

OPEN

Highways and Transport Committee

4 April 2023

Ward Member Budget Scheme Update

Report of: Tom Moody, Director of Highways and Infrastructure

Report Reference No: HTC/05/24-25

Ward(s) Affected: All Wards

Purpose of Report

1. To provide an update on the operation of the Ward Member Budget Scheme (WMBS) in its first year of operation (2023-4) since approval at Committee following initial two-year trial period (2021-3).

Executive Summary

2. In April 2021 a trial WMBS was introduced to replace the existing area highway groups.
3. A paper was presented to the Highways and Transport Committee in September 2022 that resulted in approval of a new WMBS. This report provides an update on the progress of the new scheme to date in year one (2023/24) including successes and challenges.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Highways and Transport Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the progress made on the operation of the Ward Member Budget Scheme during its first year of operation during 2023-24 and the ongoing work being undertaken with local ward members to identify works and deliver on these across the network.
2. Note the proposed steps being taken as set out within the report to improve the overall scheme delivery.
3. Approve, for the 2024-25 financial year, the annual allocation per elected member of £4,512*.

4. Agree that all Members are provided with a quarterly electronic update on the scheme by the Highways service.

**Noting the decision of Council on 27 February 2024 to reduce Council investment within the capital programme, as set out in paragraph 29 of this report.*

Background

4. The Ward Member Budget scheme was introduced on a trial basis in April 2021 to replace the old Area Highway Groups. The trial ran for two years (2021-2 and 2022-3), with each member allocated a capital budget of £4,200 per annum to use on a specified list of highway activities provided by the Service.
5. The Highways and Transport Committee received an update on the ward budget scheme at its meeting in January 2022, followed by a final report in September 2022 with recommendations on how to deliver and manage the scheme in future years.
6. The Committee approved:
 - A capital budget of £6,500 per Member, per annum (55% increase);
 - The scheme to operate over a four-year period from April 2023 to March 2028 - a total of £26k to each Member plus £20k per annum of administrative costs (£553k per annum and £2.212m over the four years);
 - The previous application process to no longer be used;
 - Individual ward work programmes to be developed based on local intelligence gathered, and engagement with Members; and
 - The proposed new approach will enable much greater interaction between Highways Officers and Members, supporting a key theme coming out of the Member Satisfaction Survey at the time.
7. The revised approach aimed to achieve a number of benefits:
 - To continue to provide a locally determined element within Highways capital works, that contributes to achieving the council's asset management objectives.

- Members would retain the flexibility to prioritise work at the start of each financial year and whether to spend their allocation equally over the four years, combine multiple years or join with fellow Member ward budgets to deliver larger value works.
- Seeking to avoid applications being voided on the basis that they are either not compliant with policy or are already being delivered within the committed Highways work programme. Existing data within systems like Fix My Street would be used to inform work programmes.
- The process would allow a known quantum of work to be programmed from the start of each year, rather than trying to fit in ad-hoc as and when Member applications are received and validated. This would make delivery of the Member budgets more cost-efficient and generate increased value for money.
- Provide greater certainty around budget spend each year. The move to a request-based process aimed to remove reliance on receiving valid Member applications.

Scheme update

8. This is the first year of the four-year scheme. It must be acknowledged that in any programme where decisions are required at the beginning to develop the programme there will inevitably be a degree of delay while those decisions are taken. Progress to end of January 2024 is as follows:
- (a) Participation: All members have been contacted and 76 of the 82 ward members have contacted the officers administering the scheme or sent requests for consideration.
 - (b) The current status of requests by stage of scheme completion is as follows:

Request Status	Number of Requests	Percentage of total
1. Received	254	100%
2. Approved and being developed for delivery	207	81%
3. Approved and work completed	7	3%
4. Approved and work programmed	11	4%
5. Rejected (<i>Not policy compliant or budget insufficient</i>)	29	11%

- (c) All received requests (item 1 in table above) are further broken down in Appendices 1 to 3, as follows:
 - (i) Appendix 1 gives a breakdown of the requests by work category.
 - (ii) Appendix 2 by status whether approved or rejected.
 - (iii) More detail on rejected requests is provided in Appendix 3 (Item 5 in the above table), giving the reason for rejection.
- (d) Scheme administration:
 - (i) A separate budget is provided for administration of the scheme, which was set at £20,000 per annum. This pays for officer time to provide specialist input necessary to review and develop requests and is essential to delivery. Administration is funded from the limited capital allocation the service has available to deliver essential maintenance and improvements to the public highway.
 - (ii) To date, in 2023-4 the time required for officers to administer the scheme has exceeded £30,000. These costs are spread across those for all members. A proposed solution to encourage greater individual responsibility by members is to include the budget for administration costs within the individual member allocations.

