHAIRMAN ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

It was noted that Councillor Bill Morris, Welwyn Parish Council did not join the meeting as a result of not receiving the MS Teams link.

7. NOTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 12 OCTOBER 2021

The notes of the meeting held on 12 October 2021 were confirmed as a correct record.

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8. TRANSIT RINGWAY SEASONAL UPDATE

Councillors received a presentation from Rob Payne, Ringway, Service Development and Communications Manager, Hertfordshire County Council, on the Ringway Service evolution and Seasonal Issues.

Members noted the scale of the Highway service. The Highways Service was responsible for planning, managing and maintaining one of the busiest highway network in the County, which included 5,456km of footways and cycleways, 5,100km of carriageways, 115,000 street lights, 168,200 drains and 13 million m² of grass to maintain. In maintaining the infrastructure, the service had undertaken the following on the highways, 20,000 potholes filled, 8,500 footway jobs and 40,000 street lighting repairs. Councillors were then given a quick explanation of each category of maintenance and what each category did. For example, Cat 1 – emergency and urgent repairs.

On data capture and analysis, Officers stated that the service had gotten smarter over the past few years especially in the way information was captured and how it was used. On fault reporting, the service trialled AI interpretation using photos that members of the public sent, the AI then analysed the photos and could see if there were any faults on the road such as a pothole. Officers stated that routine inspections were now supported by RoadAI and roads could be assessed digitally. Operational information was collected from different areas such as drains being emptied, underground pipe surveys and grass cutting and this was captured on the GIS system. The information can then be available across the service.

On roadAI for safety inspections, Officers stated that they used RoadAI to support the Safety inspection process. The data could be used multiple times for Traffic Sign surveys, Pre site visits and understanding of the existing layouts, CVI data capture, Road Safety Team site assessments, Cycleway inspections and Asset data collection. It was noted that it was a safe way to visit a site and could inform engineers there was a problem at the site, for example, road signs missing.

On collecting and analysing data using GIS, Officers stated that they started using Esri GIS in 2017 for the drain service and had developed this further and they now collected data on underground pipes, grass cutting, safety fence inspections, salt bins filling and vegetation enforcement. It was noted that the programme was for 18 months and started in October 2021. It was noted that other uses of Esri GIS virtual operations hub were Asset Management systems, Future works programmes, Asset intelligence Road AI, Cyclical works collector app. It could help with decision making and predicting when problems may arise.

It was noted that Ringway were currently working on Cat 1 Services such as Potholes, Storm clear ups, damage to trees and drainage and flooding. Winter Services such as Gritting which will take place until end of April 2022. Cat 5 Services such as Grass cutting and also working on year round programmes such as drain cleaning, safety fencing, street lighting and traffic signals.

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Councillors discussed the service and the following points were raised:

- Councillors asked who cleaned the road signs and if they were cleaned regularly? Officers stated that the signs were all cleaned in 2016-17 as part of the restoration project. Currently there was no program in place to clean the road signs on a cyclical basis. Officer stated that they would discuss this with other County officers and see if they could receive any funding for a program where the road signs were cleaned every 2 or 3 years.
- Councillors asked if every street lamp on average needed replacing every three years and asked if they were meant to last longer than that? Officers stated that it was mainly the fuses that blow or lamps with LEDs that need rewiring and it was not the light bulbs that needed changing.
- Councillors asked if the GIS software picked up road signs and barriers? Officers stated that the software would pick up road signs and will also notify when they were missing and identify what type of sign it was, for example a school sign. With the software, officers could identify where all the signs were and could send engineers to that location.
- Councillors also asked if the software picked up small signs on lamp posts? Officers stated that they were not sure but would have a look into it and see if they were picked up by the GIS software. It was noted that the signs were parallel to the lamp post and may not be picked up by a forward facing camera.

9. FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT

Councillors received a presentation from Andy Hardstaff, Team Leader for the Flood Risk Management team at Hertfordshire County Council, on Flood Risk Management.

