

Transport and Environment Committee

10.00am, Thursday, 8 December 2022

Maintenance of footways and cycleways

Executive/routine Wards Council Commitments	Routine All
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1. Recommendations

- 1.1 It is recommended that Committee notes the contents of this report and the estimated costs associated with improving the Council's approach to maintenance of footways and cycleways.

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Maintenance of footways and cycleways

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report provides an update on the Council's approach to the maintenance of footways and cycleways, including both the on-road and off-road network. It is designed to complement the Council's Transport Asset Management Plan (TAMP).
- 2.2 The off-road network is considered to largely be the Core Paths and Quiet Routes and the on-road network comprises main arterial routes and residential streets, as defined in paragraph 3.7.
- 2.3 The report also outlines some ongoing planned improvements for environmental maintenance of these assets moving forward. This was most recently referenced in the Cleaning Up Edinburgh report presented to Committee on [6 October 2022](#).

3. Background

- 3.1 In respect of the offroad network, this is largely constructed along the routes of former inner city railway lines that served the city and surrounding areas. These, and other routes, provide opportunities for recreational use by pedestrians and cyclists commuting around the city. Such routes are also wildlife corridors and connect with several parks and greenspaces as well as the Water of Leith and other green/blue networks. The hard surface route is generally adopted as a footway in the same way as public roads and footways along streets throughout the city.
- 3.2 In recent years, there has been more active management and maintenance of sections of the offroad network as its use has increased, including grass cutting of the verges and meadow areas, treatment of invasive species, litter picking, glass removal, graffiti removal, incorporation of interpretation and waymarking, removal of fly tipping, and some tree and vegetation management. Some sections of the network have also been converted from blaes to tarmac as part of active travel schemes.
- 3.3 Developing improvements to resolve issues with maintenance and management have been tried with some success. For example, a North Area Cyclepath Management Group was set up in 2008 and ran until 2011 that worked to improve maintenance and volunteering along the North Edinburgh Path Network. The group involved internal services, and representatives of Spokes and Sustrans. This provided a coordinated approach to service delivery.

- 3.4 In addition, the Water of Leith Conservation Trust developed a 10-year management plan which has identified several actions that relate to management and maintenance of routes along the Water of Leith. The Active Travel [Investment](#) and [Action](#) Plans also aim to enhance the offroad network.
- 3.5 Some of the offroad paths form part of Edinburgh's Core Paths system (e.g. North Edinburgh Paths, Innocent Railway) and Quiet Routes. Edinburgh's Quiet Routes are a network of walking, wheeling and cycling routes designed for users of all abilities that primarily avoid busy main roads, with safe and prioritised crossing points provided where they intersect.
- 3.6 Some of the paths pass through Conservation Areas (e.g. Innocent Railway, Duddingston path, Claremont path, Roseburn path, Hawthornvale path, Trinity path, Goldenacre path, Warriston path, Water of Leith path).
- 3.7 From a general cleansing and sweeping perspective, all roads (including main arterial routes and residential streets) and footpaths are zoned in line with the Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse. Zoning is dictated largely by levels of footfall.
- 3.8 As part of the 'Cleaning Up Edinburgh' report referenced in paragraph 2.3, work is underway to improve the scheduling of sweeping in normal operational circumstances.
- 3.9 On [20 October 2020](#), the Council agreed an adjusted motion by Councillor Webber on Seasonal Maintenance which requested that officers:
- 3.9.1 Consult with key stakeholders such as Lothian Buses, the Edinburgh Access Panel, Sustrans, Spokes and Living Streets; and
 - 3.9.2 Present a draft maintenance plan for the Council's footpaths, off-road paths and on-street cycle lanes. The plan was to include, but be limited to:
 - 3.9.2.1 An inspection regime for routes and all physical assets associated with them, including structures, drainage, signage, interpretation panels, benches, access barriers and any artwork, and including any trees or other vegetation in the immediate vicinity of the path;
 - 3.9.2.2 A timetable for proactive winter gritting and autumn leaf sweeping; and
 - 3.9.2.3 A timetable for proactive vegetation management, including verges and any overhanging vegetation.