Delivery timescales

- 9. Within the WMBS there are a variety of distinct types of highways work that can be requested by members. This is to ensure that:
 - (a) Works carried out qualify within the definition of capital spend; and
 - (b) The works contribute to asset management priorities.
- 10. The time from submission of a request can vary significantly and can be a source of frustration to members. The most common reasons for requests not being progressed is that they do not meet policy requirements or are unaffordable.
- 11. To help address this issue, case studies are shown in Appendix 3 for some types of work that can be requested. Each identifies issues that can be encountered, such as whether work is seasonal or can be

done all year. They provide a typical timeline, together with the activities that Highways officers must undertake to get the request from concept to construction.

Improving scheme delivery

12. Engagement between members and the senior highways officers (SHOs) has improved since the scheme first began in April 2023. This has enabled the SHOs to understand members' priorities and requests and use their local knowledge and available data to help advise where members can best utilise their budget in line with asset management priorities.
13. However, as can be seen in 8 above, there is still significant room to improve in this area. Making improvements needs members to understand how the scheme operates and better collaboration with officers to operate it effectively.
14. Priorities for improvement are identified as to:
 - (a) Encourage effective use of staff resource and reduce administration time to meet the budgeted time.
 - (b) Ensure work is primarily focused on statutory and essential works within the annual capital programme and routine and reactive service delivery.
 - (c) Identify key priorities early in each ward, what works can address these and take timely decisions on which schemes to deliver.
15. To support delivering these improvements, it is proposed to:
 - (a) Continue to communicate with members regarding what the WMBS can be used for and regarding current status of allocations.
 - (b) From the 2024-5 financial year, to include administration costs in the annual member allocations.

Consultation and Engagement

16. Two Member Tutorials were delivered by the Highways Service in December 2022 to launch the new scheme. These explained how the new scheme would operate and covered lessons learned from the trial period.
17. Local elections were held in May 2023 returned a significant proportion of new Members. It was recognised that new members

would require tutorials to explain the scheme but may also want to review any priorities agreed with their predecessors. Information on the highways service (including the WMBS) was provided to all Members following the elections. Two specific tutorials were also delivered to Members via Teams in December 2023.

18. The SHOs have also contacted Members to discuss priorities in their wards.
19. The Highways Service has continued to communicate with Members regarding the scheme during 2023-4. The latest contact in November 2023 provided an update on their budget position, including spend to date, progress on proposals (where received) and an offer to contact their SHO to discuss existing proposals or to identify proposals for consideration. There was a subsequent update at the end of February 2024.

Reasons for Recommendations

20. The Highways Service currently has insufficient capital funding to maintain the current condition of highway infrastructure. The WMBS utilises over £2m of capital funding and it is important that this contributes towards the Council's Highway asset management objectives.
21. The scheme must therefore deliver value for money for ward Members and the Council and whilst aligning to the asset management approach to maintaining and improving the public highways for the benefit of residents, businesses and other users.
22. Officers' primary focus is to deliver the statutory and essential works required to deliver a safe and well-maintained public highway for the Council as Highways Authority. It needs to be recognised that these resources are finite.

Other Options Considered

Option	Impact	Risk
Not applicable		

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer / Legal

23. The Localism Act 2011 introduced the General Power of Competence, which allows the Council to do anything an individual can do, provided it is not prohibited by other legislation. These powers replaced the previous wellbeing powers; however, the use of these powers must be in support of a reasonable and accountable decision made in line with public law principles.

The powers under the Localism Act are drafted wide enough to authorise local authorities to adopt schemes like ward budgets.

