

Suffolk seeks to manage the asset

A good asset management based approach to highway maintenance is more important than ever as budget pressures mount on local authorities says Suffolk County Council which is also making good use of surface treatments.

Making best use of cost effective maintenance treatments at the most appropriate time is a key part of a successful highway maintenance asset management plan. It leads not only to least financial cost, but also reduces environmental impact.

One council which takes this approach seriously is Suffolk. It has a strategic Transport Asset Management Plan (TAMP) accompanied by a Highway Management Operational Plan (HMOP) which sets out details of inspection, maintenance and repair standards.

Suffolk County Council's assistant director for highways and transport Andrew Guttridge says: "Suffolk is a largely rural county and as such has a high percentage of minor yet locally important roads. Most of these roads have evolved from little more than cart tracks and have not been designed or constructed to engineering standards.

"The last three winters have caused considerable stress to the whole network and each has considerably increased the occurrence of potholes. The challenge between winters has been not only to permanently repair the worst of the damage, but also keep up with programmes to prevent as many roads as possible from getting to the condition where they become much more vulnerable to winter weather. Additional Government funding has greatly helped but has to be used carefully and to maximum effect."

Suffolk's programme for 2010/11 included a range of surface treatments but by far the biggest programme was for surface dressing, covering in excess of 2M.m² of the network. Other treatments included Micro Asphalt (around 80,000m² specified), several recycling options and significant amounts of



Maintenance treatments that are cost effective are proving their worth in Suffolk

conventional surfacing (both Stone Mastic Asphalt and Hot Rolled Asphalt) which total around 400,000m² in the year. A number of sites have also benefited from binder course overlays followed by surface dressing. This has enabled shape and strength to be added to some lower category roads.

Suffolk County Council has long recognised the value of a large annual surface dressing programme and has maintained this despite sustained reductions in overall highways maintenance spend. If used correctly, surface dressing provides good value for money across the whole network, even on the highest classification of roads. This form of treatment however has not always been readily accepted by the public and media and the perception was one of 'flying chippings and broken windscreens'.

The development of premium binders in recent years, combined with high standards of traffic management, means that the public can perhaps see beyond that initial viewpoint



now, as the dressing quickly settles down into an extremely durable surface with good levels of skid resistance. This has allowed Suffolk to use this form of treatment on a number of high profile principal routes this year, in both rural areas and major towns, to very good effect.