

# Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Strategy 2023-2027

## Contents

Introduction .....	3
Asset Management Objectives .....	5
Drivers for Formalised Asset Management .....	6
The Current Situation.....	6
Future Pressures .....	7
Funding and Investment .....	8
Council Funding.....	8
Cross Asset Prioritisation .....	9
Levels of Service.....	9
Performance Management.....	10
Risk Management .....	10
Risk-Based Approach.....	10
Stakeholder and Community Engagement .....	11
Social Value .....	12
Management Systems, Recording and Monitoring of Information.....	13
Climate Change .....	14
Conclusion.....	14
Strategy Review .....	14

# Introduction

This Strategy outlines Wirral Council's approach to successfully managing its highway infrastructure over the next four years, aligned to the current Council Plan and current City Region grant funding settlement. Effective management of diverse and complex assets is delivered within a strategic framework that balances the demands placed upon it with the reality of the council's financial position. Adopting asset management principles is the basis for delivering clarity around standards and levels of service, whilst making the best use of available resources.

The Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Strategy (HIAMS) and the Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Policy (HIAMP) sit within the highway asset management framework and are key strategic documents related to the delivery of the council highway services. The framework shows that this Strategy document is supported by a series of plans that will guide the decision-making and service intervention and delivery processes.

Wirral's corporate priorities, set out in the Council Plan 2023-2027, focus on measures necessary to create and support economic growth and social stability and require highways to ensure connectivity and accessibility. Future highway maintenance activities need to be coordinated with growth and improvement projects. It is essential to consider what resource is available and how funding allocations will be considered and approved.

The Strategy considers national guidance and asset management tools to demonstrate how effective management will limit a predicted decline in the network. The information in this suite of documents will enable the council to embed good highway asset management processes and procedures to ensure effective and considered maintenance of the highway network.

This suite of documents explains the council's highway asset management approach:

- **Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Policy**  
A high-level document setting out the council's approach and how it links with the council's corporate objectives.
- **Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Strategy**  
A key strategic document related to the delivery of the council's highway services.
- **Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Plan**  
A detailed and in-depth description of how:
  - Accompanying guidance and operational policy documents support the management of the highway;

- The council uses asset management tools to develop effective processes to plan, operate, monitor and review the highway network assets;
- The council uses a risk-based and proportionate approach to maintenance interventions and service delivery; and
- The council interacts with service users.