24. Furthermore Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 enables the Council to do anything which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive to or incidental to, the discharge of any of its functions, whether or not involving expenditure, borrowing or lending money, or the acquisition or disposal of any rights or property.
25. The Council has a fiduciary duty at all times to the taxpayers and must fulfil its duty in a way that is accountable to local people.
26. The Council as the local highway authority have a statutory duty under section 41 Highways Act 1980 to maintain a highway, the Council should ensure that this scheme does not interfere with that statutory duty.

Section 151 Officer / Finance

27. The scheme budget is £553k per annum. The funding is split between Department for Transport block grant (£370k) and Council investment in Managing and Maintaining the highway (£183k) and is contained in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).
28. This reduces the budget to deliver statutory and essential work in other areas of Highway services. Works to deliver statutory and essential work will be communicated to members later in 2024.
29. The current financial pressures the Council is under have brought significant focus on the borrowing costs of the corporate capital programme. The Council's annual investment in managing and maintaining the highway has been reduced by its decision of 27 February 2024. The annual amount per member is therefore:
 - (a) £370k Department for Transport block grant;
 - (b) Divided by 82 = £4,512.
30. Members can roll budgets over to accrue or combine ward budgets to fund larger schemes over the four-year period. The potential for observed underspends is greater if a large proportion of members choose to do so. This affects the cost of servicing the cost of associated borrowing and adds to the Council's financial pressures.
31. Increased Value for Money: The current WMBS approach is intended increase delivery efficiency. It seeks to deliver this through earlier presentation of requests and priorities for assessment, planning and programming of work, rather than the ad hoc nature of the trial system.

32. This will also enable the Highways Service to integrate delivery of these smaller value works into the larger highway maintenance programmes. This helps ensure the best value possible is being achieved from the funds the Council has allocated for the maintenance and improvement of the public highway.
33. The WMBS contributes to delivery of the priorities in the [Corporate Plan](#) as follows:

An open and enabling organisation	A council which empowers and cares about people	A thriving and sustainable place
Ensure that there is transparency in all aspects of council decision making.	N/A	A transport network that is safe and promotes active travel. Safer and well-maintained roads

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

34. There are no adverse equality, diversity or inclusion implications resulting from this report.

Human Resources

35. Existing staff resources within the Highways Service will be utilised to manage and administer the WMBS. There are no human resource implications of this strategy.
36. The roles and responsibilities of these staff are focused on the delivery of the statutory duties and essential works placed upon the Highways Service. Time spent on non-statutory elements (i.e. those elements that are not directly to meet the council's statutory obligations or to reduce the cost of meeting statutory obligations) reduces the time available for staff for statutory and essential works.

Risk Management

37. The legal risks to the operation of the WMBS are set out in paragraphs 23 to 24 of this report.
38. The financial risks to the operation of the WMBS are set in paragraphs 25 to 32 of this report.

