

Overview and Scrutiny Panel Report

MEETING TITLE	O&S PANEL	DATE
Highways and Transport Capital Programme	Environment and Communities	15 December 2021

“I am delighted the Panel have had the opportunity to look at the Highways and Transport Capital Programme. By doing this important work in the build up to the budget review, we can provide an insight into some of the processes used in terms of funding and prioritisation within the programme.”



Councillor John Porter, Chair: Environment and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Introduction

The Environment and Communities Panel met to discuss the Highways and Transport Capital Programme. The meeting was carried out in preparation for the upcoming Overview and Scrutiny Commission review of the budget.

The purpose of the meeting was for the Panel to gain a stronger understanding of the Highways and Transport Capital Programme, particularly in areas such as funding, processes and prioritisation. This was achieved by discussing the programme with Bracknell Forest Council's Executive Director: Place, Planning and Regeneration and the Assistant Director: Highways and Transport.

The Highways and Transport Capital Programme

The Highways and Transport Capital Programme is used to identify the annual highway and transport priorities across the network. The schemes seek to facilitate transport in line with the Council's Local Transport Plan and ensure that the Council maintains the highway in as good a condition as resources allow, having due regard to the Council's intervention policy based on network condition.

The designing of the Highways and Transport Capital Programme each year is a compact process. The level of funding available is not known until Q3 (Oct-Dec) of the financial year. As the programme is 90% (or more) funded by external sources it is imperative the team can identify what that number will be before finalising the programme. Officers must have confidence in the deliverability of schemes, reliable costs estimates and a balanced programme before proposing it to the Executive, who will approve the programme in Q4 (Jan-Mar). The Highways and Transport Capital Programme does vary and finances allocated to schemes can fluctuate depending on the funding available. Characteristics of the programme will usually remain the same each year.

Programme Characteristics

Bid Funding	Increasingly a requirement, often short notice, ring-fenced funding, relevance varies
Grant Funding	Core Department for Transport allocations can vary between years
Scope	Wide ranging needs of a balanced programme stretches core funding
Priorities	Can be changeable, e.g. maintenance demands or emerging issues
Deliverability	Feasibility, design, costing, programming and build phases influence timescales

Funding

Highlighted in blue in the table below are the type of schemes within the programme that are funded directly by Central Government. The schemes that qualify for this must be in line with the Government's national agenda and funding is issued for specific schemes that meet the criteria. The funding for these types of schemes consists of around 90% external sourcing with local authorities contributing (usually provided by developers).

In the green are the schemes that are considered as the core programme. They are funded by two Central Government grants which Bracknell Forest Council receives annually and is supplemented with Borough Capital (Council Capital Funding). They are divided into three areas:

- **Local Transport Plan** – Schemes cover a wide range of transport objectives based on the Local Transport Plan. Included are themes such as walking, cycling, buses etc. Schemes are identified through a variety of ways, including pressures recognised through the network, development needs or changes in travel patterns. Issues such as deliverability and public impact/acceptability are also reflected within the scheme selection.
- **Highway Maintenance Programme** - The Highway Maintenance Capital Programme seeks to ensure that the Council maintains the highway network in as good a condition as resources allow. It also supports objectives within the Council's adopted Local Transport Plan. The Highway Maintenance Programme focuses on the integrity of a wide range of highway assets including carriageways, highway structures, drainage and street lighting. Schemes within the programme are prioritised based on data, with assets in the worst condition being treated first. Condition assessments are conducted annually.
- **Local Highway Schemes** – Reflect local needs. Schemes are usually identified through dialogue with Councillors who have recognised an issue or an opportunity themselves or they have been notified by local residents.

Within the final section of the table are the schemes needed to facilitate development, and so are funded entirely by development contributions. Time scales for the schemes are dependent on progression of the development.

Themes	Influence on programme	Funding
Government Growth Strategies	Access to funding for strategic transport schemes (e.g. A322, A329 and A3095 corridor works)	Specific bids to Gov't, DfT or TVBLEP <i>(LA contribution req'd)</i>
National Transport Goals	Access to funding for specific local transport schemes (e.g. walking and cycling, sustainable travel, EV)	
Local Transport Plan	Sets local objectives for core transport funding, and supports Local Plan delivery	Transport Grant (DfT)
Highway Maintenance Programmes	Provide data/evidence to prioritise core highway maintenance funding	Highway Maintenance Grant (DfT)
Local Highway Schemes	Provide community level projects which address specific needs	Borough Capital
Development Mitigations	Provide funded highway alterations to accommodate development growth	Developer contributions

2021/22

The overall Highways and Transport Capital Programme for 2021/22 totals £7.003m, of which over 90% is derived from external sources.

