

WINCHESTER TOWN FORUM

PUBLIC MEETING - ROAD AND PATHWAY REPAIRS AND CLEANING IN WINCHESTER

2 September 2004

1. **Chairman's Introduction**

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting approximately 45 members of the public, representatives from local community organisations and City and County Councillors.

He explained that the purpose of the evening was to provide an opportunity to discuss the repair and cleaning of roads and pathways in the Winchester town area.

2. **Presentation on Highway and Footpath Maintenance**

The Forum heard a presentation from Chris Wilson, Hampshire County Council's Assistant Chief Engineer.

Mr Wilson explained the division of responsibilities between the County and the City Council. The County Council was responsible for the maintenance of all the adopted highways from the motorway and major trunk roads to footpaths.

The City Council was responsible for street cleaning, land drainage and acted as agents for the County Council with regard to traffic management orders, and grass cutting (by the side of speed limited roads). They are also responsible for Parking.

The work of County Council Engineers was divided between The Castle and four sub-regional divisions, of which the Winchester district was part of the East Team based at Petersfield. It was noted that the East area also encompassed East Hampshire District Council and Eastleigh Borough Council. In the Winchester City Council area the County employed three local engineers and dealt with 850 miles of road, with one engineer covering the roads in the Winchester City area.

A lot of County work is run from the Castle and Mr Wilson explained that this included traffic management schemes, improvement schemes (such as the recent works at Fishers Pond, near Colden Common), street lighting, trees maintenance and the ROMANSE traffic information system. This was in addition to major maintenance schemes, repairs to bridges and winter maintenance.

Mr Wilson stated that highway maintenance work was divided into three main categories:

1) Reactive maintenance

This included dealing with drainage, road markings, potholes and road and footway inspections. He explained that the condition of roads and footways

were inspected in intervals of between once month and once a year, depending on its amount of use and importance.

2) Special Maintenance

This covered the larger schemes such as road reconstruction, re-surfacing or surface dressing and improvements to drainage. However Mr Wilson explained that the demand for such schemes exceeded the available budget so the County used a prioritisation system to ensure that the most deserving works were dealt with first. The system includes an independent assessment of the condition of roads, for which bids have been made by the local area engineer.

3) Regulatory Function

Mr Wilson reported that the new Traffic Management Act imposes responsibilities on Local Authorities to prevent congestion through better planning of repairs and use of temporary traffic lights. However, it was noted that Local Authorities had to allow emergency repairs by utility companies and also facilitate Police road diversions following accidents.

It was also explained that, as part of the County's regulatory function, the Engineers dealt with unauthorised signs and notices by writing to the owner/promoter and requesting that the sign be removed within 28 days. However, Mr Wilson explained that dangerously located signs could be removed immediately.

Similarly, in cases of over grown vegetation letters were sent to the landowner stating their responsibility for their trees and hedges. Mr Wilson added that, once the correct landowner had been identified, this method was usually very successful.

Skips and scaffolding that used the public footpaths or highways also required licensing and the correct insurance by the supplier, which was administered by the Engineers' Department.

At the conclusion of his presentation, Mr Wilson underlined the importance of the public reporting problems with the highway network and explained that in rural areas a good working relationship had been established between the Department and a representative of each of the Parish Councils. In the town area a similar working arrangement was conducted with the Ward Members.

The contact telephone number for the Winchester Sub-Unit is 01962 848544.

3. **Presentation on Highway and Footpath Cleaning**

The Forum heard a presentation from John Hill, Winchester City Council's Client Services Contract Officer in the Environmental Health Team.

Mr Hill explained the duties of the City Council's role with regard to waste management and street cleaning. Although the actual work was contracted out to Serco (and Richard Bradley from Serco was also in attendance at the meeting), the City Council managed the contract, set and monitored performance and quality targets and methods of working in accordance with

the 1990 Environmental Protection Act. Mr Hill also reported that the Act set categories of street cleanliness.

The Forum heard how, in terms of street cleaning, roads were divided into the following categories and that heavier used roads and pathways were cleaned more regularly than others:

- Urban Roads in Town Centres and Shopping areas
- Urban Roads in high density residential areas with terraced houses and flats
- Urban Roads in low density residential areas with detached and semi detached houses
- Motorways and trunk roads
- Rural roads

Winchester town centre was swept before 8.30am every day and the surrounding roads were continually de-littered up to 6.00pm. Some of these town centre roads were swept three times a week (such as North Walls, the out of town shopping centres, and College Street), some weekly (such as Alresford Road) and some monthly (such as Canon Street and Chilbolton Avenue). All other roads were swept on a 8 week cycle. Mr Hill explained that the road sweeping did not take place during the peak traffic hours to avoid delays and only operated between 6.30am and 8.00pm to avoid nuisance to residents.

In terms of car parks, Mr Hill advised that these were de-littered either daily or three times a week.

The City Council also employed a “hit squad” (through Serco) which could respond to residents’ complaints within an hour. The Forum also noted that the City Council managed 130 litter bins in the town centre which were emptied daily and twice a day on Saturdays. There are a further 160 litter bins in the suburban area which are emptied at least weekly.

