Southend-on-Sea City Council

Agenda Item No.

Meeting:	Cabinet
Date:	16th September 2024
Classification:	Part 1
Key Decision:	No
Title of Report:	Notice of Motion – Replacement of paving slabs

Executive Director:	Alan Richards – Executive Director for Environment and Place
Report Author:	Chris Read – Service Manager for Highways & Asset Management
Executive Councillor:	Cllr Daniel Cowan – Leader and Portfolio Holder for Infrastructure

1. Executive Summary

1.1. Councillor Stephen Aylen presented a Notice of Motion to Council on 21 March 2024 seeking a resolution that officers relook at the cost benefit and whole life costs of the current council policy (to replace slabbed footways with black dense bituminous material) and taking into account the environmental and cost impact as well as the disruption to the public and that the Council cannot replace paving slabs as the current suppliers are unable to supply imperial ones. Cllr Aylen further detailed that this is despite the fact that since 1971 council policy has been to only use metric slabs so replacement slabs are available if replacement of post 1971 slabs is required.

1.2. The Policy for resurfacing footways was reviewed and approved by Cabinet on 25 February 2020. The report detailed that evidence showed that an improved value for money benefit would be achieved if SCC footway works were completed in black Dense Bituminous Material (DBM) regardless of existing footway type.

1.3. Following, this approval, all subsequent SCC footway works and repairs to date have been undertaken in this way with the exception of Conservation areas, when a moratorium was placed and still where a decision is yet to be agreed.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet:

2.1. Based on the original evidence provided in 2020 and subsequent data and information contained within this report, that the policy for replacing footways with black DBM, regardless of current surface type, is maintained.

3. Background

3.1. The original report in 2020 highlighted that continuing the strategy of replacing like for like would increase backlog of repairs and lead to a greater level of the footway being in poor condition in future years, based on the current budget available at that time. As this was profiled to 2050, we believe the basis of this information and its findings remains unchanged.

3.2. We have highlighted key reasons for maintaining the current policy in Section 4 of this report and in addition, tried to answer some of the direct points raised in the Notice of Motion (NoM).

3.3. Just to note, the NoM detailed the use of a 'bitumastic type surface'. For clarification the council use Dense Bituminous Material (DBM) for all our footway resurfacing and repairs, which is a standard UK wide specification material.

4. Reasons for Decisions

4.1. Financial – DBM is 20% cheaper than slab replacement and based on the lower cost of sourcing metric slabs as original imperial-sized slabs are harder and more costly to procure. Based on our budget for footway resurfacing of £3.5m, the use of BDM allows us to resurface pavements by approximately 3 additional roads per year.

4.2. Ageing Network - the NoM detailed that many slabs have been in place for over 100 years. This is clearly one of the issues as they are now very brittle in nature due to their age. Vehicles traversing the footways, over proper vehicle crossings or improperly, has led to slabs lifting or cracking, which leads to an increased risk of tripping accidents and maintenance costs. We undertook approximately £900k of footway related repairs during 2022/23, rising to £1m in 2023/24, with a large proportion of this related to defects (cracking, trip hazards, rocking etc) occurring on slabbed footway that required repair (replaced with DBM). By replacing the footways with a more flexible material, they are more durable to the weight of vehicles and less likely to produce these defects, risks or maintenance costs.

4.3. Lifestyle changes (in part due to the COVID pandemic) - such as increased use of deliveries, prior to the pandemic, in 2017 18% of households had

groceries delivered. This has risen to 38% in 2024 and is predicted to be around 45% by 2028.

4.4. Highway Claims – between 2022/23 and 2023/24 the number of footway claims went down by nearly 10%. This correlates with shifting our footway programme to utilising DBM material and specifically targeting high risks areas (e.g. around trees) with the same type of repair.

4.5. Disruption to residents – the advantages of resurfacing with DBM is that it can be fully completed in sections and reopened to the public, meaning there is reduced disruption for residents.