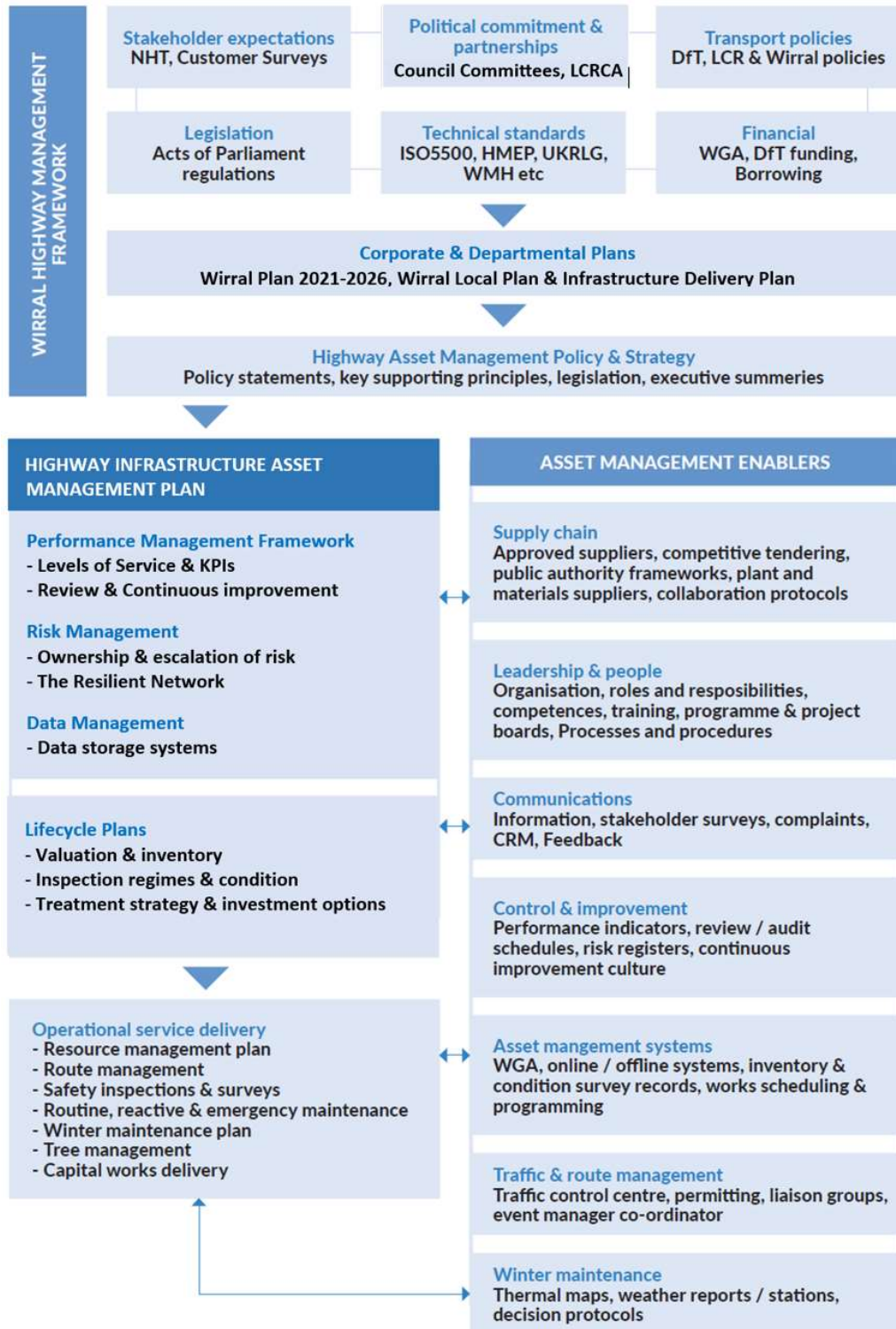


Fig.1 - Diagram showing the Asset Management Framework Structure.

Wirral Council's Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Strategy aims to optimise the use of available resources, enhance the safety and efficiency of our road network, and ensure the longevity of our infrastructure. In implementing an initiative-taking and data-driven, evidence-based approach, the council will aim to deliver a well-maintained and sustainable highway network that meets community needs while maximising the value of public investments. Challenge from local Members is also vital to ensure that local priorities are incorporated into delivery plans.

## Asset Management Objectives

To support the ambition set out in the Asset Management Policy, this Strategy focuses on the following to ensure the highway network supports its varied and fundamental service users:

- Enhance the condition and longevity of the highway network through proactive and proportionate maintenance interventions;
- Minimise disruption caused by reactive highway repairs and associated costs;
- Maximise value for money and carbon savings by utilising cost-effective preventative treatments;
- Provide a safe highway network for all users where collisions and personal injuries are minimised;
- Embed data-led, evidence-based, decision-making and ways of working in all areas of highway activity;
- Foster community satisfaction by providing well-maintained and safe infrastructure; and
- Support Wirral Council's ambitious regeneration agenda, ensuring that new and existing infrastructure will be sustainably maintained.

## Drivers for Formalised Asset Management

In October 2016, the UK Roads Liaison Group published "Well-Managed Highway Infrastructure: A Code of Practice" which promotes an asset management risk-based strategy for levels of service. This enables individual highway authorities to develop an individual approach led by their local needs, priorities and affordability.

Additionally, several legislative requirements have a direct and mandatory impact on the way highway operations are delivered. Combined with political commitment, technical standards, financial constraints, managing stakeholder expectations, following best practices and the climate change agenda, these are the drivers for formalised asset management. These factors are considered against the council's vision and plans, safeguarding the highway network for the people of Wirral and its visitors.

## The Current Situation

Funding to renew or improve highway assets is received centrally from the Department for Transport (DfT). Distribution is devolved through the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) via the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS). To help us determine our Strategy it is important to consider what is currently happening both locally and nationally.

DfT data shows a decline in maintenance conditions across the national and local road network during the last 30 years with minor roads being the most affected. This is suggested as the reason motorists consider road conditions to be getting worse (RAC: 60% of drivers think the state of local roads has got worse in the last year; Nov 2022) (RAC: road treatment and resurfacing falls to the lowest level in five years; Sept 2023). Estimates to remove the national backlog of road repairs claim it would take ten years to complete and cost over £10bn. When analysing funding allocations from a Wirral perspective, the asset modelling suggests that the current backlog to restore these assets to an as-new condition requires a substantial increase in capital funding for planned structural maintenance.

Another factor in explaining the backlog is a reduction in local councils' Revenue budgets. Revenue budgets have been reduced in recent years, combined with considerable inflationary increases; essentially this means a reduction in the funding available for reactive (unplanned) maintenance, which affects condition and public perception.