It was noted that where roads were affected, they should always be reported through the Highway Fault reporting system. A guide to reporting flooding issues can be found here: <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/recycling-waste-and-environment/water/flooding-in-hertfordshire.aspx#flooding>

As Highways were the lead Local Flood Authority, they had to produce a strategy, do investigations, keep a register of structures and features, they have permissive powers to carry out works, for example, surface run-offs and groundwater, do statutory consultee on major applications and regulation of ordinary watercourses.

It was noted that Highways had done an analysis of flooding across districts due to events being localised and differing sizes of districts. It was noted that Dacorum saw the worse weather between August 2020 to July 2021. Within that period, Highways wrote to 438 properties in approximately 36 locations. Looked to carry out 59 separate investigations, 4 of which were quite significant in nature. It was noted that Broxbourne was not included in the map as the town did not experience any flooding during that period.

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There were some issues with investigations such as needing to screen all reports of flooding, the complexity of investigations were independent of scale, there were demands of balancing workload post flooding, there were some difficulties with coordinating with other Risk Management Authorities (RMA) and being mindful of the impacts of flooding to those who were affected.

Councillors were shown a map of modelled predicted flood risks. It showed a degree of uncertainty, areas where flooding was predicted but did not occur, areas where flooding occurred but was not predicted and areas where flooding was predicted and it occurred. The model helped predict what would happen and reduce the possibilities of flooding happening.

Councillors noted the 8 hotspots in the Welwyn Hatfield area that required further investigation based on history and the modelled flood risk. Some of the areas were Travellers Lane; Hatfield, Robbery Bottom Lane, Oaklands; and Swallowfields, Swiftfields and Knella Road in Welwyn Garden City.

Councillors noted the implementation of new flood risk management schemes. The potential for Natural Flood Risk Management to be applied in Hertfordshire would be explored by the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) through the project supported by Thames Regional Flood and Coastal Committee (RFCC), which was initially based on two pilot areas in Long Marston and Harpenden. The LLFA would explore with the RFCCs the potential for funding schemes that could be used to support action by individual property owners in areas where larger engineered structures were not viable. Working with Thames Water Utilities Ltd and Anglian Water Services the LLFA sought to identify areas for the retrofitting of SuDS where there was insufficient capacity in the sewerage system.

Councillors noted some of the advantages and disadvantages of Natural Flood Management (NFM). Some advantages were tree planting, low costs and community engagement. Some of the disadvantages were engagement with landowners, staff resources and long-term management.

Councillors noted some of the advantages and disadvantages of Sustainable Drainage (SuDS). Some of the advantages were that the SuDs were legible and multifunctional. Some of the challenges were that the shared provisions were restricted and it was not easy to secure maintenance.

Councillors noted some advantages and disadvantages of Property Flood Resilience (PFR). Some of the advantages were the ease of mobilising and viability for single properties. Some of the disadvantages included not being universally popular and the short lifespan of the measures.

It was noted that it was important to ensure local people understand their risk to flooding and coastal change, and know their responsibilities and how to take action.

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- Councillors asked who was responsible for home flood defence for private homes within Welwyn Hatfield where the water run-off was from the highway. Officers stated that in terms of protecting a property against flooding, the responsibility was with the property owner. Everyone within the Borough was responsible with how they deal with flood on their property. But if a particular piece of infrastructure was causing a problem, this would need to be looked at on a case by case basis.
- Councillors asked who they should report issues to with regards to flooding and blocked pipelines, and who in County needed to take action? Officers stated that it was a highways issue but the riparian owner was responsible for the water draining onto the highways. Officers stated that the only enforcement powers that County had, in their capacity as the lead flood authority, was in circumstances where ordinary water courses needed to be cleaned and maintained to ensure water flowed through them. It was noted that a site visit would help County assess the problem and it would need to be reported to Highways and prioritised on the system as appropriate.
- Councillors asked how would they know whether a ditch at the side of the field was an ordinary water course? Is there a definitive map of where they were located? Officers agreed to send a link of the map to Councillors. It was noted that water courses were effectively ditches that carry water.

10. HIGHWAY DRAINAGE

Councillors received a presentation on the County's Highways Drainage from Peter Simpson, Senior Asset Manager & Team Leader at Highways Operations, Hertfordshire County Council (HCC).