Rural Communities

39. There are no direct adverse impacts rural community resulting from this report.

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

40. There are no direct adverse impacts on children and young people resulting from this report.

Public Health

41. There are no direct adverse impacts on public health resulting from this report.

Climate Change

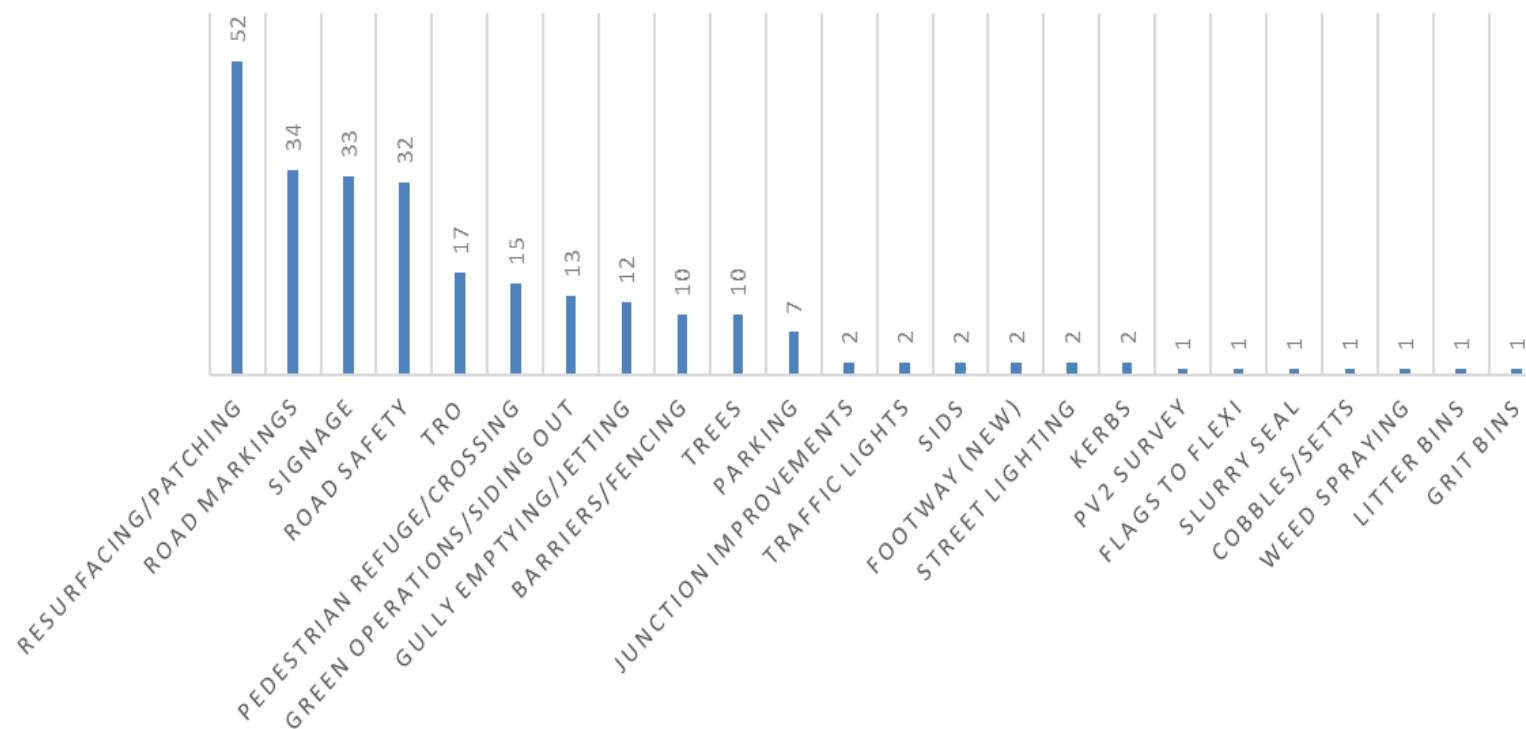
42. There are no direct adverse impacts on climate change resulting from this report.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Domenic de Bechi, Head of Highways Domenic.deBechi@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Appendix 1: Breakdown of all requests by work category Appendix 2: Breakdown of all requests by status Appendix 3: Breakdown of rejected requests and reasons Appendix 4: Case study slides
Background Papers:	Purpose
(Public Pack)Agenda Document for Highways and Transport Committee, 22/09/2022 10:30 (cheshireeast.gov.uk)	Review of Highways Ward Member Budget Scheme (Page 277-288 of Committee Agenda Document pack).