Population growth, plus new business and housing developments will continue adding new highway assets. These will require management, maintenance and increased funding.

## Future Pressures

The population of Wirral is increasing; estimates are that between 2019 and 2037 the population will have increased by 2.7%, rising to 332,700 people. Whilst the council will continue to encourage sustainable and active travel, the population growth together with new business and housing development, will continue to add new highway assets.

This Strategy underpins the Neighbourhood Services Directorate Plan 2023 to 2027 and will work closely with the Infrastructure Delivery Plan 2020-2035 to address these pressures.

Financial challenges are not a new phenomenon; significantly high inflation levels mean that in real terms, there has been a reduction in the funding available to the council for maintaining the highway network. New infrastructure schemes are delivered by Capital funding in the form of devolved grant (currently CRSTS settlement) as opposed to borrowing. However, those schemes providing public realm improvements and asset creation do add to highway maintenance demands, resulting in greater financial pressures on Revenue budgets.

Moving forward, it is recommended that all regeneration projects should have a fully costed maintenance plan to support them before being approved; consideration of inflationary pressures and transfer of assets by third parties should be an element of this process, together with analytical lifecycle modelling.

The council is committed to achieving 'net zero' carbon emissions associated with our activities by 2030. The design and use of materials to provide maximum life from sustainable sources is a factor in achieving this however, it has financial implications. Using sustainable materials and processes will be evaluated against cost and durability.

Climate change predictions could also cause significant pressures. Extreme weather patterns cause differing levels of deterioration and problems with the highway network. In heat waves, road surfacing can melt and expand under the heat. In periods of heavy rainfall, roads requiring maintenance can fall victim to the appearance of potholes, cracks and other surface irregularities, and be liable to surface water flooding which can exacerbate these problems. Financially, Winter Service provision is onerous due to severe weather conditions not previously experienced.

## Funding and Investment

Responsibility for the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) Key Route Network was devolved to the Metro Mayor as part of the Liverpool City Region's devolution agreement. As a result, Wirral Council is eligible for City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) funding initially provided for a 5-year forward programme; this is an unprecedented Government investment in local transport networks and is a driver for meaningful change. It is for projects that support inclusive economic growth, provide better connections between places, and encourage more people to use sustainable and zero-carbon transport but includes planned maintenance.

Details around how the council intends to prioritise the funding received for the different assets will be detailed further in the Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Plan. This will include, where possible, affording a greater priority to assets that help the wider strategic aims of the council, all of which will be assessed against funding levels and evidence of need.

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total
2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	
£7.29m	£8.00m	£8.06m	£7.23m	£7.19m	£37.77m

Table 1 - A summary of CRSTS funding allocations.

## Council Funding

The council receives a Revenue budget for maintenance works and a Capital budget for new schemes which incorporate maintenance works. These schemes and the subsequent bidding process aim to deliver the best use of budget allocation and must report to the Highway Infrastructure Asset Management (HIAM) Board.

### Revenue Budget

This covers day-to-day expenditure and income, including reactive works which maintain, rather than increase, the value of a fixed asset. The Highways and Infrastructure budget totals approximately £6m per annum net, of which approximately £1.6m is available for spend on routine and reactive infrastructure repair and maintenance. Unfortunately, this level of funding is not adequate for the levels of reactive service that Members and residents often expect and expectations need to be managed by careful consultation and communication.

### Capital Budget

Capital spending reflects investment in an asset and is defined in the Accounting Code of Practice as “expenditure which adds to, and not merely



maintains, the value of a fixed asset.” The council Capital budget is grant-funded through the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS).

The highway Capital programme is determined by a strategic review looking at all assets. Condition data and other intelligence, such as highway inspector knowledge, customer feedback and involvement from Members, have a significant input. A risk-based approach, looking at whole lifecycle forecasting, is considered together with other factors (regeneration projects, utility works and proposed developments) enabling us to develop a programme of forward works that ensures optimisation of budgets and value for money.

## Cross Asset Prioritisation

Whilst annual funding is effectively reduced, cross-asset evaluation is crucial so that schemes address the potential beneficial outcomes across all the assets included in a particular scheme. CRSTS grants are allocated over a specified 5-year period (currently 2022/23-2027/28) and this cross-asset method must be adopted ahead of the bidding process.

The principles to support this include alignment with Strategic Plans, ability to deliver minimum levels of service and consideration of risk within and between asset groups.