Councillors noted that with the effects of climate change, Hertfordshire recorded the wettest August and October in 2020. High intensity storms had also impacted Hertfordshire and had continued for a longer duration. There had been an increase in growth, urbanisation, natural and built drainage and topography such as Lea Valley, Water Lane and The Wash. Highways has a multi-agency approach and works with other companies because of the connectivity between infrastructure and borough and district councils, water companies, land owners, environment agencies, Highways England, network rail, internal drainage boards, Canal river trust and British Waterways board.

On the Approach to Management & Maintenance, it was noted that under the Highways Act 1980 there was a duty to maintain a safe passage on the highway including empowerment to drain the highway. The surface water management plans were referenced in the County's local transport plans for sustainable strategy and the 'Roads in Herts' document which was being updated. County has a Drainage Gully Emptying & Cleaning Service, which was approved by Hertfordshire County Council at Cabinet in December 2017. The service was safe and operational, affordable, sustainable, maintainable, had a good asset management and risk based approach to the service. Highways also look at the frequency of cleaning such as silt levels, flood risks and records, maintenance history and customer enquiries.

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In regards to infrastructure, it was noted that in Welwyn Hatfield there were 629 culverts, 347 subways, 89 pumps including 2 pumping stations adjacent to dual carriageways, 1 river bridge, 1 balancing tank, 546km of ditches, 3,000 soakaways, French filter drains adjacent to dual carriageways, 181,000 road gully drains which included 2,800 footways and cycleway gullies.

It was noted that there were 3 different types of maintenance, Planned Maintenance, Reactive Maintenance and Improvements / Structural Maintenance. The planned maintenance looked at cyclical emptying and cleaning of gully drains, which were cleaned on either 6-month cycle, 24-month cycle or 18-month cycle. Reactive Maintenance looked at emergency works and minor repairs which responded to new reports and incidences. This would be done in line with the County's councils defect management approach regarding intervention levels and response. Category 2 (Serviceability) Drainage Register, Investigation Works, Improvements and Structural Maintenance looked at more significant and complex schemes such as Major Projects A120 Flood Alleviation and Bypass Scheme.

It was noted that Highways had done some research on the customer journey and had improved the user experience of reporting faults and giving customers more information about the fault. Research showed that users preferred the word 'drains' rather than gullies. Highways now show when the last routine visit was for gully cleaning and service history.

Councillors raised the following points:

- Councillors noted statistics on the number of gullies in Welwyn Hatfield and queried why there was only 1 bridge included as there were more bridges in Welwyn Hatfield. Officers stated that the other bridges might not be owned by County. It was noted that County were still data cleansing and the officers would make a note to check the data/ verify the data and asked Councillors to let them know if they had any more information for officers to look into.
- Councillors asked if County maintained a certain number of ditches or whether there was a particular length that was maintained per year? Officers stated that the site location of a ditch was maintained and not the actual meterage of the ditch. Councillors asked what the return period for maintenance of ditches was or whether it varied? Officers stated that they have a prioritisation list in terms of proximity to the urban environment, and people and properties, but also in terms of deposition and spill going into the ditch. Also the ditch can be overgrown and more prone to build up of detritus and require a more frequent maintenance regime. It was noted that a cyclical cleaning program was not in place at present.
- Councillors asked what the response time for remedying a blocked gully, and wondered whether a 12month intervention period was appropriate? Officers stated that the timelines had come out of the flood scrutiny in July 2021. There was also a council motion that addressed the response times and looked at the service levels. It was about investigating and looking at

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trends and making sure the blocked gully did not cause a flood because it will be connected to other infrastructure in the area. Officers have looked at what is affordable and a reasonable approach to manage the risk and level of funding. The response time was based on trend analysis, risk and investigation of drains.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Welwyn Hatfield Highways Liaison meeting will take place on the 13 October 2022.

Officers asked Councillors to email them if they had any topics of interest they wanted to discuss at the next meeting.

Meeting ended at 8.52pm
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