The Highway Maintenance Grant from Central Government is £1.888m which, alongside a continued local contribution from Borough Capital (Council Capital Funding) of £200k, is to support road and footway maintenance. A further £400k Borough Capital funding is allocated toward the essential lamp column replacement programme. The overall Highway Maintenance Capital Programme for 2021/22 totals £2.488m. Even with this level of funding, the scale of demand for planned maintenance far exceeds the available budget.

The Council also makes additional provision in its revenue budget for reactive highway maintenance work. This is used for routine and urgent maintenance purposes on all highway network assets and includes the delivery of the winter service (road gritting) and the 24/7 emergency response service. The sum allocated within 2021/22 is £2.7m.

Core funding for the 2021/22 Transport Capital programme is made up of an Integrated Transport Grant from Central Government (£726k) alongside developer contributions for transport mitigation measures totalling £3.689m. In 2020/21, the Council was successful in securing additional funds from Central Government through the Local Growth Fund which is aimed towards implementing transport measures linked to economic growth and carbon reduction with a focus on removing pinch points. The 2021/22 programme included the completion of the A3095 (South) Highway Improvement Scheme and improvements to the A322 Sports Centre Roundabout, both of which were part-funded in this way.

As well as large scale schemes, the Council continues to implement local improvements that support the Local Transport Plan. These focus on improving access, mobility and travel choice, highway capacity and road space allocation, road safety, residential parking and traffic management. Additional match-funding has been committed by Silva Homes (£100k) to support further provision of residential parking schemes in priority areas.

The overall Transport Capital Programme for 2021/22 totals £4.515m.

Key findings

- **Councillors and Officers recognise the recent success of projects designed to improve traffic flow in the Borough. The A road corridors schemes were funded directly by Central Government. Bracknell Forest Council is now in a good position on the strategic network to be able to accommodate future growth.**
- **A productive and open dialogue exists between Councillors and Officers. No formal consultation process is in place, this is because the relationship between Councillors and Officers is good. Many schemes proposed by Councillors have been included in recent Highways and Transport Capital Programmes.**
- **Some avenues of funding have remained static over an estimated 10 year period and so resources are becoming increasingly stretched. This trend is likely to continue for at least three years.**
- **Maintenance of existing highway network currently the biggest challenge within the Programme. This is because of funding from Central Government has not been increasing.**
- **Ahead of the 2021/22 Highways and Transport Capital Programme the Department for Transport combined the pothole funding with the Highway Maintenance Grant. As a result local authorities receive more (£500,000) within the grant with the expectation it will be used for highway maintenance, including the repair of pot holes.**
- **New travel patterns emerging in light of the Covid-19 Pandemic. This could have significant impact on future Highways and Transport Capital Programmes but remains unclear how at this stage.**
- **An increasing appetite from Central Government and the general public for a greater focus on sustainable modes of travel. The expectation is Central Government will ring fence funding towards these types of themes and will be expecting local authorities to direct this funding towards schemes that meet the criteria. Bracknell Forest Council is already doing this but there is room for a stronger focus.**

Throughout the meeting members of the Panel were able to deepen their understanding of the Highways and Transport Capital Programme. This was achieved through a presentation delivered to the Panel by the Assistant Director of Highways and Transport, followed by members of the Panel questioning both the Assistant Director of Highways and Transport and the Executive Director of Place, Planning and Regeneration. The presentation provided the opportunity for Panel members to witness first-hand a breakdown of the programme, with a particular focus on methodology. The presentation, alongside the questioning process afterwards, also highlighted several key findings which have been listed in bold above.

With this greater understanding of processes and methods of prioritisation within the Highways and Transport Capital Programme, the Environment and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel have been able to produce this report for the Overview and Scrutiny Commission to consider during the upcoming meeting to discuss the Budget. This will allow the Commission to be in a stronger position when they review the Budget in next month's meeting.

Contributors to the meeting

Councillor John Porter (Chair)	Councillor Robert Angell
Councillor Mrs Tina McKenzie-Boyle (Vice Chair)	Councillor Michael Gbadebo
Councillor Tricia Brown	Councillor Nick Allen
Councillor Mary Temperton	Councillor Mrs Sandra Ingham
Andrew Hunter, Executive Director: Place, Planning and Regeneration	Neil Mathews, Assistant Director: Highways and Transport
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