## Levels of Service

Levels of Service are statements that combine the council’s corporate aims, including the Council Plan 2023-2027, with the performance of highway assets. They relate to the performance of the network and focus on safety, serviceability, sustainability and accessibility, all within the budgets available.

### **Establishing Levels of Service**

The primary consideration when deciding Levels of Service is to maintain statutory requirements. Additionally, the views of senior decision-makers, stakeholders and the public are sought, and the levels must reflect the funding available.

The current condition of the network reflects the satisfactory level of pre-emptive work undertaken over the last ten to twenty years. Moving forward, the council must aim to maximise the serviceable life of assets in a financially viable and environmentally responsible manner. Likewise, the council will listen to and support our communities and promote the endorsement of sustainable and accessible modes of travel.

## Performance Management

Performance will be monitored to identify progress and to identify areas that require a greater focus. Defining the Level of Service and Key Performance Indicators provides a measure of our highway service standard. They provide a direct link to the council's corporate aims and objectives, plus other council strategy documents. At a minimum level, they satisfy the council's statutory duties. They also take account of the management and mitigation of risk to the service user and the council.

When setting Levels of Service and associated targets, the council will consider local views, and the findings from the residents' annual survey plus the National Highways and Transportation Survey (NHT). The delivery of other services, such as grounds maintenance and street cleansing, may affect the customer's perception of highway maintenance services and associated performance measures and targets will be considered in combination with these other services.

## Risk Management

Risk is present throughout asset management because of the ways the asset may perform and the consequences of failure, combined with several uncertain external factors including weather, changes in budget provision and political direction plus the demand from other service areas.

It is not possible to remove all risks from highway asset management. The management of risk is covered in a project governance process and each programme and/or project will include a costed risk register prior to commencement. This is reviewed throughout the delivery phase and is reported to the relevant programme/project Board and the Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Board.

## Risk-Based Approach

Adoption of a risk-based approach to highway maintenance, taking account of the advice in the ['Well-managed Highway Infrastructure: A Code of Practice'](#) and national policy on road user hierarchy will enable the council to establish and implement levels of service appropriate to the resources we have available.

The council has implemented a road network hierarchy based on use, and local factors rather than just road classification; this includes our Resilient Road Network and Key Route Network (KRN).

To ensure the council supports its approach to asset management, regular training is provided to highway inspectors and other staff to support their competency in asset management and reactive highway maintenance intervention decision-making. The Liverpool City Region Combined Authority has agreed that highway authorities will adopt the UKRLG Competency protocol for the assessment of asset management skills.

Where a decision to outsource an aspect of asset management activities is made, external resource providers must prove competency against the required activities.

## Collaboration and Partnership Working

A key element of the council's strategic approach is building capacity through collaboration and partnership working. There is much evidence of the benefit of finding common goals with other organisations and sharing knowledge and resources to enable outcomes. For this reason, the council collaborates closely with neighbouring Local Authority Highway neighbours and agencies.

Additionally, we work closely with the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA). Keeping people and businesses moving and driving economic growth in and across the city region is crucial so investing in our roads is a key priority for the Combined Authority.

Highway works management increasingly requires enhancement to minimise its negative impacts. To achieve this, we strive to foster positive working relationships with our highway contractors and view this as critical to our partnership.

Some organisations provide a platform for members to engage with each other, providing a vital link between central and local government, supply chain and the highway communities to ensure ongoing improvements in the highways sector. As highway authority, we have membership in these organisations including CIPFA, LCRIG and Adept.

## Stakeholder and Community Engagement

Many groups of people and organisations have a personal stake in the council's highway network. In adopting an asset management approach, we will ensure that the network meets the needs and expectations of these stakeholders as much as possible within the constraints we encounter. That is why we listen to and communicate with all stakeholders regularly, using the most appropriate media.

The communication aims for Wirral's Highways and Infrastructure Service are:

- Communicate Wirral's Policy and Strategy plans for the road network through several accessible channels;
- Have communication channels in place to keep road users up to date on upcoming and live impacts on the network;
- Consult with stakeholders on changes to the road network; and
- Welcome road user feedback to concerns and use road user experiences to help inform service provision.

The council Communications and Marketing Team engages with stakeholders, through several channels, to provide information and seek feedback on plans and schemes. We will listen to, learn from, and consider this feedback against future programmes of work.