4.6. Material risks – all construction materials in their component states are potentially hazardous, for various reasons. However, the surfacing material we use is a UK standard specification, compliant with British Standards and used across the UK. It is noted that many local authorities including many of our near neighbours in the Eastern Highways Alliance (EHA) are moving in this same direction of undertaking more DBM or bituminous type footway surfacing rather than replacing slabbed footways with the same material. We work closely with the EHA and share best practice and undertaking regular bench marking exercises for all aspects of highway and believe for all the reasons detailed in this report that the practice of laying slabbed footways, likely to suffer vehicle loading is not recommended.

4.7. Environmental – all types of surfacing material create some form of environment impact. It is growing increasingly difficult to reduce the requirements of carbon without dramatically increasing costs. Therefore, the industry is looking at better ways of using recycled material and offsetting carbon requirements by the introduction of more trees etc. However, it is worth noting that while bituminous material has its drawbacks, cement, the key component of a slab, requires the heating of limestone in giant kilns to 1600 C and produces equivalent levels of carbon dioxide to the amount of cement produced.

4.8. Storage – linked to the environmental impacts and in order to efficiently deliver a rolling footway programme a significant volume of slabs would need to be stored to service the works. This would attract additional costs for yard space, lighting and security. The Alternative is to organise delivery of slabs to site on a job by job basis but the impact of this is that we would be unable to access the benefit of buying in bulk and we would also need to accommodate the storage of slabs on the site while we are we working on which would significantly increase the footprint of the construction which would undoubtedly have an impact on the residents from a parking and access perspective.

4.9. Health & safety – due to the weight of an individual slab, and HSE Manual Handling recommendations, each slab would need to be mechanically lifted. This adds to the time required to undertake the works, resulting in increased traffic management costs and would also necessitate the requirement for additional plant on site (again adding further cost). Avoiding this issue is the main reason why existing slabs to be replaced are broken up. However, they

are sent to a local recycling centre to be reused in future schemes. DBM surfaces are very much safer, significantly reducing the risks of trips and falls for all.

4.10. Weed Growth – while it is accepted that bituminous surfaces do attract an element of weed growth, this would apply to any surfacing, including slabs. As a slabbed footway ages and settles the gaps in the slabs often increase attracting detritus and promote weed growth and act as channels for tree roots.

4.11. Surface Water run off – all new DBM footways are predominantly laid with the fall towards the carriageway or verge. However, any area of footway (slabs included), where the ground becomes saturated, would be prone to surface water flooding. This also applies in relation to freezing in that any footway would become slippery underfoot in certain weather conditions.

5. Other Options

5.1. To revert back to the pre-2020 approach, however this is not recommended due to the reasons set out in the main body of the report.

6. Financial Implications

6.1. There are key financial implications here, in those current footways with a slabbed surface, due for replacement, would incur increased costs up to 20% per scheme.

7. Legal Implications

7.1. The Highways Act 1980 specifically, we have a statutory duty under Section 41 to maintain the highway at public expense. In addition, Section 62 of the same act, gives the general power of improvement, including the right for a highway authority to alter or remove any works previously executed.

8. Policy Context

8.1 If the decision to revert back was made a new Policy would have to be taken through a cabinet cycle, whereas staying as we are, would require no further update, other than a review of the conservation areas in due course. The conservation area footways in Southend cover approximately 3.2% of the total footway area.

9. Carbon Impact

9.1. Unchanged

10. Equalities

10.1. All works are considered equally and enhancements are made where possible or required. It is believed that a bituminous surface offers a better surface for those users using mobility scooters, wheelchairs and the elderly.

11. Consultation

11.1. None required

12. Appendices

12.1. **Appendix 1**: None

13. Report Authorisation

This report has been approved for publication by:		
	Name:	Date:
S151 Officer	Joe Chesterton	6 September 2024
Monitoring Officer	Susan Zeiss	29 July 2024
Executive Director(s)	Alan Richards	30 July 2024
Relevant Cabinet Member(s)	Cllr Daniel Cowan	19 July 2024