

Transport, Infrastructure and Strategic Housing Scrutiny Panel

DATE 15/09/2026
REPORT OF Paul Evans, Assistant Director Infrastructure
SUBJECT Pothole Resilience and Communications

STATUS Open

CONTRIBUTION TO OUR AIMS

This report supports the Council's aims by promoting safe, resilient and well-maintained highways that enable residents, businesses and visitors to travel safely and reliably. It contributes to place-based outcomes by supporting network condition, accessibility, customer confidence and effective use of public resources. The report also supports environmental and financial aims by highlighting the importance of planned preventative maintenance, durable repairs, improved data, value for money and reduced repeat investigations.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an overview of pothole resilience and highway maintenance within North East Lincolnshire and outlines how the Council manages highway defects through an established risk-based inspection and maintenance approach. The report highlights the impact of winter 2025/26 on the highway network, the operational response to increased demand. Primarily this report aims to provide the panel with a clear communication plan on how the service will engage with the public around this contentious issue. Further work to explain the full approach to reactive and planned maintenance including potholes will be discussed at November's Housing, Infrastructure and Transport panel.

This report will focus on a communications activity which will be undertaken to provide better public understanding to pothole resilience and highway maintenance across the borough.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

The Scrutiny Panel is invited to consider:

This panel will consider the information that the service proposes to share with the residents of North East Lincolnshire over the winter reactive maintenance period (November to April).

1. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

North East Lincolnshire Council has a statutory duty under Section 41 of the Highways Act 1980 to maintain highways that are maintainable at public expense. NELC is responsible for approximately 386 miles of adopted roads and 479 miles of adopted footways. Potholes and carriageway defects are managed through routine inspections, public reporting, dynamic risk assessment and prioritised repair activity. The Council must demonstrate that appropriate inspection arrangements are in place,

defects are assessed and prioritised, and repairs are completed within reasonable timescales to support its statutory defence under Section 58 of the Highways Act 1980.

During winter 2025/26 the service experienced a significant increase in highway maintenance demand. Between December 2025 and February 2026, 518 pothole repairs were programmed through routine inspection activity, representing a 134% increase compared with the same period during the previous year.

Customer reporting also increased substantially. Reports relating to potholes increased by more than 900% when compared with the equivalent period the previous year, whilst carriageway defect reports increased by more than 1,000%. These figures demonstrate the extent of deterioration experienced during the winter period and the resulting demand placed upon the service.

To respond to these pressures, operational capacity was increased through the deployment of additional resources and contractor support. Throughout this period, repairs continued to be prioritised in accordance with the Council's established risk-based assessment process to ensure resources remained focused on those defects presenting the greatest risk to highway users.

Residents play a critical role in identifying emerging defects and providing valuable intelligence regarding highway condition. Reports can be submitted through the MyNELincs portal, whilst alternative reporting routes remain available through Customer Services for those unable to access digital services.

The significant increase in highway defects experienced during winter 2025/26 resulted in a corresponding rise in customer enquiries and reports. During this period, effective communication became increasingly important to ensure residents understood how defects were assessed, prioritised and programmed for repair. Based on these reports, the service recognised a gap in communication with residents, therefore, moving forward the service is proposing to work closely with communications colleagues to support public awareness of the challenges being experienced across the network and the actions being taken in response.

As part of the Council's winter communications package, a proactive communications activity will be undertaken to explain the impact of prolonged wet weather and freezing temperatures on road conditions, encouraging residents to report defects through the appropriate channels and provide reassurance that additional resources had been deployed to respond to increased demand. Communications also sought to improve understanding of the Council's risk-based approach to highway maintenance and explain why some defects may not require immediate investigation or may already have been identified and programmed for repair.

Alongside traditional media activity, residents will be kept informed through the Council website, social media channels and routine communications relating to highway maintenance programmes. This helps promote transparency, encourage accurate reporting and provide updates regarding highway maintenance activity taking place across the borough. The winter communications package will also provide opportunities to highlight the wider programme of planned maintenance and investment being delivered to improve the long-term condition and

resilience of the highway network.

Clear communication with residents remains important in helping customers understand how defects are assessed, prioritised and managed. Improved public understanding of the risk-based approach supports transparency, helps manage expectations and encourages continued engagement in the reporting process. Future communications activity will continue to focus on providing clear, consistent and accessible information regarding highway maintenance priorities, reporting arrangements and planned investment across the network.