We partake in the National Highways and Transport Network (NHT) Public Satisfaction Survey. This gives us public perspectives on, and satisfaction with, highway and transport services. It is a collaboration between UK Highway Authorities, allowing comparison, knowledge sharing, and improvement of efficiencies through good practice sharing. The survey provides us with an understanding of how we are performing in the eyes of our public and provides a consistent standard to help in setting service levels and a means of measuring the impact of service improvements.

It also names which highway authorities are the best performers in the various categories and provides us with the opportunity to gain experience from the good practices of others.

In addition to the proactive approach to stakeholder communication detailed above, customers can report issues or make service requests via the council website and Neighbourhoods call centre. Customer requests are automatically routed to the relevant teams via the corporate customer relationship management (CRM) system and, where related operational activities are required, the highway asset management system. This allows officers to receive requests and provide responses on site via mobile devices.

## Social Value

In 2012, a new Act came into being – the Public Services (Social Value) Act. It requires public sector organisations and their suppliers to consider how the services they commission and procure can improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of an area.

Statutory requirements of the Act apply to larger commissioned highway contracts however, the council encourages all procurement activities to consider an element of Social Value in their evaluation.

This is a very positive move and directly supports the basic principles of our highway asset management objectives which include:

- Improving the social value of sustainable and active travel;
- Enhancement of local community areas: and
- Consideration of biodiversity infrastructure and habitat.

The council has developed a Social Value framework providing ways to identify and measure Social Value. We will be working with procurement colleagues to identify which area(s) from this framework will be included in our tender documents and agree to the weighting they will be given. There are currently exciting and ambitious regeneration plans for community areas in Wirral and we will aim to maximise the highway contribution of social value as part of our commitment.

## Management Systems, Recording and Monitoring of Information

The council's highway asset data is held in a single integrated highway asset management system, Symology, which not only enables key asset data to be collected, stored, managed, and reported but also oversees essential routine operational activities. The functionality provided by the system is critical to optimising delivery of the council's obligation as the Highway Authority. This system includes:

- An asset register containing details of more than 160,000 individual assets, which can be accessed either via a database or on the GIS mapping interface, with each asset type having its own individual mapping layer. Customer requests, maintenance activities and inspections/surveys are all therefore linked to specific assets, providing a full auditable history for current and historic assets.
- A Customer Service module linked to the council's corporate CRM system, allowing the automatic allocation of requests to the relevant team and, where appropriate, prompting of a site inspection via the mobile application.
- Functionality to manage a range of routine inspections, surveys and maintenance activities. Currently this includes Highway Safety Inspections, General Inspections of highway structures, cyclic drainage operations and highway tree inspections.
- Works ordering and management modules allowing the creation of work orders for reactive and planned maintenance activities via both the desktop and mobile applications.
- Network management using the Street Works module, which is linked to the Department for Transport Street Manager system, ensuring the council can efficiently manage its obligations set out in the Permit Scheme for Road and Street activities and New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 (NRSWA).

## Climate Change

Wirral Council declared an Environment and Climate Emergency in July 2019, and through this commitment took action to address the ecological and climate crisis that we face. Key commitments within the declaration are:

- Cut climate-damaging pollution locally in line with global targets, whilst developing resilience to more extreme weather patterns and rising sea levels that impact Wirral.
- Protect and enhance biodiversity.

As a local authority, we can have a positive influence through how we organise our operations and services; the regulations and policies we set; the goods and services we buy; the investments we make; and the example we set to others.

The council is investigating, considering, and embedding new ways of working that help decarbonise the designing and commissioning of highway activities. We will look at carbon emissions not just for an isolated project, but also during the lifespan of an asset (referred to as whole-life carbon costing). This will include selecting treatments, materials and operations that have a low carbon impact across their service life.

The response to the climate emergency will have a significant impact on the management of highway assets. There are going to be new types of assets on the network such as electrical vehicle charging points and additional maintenance implications for sustainable transport infrastructure and modern technologies.

Additionally, where appropriate, highway schemes will address environmental attributes such as tree planting, providing wildlife habitats to support biodiversity and enhancing the natural landscape.

## Conclusion

This Highway Asset Management Strategy and the accompanying Policy have been developed to ensure the highway network and associated assets are designed and maintained in a suitable way to meet the needs of our residents. The requirements are designed to drive continuous improvement in maintaining the safe, serviceable, and sustainable highway network. They will support the council's priorities identified in the Wirral Council Plan 2023-2027.

## Strategy Review

The Strategy will be reviewed annually, together with the Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Policy, so that it remains current and reflects and supports the council's vision and objectives. However, if there are significant changes in national policy, legislation or guidance that affect the management of the highway, the review will be brought forward.