

Winter Carriageway Conditions

January 2024

Following the period of extended wet weather that we have experienced over the festive period the Highways and Traffic Management Service has experienced a significant increase in the number of potholes reported by the public and recorded through the Highway Safety Inspection process.

Enquiries by Year & Month

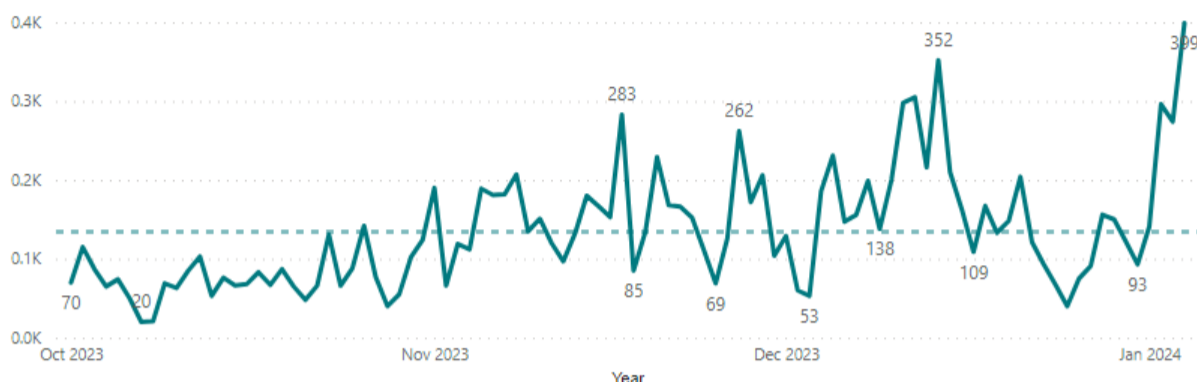


Figure 1 Table of Public Pothole Reports from Oct 2023

This increase in numbers highlights the fragile nature of our carriageways due to the long term lack of capital funding, leading to under investment.

This situation is undoubtedly going to get worse over the next couple of weeks as the current cold spell leads to further deteriorations due to freeze thaw effects.

If you receive direct contact by members of the public regarding potholes it would help if they are encouraged to use the 'report a problem' webpages.

www.devon.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/report-a-problem/

Once a defect has been reported by the public the Service aims to visit and triage the report within 3 working days on our higher category road network, and 7 days in our lower category network. The Triage Officer will then arrange the appropriate response based on the Council's [Highway Safety Policy](#).

Should members of the public contact you regarding the late repair of defects or suggestions that defects have been closed down without action, please ask for the reference number (it starts with a D) that they will receive when they made the report. With this number it is much easier to follow up on these enquiries.

In addition to the increase in defect repairs the additional task of gritting the network is likely to stretch resources, particularly if this cold snap continues for any length of time. Currently the road surface temperatures are rising above zero in the daytime. When they remain freezing all day we enter a cycle of continuing to grit the roads throughout the day. This draws heavily on resources. The potential impact will be the need to focus on the safety critical operations over the planned improvement works such as patching and drainage improvements. While this is frustrating for our communities, the safe operation of the network has to be prioritised.

The Network Response Team are in daily communication with our contractor, Milestone, to assess the current demand, adequacy of resources and priorities. This includes identifying non-safety or 'serviceability' defects that do not meet safety defect criteria, but that may represent sufficient deterioration to be considered a nuisance or are likely to continue to deteriorate further. Where defects are situated in close proximity to one another, inspectors can specify larger patch repairs to encompass those defects.

In addition to identification and repair of non-safety defects we are continually innovating and trialling new products and processes to improve the efficiencies associated with defect repairs. For example, the recent trial of a product called 'Elastomac' which we demonstrated at County Hall back in the summer (a mastic asphalt that utilises around 70%-80% recycled materials). This is in parallel to now established processes like the dragon patchers we operate in Devon. Whilst pothole numbers may be higher than we'd like in the weeks ahead, it's worth reflecting on where we might be if it wasn't for a combination of these combined efforts.

To give you an understanding of the current level of resources, at present there are up to 26 defect gangs across the County undertaking pothole repairs, supported by 2 additional sub-contractor gangs. With regards to serviceability repairs, we currently have around 8 internally resourced Milestone gangs carrying out larger scale repairs across the County. In addition to this they are being supported by two externally resourced gangs and further work is underway as we speak in potentially bringing in one or two further sub-contractor gangs. Lastly, all four dragon patching gangs are on programmed work this week and will continue whilst the weather remains favourable.

As I reported before Christmas, the additional £6.663m is already being invested into the carriageway with additional serviceability patching and local planned works brought forward in the programme. Again, I would encourage you to continue liaising with your local Neighbourhood Officer to agree future priorities.

Stay Safe

Stuart Hughes

Cabinet member for Highway Management