4. [Main report](#)

- 4.1 The ongoing maintenance, across all seasons, of footways and cycleways is carried out across a range of services. This report focuses on those responsibilities that lie with Neighbourhood Environmental Services.
- 4.2 Committee will note that much of the current operational approach is reactive rather than proactive due to some of the difficulties in predicting when seasonal events will

take place. All of the operational activities are however designed to maintain accessibility across the on road and off-road networks.

Seasonal Maintenance

- 4.3 Seasonal maintenance of the Council's footpaths, off-road paths and on-street cycle lanes comprises the following activities:
 - 4.3.1 Grounds maintenance, treatment of invasive species and tree maintenance;
 - 4.3.2 Leaf fall/clearing; and
 - 4.3.3 Winter gritting.
- 4.4 Grounds maintenance, comprising of verge cutting, flail cutting of vegetation, meadow mowing, and improving sight lines is carried out by the Council's Parks and Greenspace team.
- 4.5 In addition, the Parks and Greenspace team are responsible for treatment of invasive species and for tree maintenance. A separate report on Trees is included on this agenda for Culture and Communities Committee on 13 December 2022 and a summary of the activities undertaken by the Council in respect of tree maintenance is provided below.
- 4.6 In leaf fall season, the main priority from a cleansing perspective is sweeping of the off-road network, to address the hazards posed to users by wet or frosty leaves.
- 4.7 The Council's Winter Maintenance plan covers footpaths, off-road paths and on-street cycle lanes.
- 4.8 Routes are treated by a combination of mini tractors and the sweepers.
- 4.9 A summary of the priority system for winter gritting is published on the Council's [website](#).

Current Arrangements

Grounds Maintenance, Treatment of Invasive Species and Tree Maintenance

- 4.10 Grounds maintenance is carried out throughout the year, with grass cutting taking place between April and October each year.
- 4.11 While some routine and proactive maintenance is undertaken (e.g. grass cutting), the vast majority of the work is reactive and covers the entire area of responsibility of the Parks and Greenspace team, rather than focusing on individual areas, like the off-road network.
- 4.12 Attempts have been made to dedicate resources to operate purely on the off-road network, however this reduces the flexibility of wider teams and can be a particular challenge in peak summer months where focus is on grass cutting and pitch work.
- 4.13 In addition, vehicle access to the network has proven challenging due to conflict with route users. This means that some areas have become overgrown and therefore increasingly difficult to manage.
- 4.14 Despite these challenges, a trial approach has very recently started which covers the whole of the North-West area. One squad, comprising three members of staff,

are dedicated to cycleway and pathway maintenance all year round. The team works Monday to Friday. In the initial stages of this trial the squad will primarily focus on cutting back vegetation to avoid encroachment onto paths and blocking lighting. The success of this approach will be monitored over the coming months with an opportunity to review whether the range of tasks can be extended to help tackle seasonal leaf fall and gritting.

- 4.15 The Council also carries out the chemical treatment of some invasive species (e.g. Giant Hogweed and Japanese Knotweed) each summer. In addition, volunteers have been involved in removing Himalayan Balsam, another invasive species, by hand.
- 4.16 In the past, volunteer organisations also assisted with vegetation management (which comprised of coppicing of trees, pruning branches, scrub clearance, etc.), with occasional volunteering effort carried out using corporates days to litter pick, replant and maintain areas, rake meadows, etc.
- 4.17 The Council's responsibilities for tree maintenance focus on dealing with dead, dying or dangerous trees, including trees which are infected with Ash Dieback and Dutch Elm Disease. A further report on Ash Dieback is due to be considered by Culture and Communities Committee in March 2023.
- 4.18 Many residents backing on to the network complain about low branches, leaf litter, and other tree-related issues. At present, maintenance activities to deal with this are carried out on a reactive basis.
- 4.19 The Forestry Service will also deal with fallen trees and storm-damaged branches that blocks routes.

Leaf Fall/Clearing

- 4.20 The rate and volume of leaf fall is subject to climatic variations such as hard frosts and high winds.
- 4.21 As far as possible, the off-road network is swept on a weekly basis, where required, with the work mainly carried out early on weekend mornings to reduce the conflict of vehicles with cyclists and pedestrians (as previous issues with regard to vehicle access has hampered maintenance and treatment).
- 4.22 There is no formalised programme or timetable for leaf sweeping on footways. A reactive approach is taken, combining the use of cage vehicles/manual collection and small and large sweepers to maintain footways using previous year's resident enquiries and local knowledge of crews and Supervisors to identify where high priority leaf fall areas are. Resources are deployed based on that knowledge.
- 4.23 A reactive approach to sudden leaf drop is also undertaken, through regular inspections during the predominant period of leaf fall. There are instances where a section of footway or cycleway will be cleared of leaves, only for a significant fall of leaves overnight to lead to further cleansing requirements.