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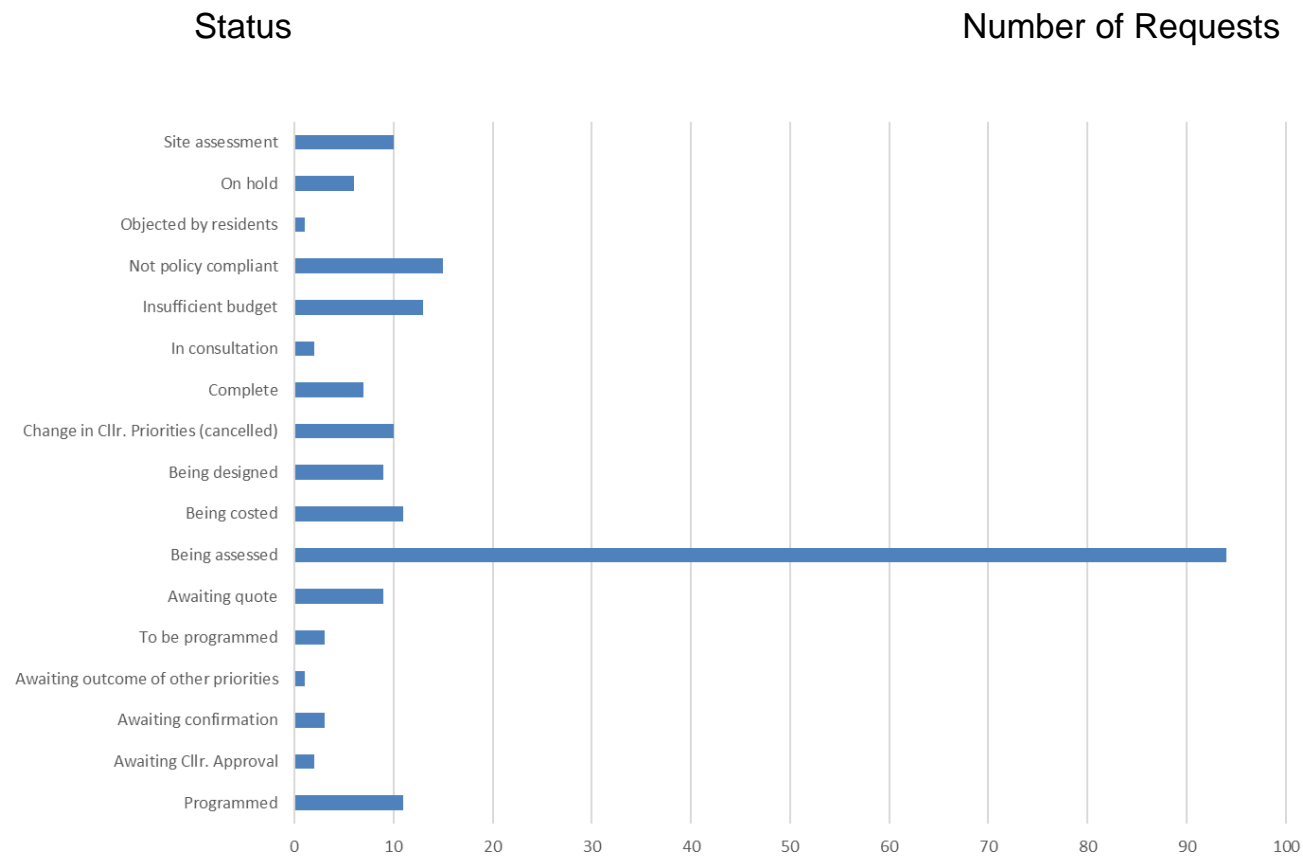
Breakdown of all requests by work category

REQUESTS BY CATEGORY



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Breakdown of all requests by status



Appendix 3

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Breakdown of rejected requests and reasons

Category	Description	Reason
Barriers/railings	A knee-rail or similar barrier	Not policy compliant
Pedestrian crossing	Dropped-kerb with tactile paving	Insufficient budget
Signage	Entrance signs to Village	Not policy compliant
Planters	Installation of planters	Not policy compliant
Speed limit review	Stocks Lane speed review	Insufficient budget
Zebra crossing improvements	Review/Improvements to existing zebra	Insufficient budget
Active Travel scheme	Feasibility of active travel scheme between roundabout and junction on major route	Insufficient budget
L2 - carriageway patching	Carriageway patching	Insufficient budget
Pedestrian crossing	Pedestrian refuge facilities at both ends of street	Insufficient budget
TRO	Holmesville Avenue, extend double yellow lines	Insufficient budget
Tree planting	Earle Street	Not policy compliant
Zebra crossing upgrade to Pelican crossing	Gresty Road	Insufficient budget
Footway surface treatment	Various road on housing estate. Potential to joint fund with another Cllr which was declined	Insufficient budget
Sign cleaning/clearance	Various locations. Potential to joint fund with another Cllr which was declined	Insufficient budget
Signs	Parish boundary signs at all appropriate locations	Not policy compliant
Flood alleviation	Flood alleviation schemes to known problem areas	Insufficient budget
Planting wildflowers	Selected verges	Not policy compliant
TRO	Provision of junction protection markings	Not policy compliant
Disabled parking bays and vehicle crossings	Nicholson Close	Not policy compliant
Relocation of lamposts	Brocklehurst Avenue and Greystoke Road	Not policy compliant
Pedestrian crossing	A533 Request for pedestrian crossing	Insufficient budget
New signage	30mph sign	Not policy compliant
Traffic regulation order (new/amend)	Double yellow lines in various locations along Crewe Road	Objected by residents
Bollards	Cliff Road - Installation of bollards to protect the pavement	Not policy compliant
Traffic lights	Water Lane	Insufficient budget
Speed reduction	Request for a speed/safety review from 60 down to 40 mph	Not policy compliant
Speed reduction	Request for a speed/safety review	Not policy compliant
Speed reduction	Newcastle Road	Not policy compliant
Street name plate	The Broadlands	Not policy compliant