The Forum noted that the total yearly cost of the street and pathways cleaning service was approximately £700,000 which equated at £15 per household per year. Mr Hill reported that customer surveys had demonstrated a general satisfaction with the quality of street and pathway cleaning in Winchester and that this had been underlined by the Team’s good results in the recent Best Value Review.

In his presentation, Mr Hill stated that this work was complemented by the efforts of other organisations such as the Winchester Litter Pickers, the Cathedral, the railway station and the various town centre sponsors of litter bins.

At the conclusion of his presentation, Mr Hill commented on the increasing challenges to the Team to maintain its standard of work in the light of the problems associated with the town centre’s increasing evening economy, traffic levels and Sunday Trading (that would have otherwise provided a quiet day to clean up).

4. **Public Comments and Questions**

A number of the public and a City Councillor present commented on the need to better control overgrown vegetation and particular concerns were raised in regard to Romsey Road. Mr Wilson replied that responsibility for cutting back vegetation generally lay with the resident or landowner concerned. The County only has a limited budget for this work and only cuts highway trees and hedges, or non-highway vegetation where there was a significant hazard. In cases where the landowner was incapable of maintaining their trees and hedges, the Department could recommend the names of suitable private contractors. With regard to roadside weeds, Mr Wilson explained that the pesticides used these only took effect on live weeds after a period of 2-3 weeks.

Others present commented on the state of individual footpaths or road surfaces, including Romans Road and Taplings Road, and these concerns were noted by Mr Wilson. A member of the public suggested that new footways should be made to withstand the weight of heavy goods vehicles that frequently had to park on the pavements during deliveries so as to prevent traffic congestion. However, in response, Mr Wilson stated that to construct or repair all footpaths to this standard would be prohibitively expensive, but that this strengthening was in fact now carried out in limited areas. In response to comments about the poor repair by Utilities of parts of the pedestrianised High Street, Mr Wilson confirmed that utility companies were under a duty to repair to the standard that was there before they undertook their repairs (following a short period of temporary reinstatement).

Concerns were raised in regard to gritting of footpaths, roads and bus routes in the winter. Mr Wilson stated that the County was intending to improve arrangements for footway gritting next winter. Councillor Knasel (the City Council's Portfolio Holder for Economy and Transport) explained that further details on the priority salting routes were available at the County's website:

<http://www.hants.gov.uk/highways/WinterSalting/whichroadswesalt.html>

With regard to concerns raised about the litter bins in the public parks, Mr Hill explained that these were managed by the Community Services Department of the City Council.

Other concerns were raised regarding better educating the public so as not to create so much litter, dealing with cigarette butts, the need to quicker repair pot holes more quickly, and the frequency at which some streets were cleaned. Other concerns were raised regarding the difficulty of taking a complaint to the right person at the Council and being able to contact them by telephone. It was also suggested that the Police should, as part of an occasional deterrent measure, use the CCTV coverage to "blitz" acts of late night public disorder around the High Street.

A town ward Councillor raised a constituent's concern with regard to the removal of the steps from Alresford Road onto St Stephen's Hill (opposite St Johns Road). He suggested that although the steps may have been removed for sound safety reasons, in such instances, there should have been better communication with the local residents.

In response to comments regarding the poor state of the un-adopted roads and footpaths around Teg Down Meads and Hill Side Close, Mr Wilson agreed to contact the developer to try and influence a speedy and satisfactory resolution to the problem.

The Forum also heard concerns about the poor state of many of the Council's public conveniences and, in response, Mr Hill stated that the Abbey Gardens conveniences were cleaned three times a day and that the Council was considering installing a chemical in the urinal that reacted with urine to produce a more pleasant and less pungent smell. In response to further comments about the Jewry Street conveniences, Mr Hill explained that following a £8,000 renovation, it had been decided to continue to close these toilets overnight to prevent their continued misuse. The Forum noted that the site would be re-developed (including the toilets) as part of the new Winchester Cultural Centre.

A number of the public present commented on the problems posed by parked cars obstructing the road sweepers. The Forum noted that this was currently dealt with by manual sweeps, but agreed that alternative methods should be investigated, such as prior notice to residents (so that they could park elsewhere) and Members discussed a possible role for Neighbourhood Wardens.

Several of the public who spoke, praised the City Council for the managing to keep the streets and pathways relatively free of litter and graffiti but concerns were raised about industrial waste from High Street retailers and society's general attitude to litter.

5. **Conclusion**

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Chairman thanked Mr Hill and Mr Wilson for their presentations and the public for their comments and suggestions. These would be further considered at the next Councillors' meeting of the Forum on 13 September 2004.

The Chairman also gave prior notice of the next Public Meetings:

- 7.00pm 4 November 2004: Vision for Winchester
- 7.00pm 1 February 2005: Congestion and Air Quality in Winchester

The meeting commenced at 7.00pm and concluded at 9.00pm

R Pearce
Chairman