In addition to the above, the service publishes an annual highway maintenance transparency report which is available to view on the Council's website, which includes details on road condition, inspections, asset information, number of potholes filled, details of the network, length of roads resurfaced, spending figures, priorities of maintenance, details of streetworks planning, links to other policies and strategies and specific schemes to be undertaken within the financial year. This year's report will be published on the Council's website by the 10th of September.

2. RISKS, OPPORTUNITIES AND EQUALITY ISSUES

Risks associated with highway maintenance include continued deterioration of the network due to weather conditions, increasing customer demand, resource pressures, and the financial impact of reactive repairs. There is also a reputational risk where expectations regarding repair timescales are not fully understood.

Opportunities exist to continue improving highway resilience through planned preventative maintenance, innovation, improved data utilisation, and the ongoing development of condition monitoring technologies. Alongside this is the opportunity for additional service transparency with residents through the use of borough wide communications.

There are no identified adverse equality impacts arising from this report. It remains important that accessible reporting routes are maintained for residents who are digitally excluded or require assistance accessing online services.

3. REPUTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS

Effective communication with residents remains important in managing expectations and maintaining confidence in the service. Clear information regarding the reporting process, prioritisation of repairs and planned maintenance activity helps residents understand how defects are assessed and managed.

There are positive reputational benefits associated with demonstrating a robust and transparent approach to highway maintenance, investment, and continuous improvement. Conversely, persistent defects, delays in repair or misunderstanding of maintenance processes can have a negative impact on public perception of the service.

4. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Highway maintenance activities are funded through a combination of revenue budgets, capital investment, highways capital programme allocations and external

funding where available. Continued investment in planned maintenance aims to reduce future reactive repair requirements and improve long-term value for money.

The 2025/26 highways capital programme had a value of approximately £5.94 million, supporting a range of highway improvement and maintenance activities across the borough.

5. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct implications arising from the recommendations of this report. However, the maintenance of safe highways, footways and crossing points supports safer journeys for children, young people and families travelling throughout the borough.

6. CLIMATE CHANGE, NATURE RECOVERY AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

Highway Maintenance has climate change, nature recovery and environmental implications. Planned resurfacing, durable repairs and preventative maintenance can reduce the need for repeated reactive visits, which may lower vehicle movements, traffic disruption, material use, waste, and associated carbon emissions.

Using longer-lasting repair methods, improving repair quality, and prioritising planned maintenance can help extend the life of the highway asset and reduce the environmental impact associated with repeated short-term repairs. Where appropriate, techniques that reuse existing materials, reduce waste, or improve repair durability should be considered as part of future options appraisal, provided they are safe, affordable, and suitable for local highway conditions.

Emerging technologies such as AI-based road condition monitoring, predictive maintenance, thermal repair techniques, and advanced materials may also support environmental outcomes by helping the Council identify deterioration earlier, target investment more accurately and avoid unnecessary repeat interventions. Any future adoption should consider whole-life cost, carbon impact, operational feasibility, and value for money.

The report does not propose any direct change that would adversely affect nature recovery or the local environment. However, future planned maintenance, resurfacing programmes and innovation pilots should continue to consider environmental impacts, opportunities to minimise waste and carbon emissions, and alignment with the Council's wider climate and environmental commitments.

7. MONITORING COMMENTS

In the opinion of the author, this report does not contain recommended changes to policy or resources (people, finance, or physical assets). As a result no monitoring comments have been sought from the Council's Monitoring Officer (Chief Legal Officer), Section 151 Officer (Director of Finance) or Strategic Workforce Lead.

8. WARD IMPLICATIONS

Affects all Wards.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers and source documents have informed this report:

- Highways Act 1980, including Section 41 duty to maintain highways maintainable at public expense and Section 58 statutory defence.
- NELC highway inspection, highway maintenance and risk-based defect assessment policy information.
- NELC Local Transport Plan programme information, including planned resurfacing and surface treatment schemes.
- NELC Council Plan Performance and Finance reporting for 2025/26, including Local Transport Plan delivery, Infrastructure capital reporting and relevant road safety spend information.
- NELC customer reporting information, including MyNELincs Roads, Footpaths and Cycleways reporting arrangements.
- Department for Transport publications and announcements relating to pothole repair, highway maintenance funding and emerging highway technology.
- Sector research and publications on artificial intelligence road condition monitoring, predictive maintenance, self-healing asphalt, robotic or automated crack repair, infrared and thermal repair techniques, and durable repair methods.

10. CONTACT OFFICER(S)

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