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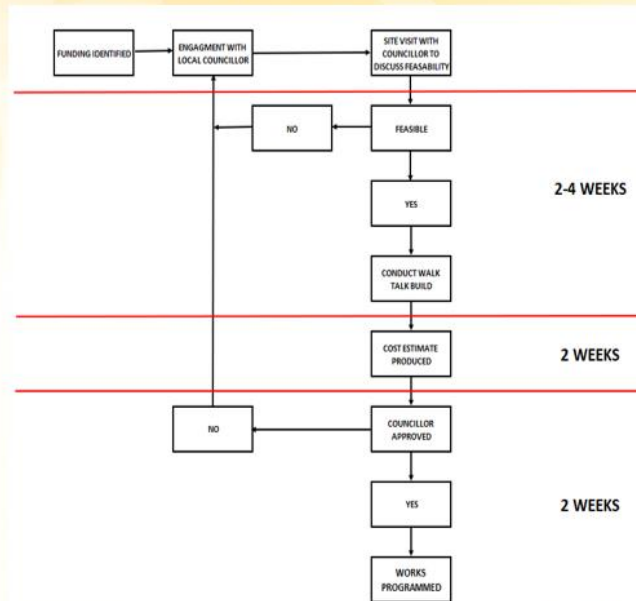
Case study slides

Street Name Plates

- Replacement of damaged/missing name plates
- Deliverable all year round
- Typical cost £500



Timeline for request to be process, assessed, costed, programmed and delivered is typically **6-8 weeks**:



Carriageway Patching

Hand Lay Patching

- Suitable for localised carriageway patching
- Static site (1 site per day)
- Deliverable all year round
- Typical cost per day £4,000 including traffic management



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Surface Treatment Patching

- Suitable for shallow carriageway repairs (urban areas)
- Transient site (multiple sites can be visited per day)
- Seasonal work 1 April and 31 October
- Typical cost per day £3,000 – 4,000



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All changes have been saved

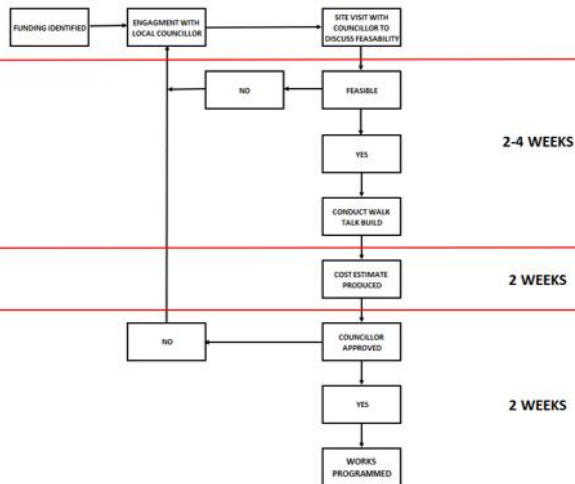
Footway Patching

- Suitable for small scale repairs
- Static site (1 site per day)
- Deliverable all year round
- Typical cost £3,500 including traffic management



- Timescale for delivery of work typically **8-12 weeks**.
- Your Senior Highways Officer will advise best type of treatment for the road/footway selected

Footway and Carriageway patching



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Traffic Regulation Orders

- New parking restrictions
Double Yellow Lines scheme for Shrigley Road / Spuley Lane (Parked cars blocking the junction)
- Deliverable all year round
- Typical cost £5,000 – 6,000



- Timescale for delivery typically **6 – 9 months** if no objections received