- 4.24 There are well established volunteer and/or resident association groups that undertake their own leaf fall clearance, with the Council providing any necessary equipment and pick up the material collected.
- 4.25 In 2021, the Council increased the small sweeping fleet from nine vehicles to sixteen, providing greater capacity to deal with leaf fall and gritting. This has had a positive effect on the service's ability to sweep cycle paths.
- 4.26 In normal operating circumstances, these small sweepers can carry out traditional litter and detritus collection. When gritting on footways and cycleways is required the normal body can be replaced with a gritting body and if needed, a plough. In addition, the Council hires additional large sweepers for a short period to complement the existing resources for leaf clearing, usually from October to December, although this depends on the length of the leaf fall season.

Winter Maintenance

- 4.27 For Winter 2022, priority 1 cycle ways and foot paths will be treated in line with the Council's winter weather plan, as approved by Committee in June 2021.
- 4.28 This operational approach also includes three dedicated Travelling Safely routes and two dedicated cycle routes.

Plan for Seasonal Maintenance

- 4.29 The Council has a clear plan for winter maintenance on the Priority 1 network.
- 4.30 However, as noted above, the approach to grounds maintenance and leaf clearing is much more reactive, in recognition of the difficulties in planning for leaf drops and prioritising resources to specific locations.
- 4.31 This approach also recognises that the current resources are not sufficient to support more proactive maintenance planning.
- 4.32 On [6 October 2022](#), Committee received a report on Cleaning Up Edinburgh. This report recognised that additional resources would be required to improve the Council's approach to approach roads, rural roads and cycleways and recognised that a team actively working in this area could be dedicated to assisting with the maintenance of cycleways (particularly leaf sweeping, clearance and overgrowth). The cost of introducing this team was confirmed as £400,000 per annum.
- 4.33 Committee noted that there is currently insufficient budget to deliver these (among other) improvements and that any investment would need to be considered as part of the Council's budget setting process.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 The Council is currently looking at ways to involve volunteers more in greenspaces and there is an appetite from residents to become involved. However, this requires to be co-ordinated.
- 5.2 As set out in paragraph 4.13, a trial approach is underway in the North-West area with a view to improving maintenance of cycleways and pathways.

- 5.3 Officers also intend to engage key stakeholders to build on the success of earlier joint working (for example in North Edinburgh (paragraph 3.3).
- 5.4 The Edinburgh Million Tree City programme continues to focus on planting new trees to replace losses.
- 5.5 Work is currently underway to improve retention of digital information for inspection and leaf clearance work carried out and is expected to be completed in early 2023. Although, this will be too late for the current leaf fall season, it will be in place for autumn 2023.
- 5.6 The Council's Winter Weather Plan is now in effect.
- 5.7 The Cleansing and Parks and Greenspaces teams now report to a single Head of Service (Head of Neighbourhood Environmental Services). A review of service activities and how these can be managed effectively to reduce any overlap or duplication is underway and expected to conclude over the course of 2023.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 The activities outlined in this report are carried out within the Council's existing financial resources.
- 6.2 However, as noted above, to deliver an improved approach to seasonal maintenance of the Council's footpaths, off-road paths and on-street cycle lanes will require additional resources. The estimated cost of this is £400,000. However, any additional investment would need to be considered as part of the Council's budget setting process.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 As noted above, Council officers continue to work with volunteers to maintain the Council's network of footpaths, off-road paths and on-street cycle lanes where it is possible to do so. Officers will also engage with key stakeholders on opportunities for joint working.
- 7.2 Further investigation of opportunities to include volunteers in the Council's work programme, particularly in parks and greenspaces, is underway.

8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 Winter Maintenance Review 2020/21 – Transport and Environment Committee – [17 June 2021](#)
- 8.2 Winter Maintenance Review – Transport and Environment Committee – [17 May 2018](#)

9. Appendices

- 9.1 None.