

	Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee 29 July 2026
	Report from the Corporate Director, Neighbourhoods and Regeneration
	Cllr Promise Knight, Cabinet Member for Cleaner Streets, Transport and Public Realm
Highways Maintenance Report	
Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
List of Appendices:	Appendix A – DfT Transparency Report (Local Highways Maintenance Transparency) Appendix B – Highway Maintenance Benchmarking Dashboard Appendix C – Highway Structural Condition over time Appendix D – Highway Maintenance Contract Benchmarking Appendix E – Analysis of Customer Reports Appendix F – Highway Defect Investigation Levels Appendix G – Insurance Claims Appendix H – Trends in Reactive Maintenance Carriageway repairs Appendix I – Contract Key Performance Indicators Appendix J – Trends in Highway Reactive Maintenance defects identified Appendix K – Highways Inspection Regime Appendix L – Carriageway & Footway Resurfacing 2021- 2026
Background Papers:	None
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1.0 Executive Summary

This report provides the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee with a comprehensive review of Brent Council's highways maintenance service, including its performance, effectiveness and value for money. It responds to the Committee's request for a detailed assessment of the Council's approach to maintaining the borough's highway network, including carriageways, footways and associated highway assets.

The report explains how the Council balances reactive safety repairs with planned and preventative maintenance, the arrangements in place for managing and monitoring the highways maintenance contracts, and the outcomes being achieved through the Council's asset management approach. It also considers the condition of the highway network, investment levels, customer experience, compensation claims, and the challenges associated with managing tree root damage.

The report demonstrates that Brent has significantly increased investment in planned highway maintenance in recent years and has adopted a modern, evidence-led asset management approach consistent with the recommendations of the UK Roads Leadership Group's Well-Managed Highway Infrastructure: A Code of Practice and the Department for Transport's Highways Maintenance Incentive Funding framework. This has enabled the Council to deliver substantial improvements to the highway network whilst seeking to maximise the value obtained from available resources.

The report also identifies a number of opportunities for further improvement, including strengthening customer communication, enhancing performance reporting and benchmarking, continuing the development of the Council's Highway Asset Management Plan, and making greater use of digital technologies to support future investment decisions.

The Committee is invited to note the contents of the report and the progress made in improving the highways maintenance service, whilst considering the future challenges and opportunities identified.

2.0 Recommendations

- 1) Notes the contents of this report and the progress made in improving Brent's highway maintenance service through increased investment and adoption of an asset management approach.
- 2) Notes the continued shift from reactive to planned and preventative maintenance as the most cost-effective means of improving the condition and resilience of the highway network.
- 3) Notes the opportunities identified to strengthen customer communication, resident engagement and performance reporting.
- 4) Supports the continued development of the Council's Highway Asset Management Plan, including enhanced use of condition data and benchmarking.

3.0 Detail

3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities & Strategic Context

The effective maintenance of Brent's highway network makes a significant contribution to the delivery of the Council's Borough Plan and wider corporate priorities. Safe, well-maintained roads and footways support economic growth, improve access to employment, education and local services, encourage active travel, enhance the quality of the public realm and contribute to healthier, more sustainable communities.

The Council's approach to highways maintenance supports a number of the Borough Plan priorities, including:

- **A Cleaner, Greener Future** by maintaining the highway network in a way that supports active travel, improves the public realm, protects and enhances street trees where practicable, and reduces carbon emissions through the adoption of sustainable maintenance practices and low-carbon construction materials.
- **A Prosperous Brent** by maintaining reliable transport infrastructure that supports businesses, freight, public transport and access to town centres, helping to sustain economic activity across the borough.
- **Thriving Communities** by providing safe and accessible streets that enable residents to travel confidently, access local services and participate fully in community life.
- **A Healthy Brent** by maintaining safe footways and cycle routes that encourage walking, wheeling and cycling, reduce the risk of injury and improve accessibility for all highway users.

The Council's highways maintenance service is delivered in accordance with the principles of its Highway Asset Management Plan, which adopts a risk-based, evidence-led approach to managing one of the Council's most valuable infrastructure assets. The service also supports delivery of the Council's Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy by extending the life of highway assets through preventative maintenance, reducing waste, promoting the use of recycled and lower-carbon materials, and protecting the borough's urban tree canopy wherever practicable.

The Council's approach is aligned with the national asset management principles set out in the UK Roads Leadership Group's Well-Managed Highway Infrastructure: A Code of Practice and the Department for Transport's Highways Maintenance Incentive Funding framework. These promote lifecycle planning, preventative maintenance, robust asset data, risk-based decision making and continuous improvement as the most effective means of delivering safe, resilient and financially sustainable highway networks.

This report supports those objectives by providing Members with an assessment of current service performance, identifying areas of good practice and highlighting opportunities to further improve the effectiveness, efficiency and resilience of Brent's highways maintenance service.

3.2 Highways Maintenance Overview

3.2.1 Overview of Brent's Highway Network

Brent Council is the Highway Authority for the majority of the public highway within the borough and has a statutory duty under Section 41 of the Highways Act 1980 to maintain the highway in a safe condition for all users. The highway network is the Council's largest and most valuable physical asset, with an estimated replacement value of approximately £4.5 billion. It supports residents, businesses, public transport, emergency services and active travel, making effective maintenance essential for economic activity, accessibility and public safety.

The Council is responsible for maintaining a diverse range of highway assets including:

Asset	Quantity
Roads	505 km
Footways	847 km
Cycleways	19 km
Highway bridges and structures	90
Road gullies	20,700
Street trees	10,000
Street lighting columns and illuminated assets	22,800

These assets vary considerably in age, construction, condition and strategic importance. While principal roads carry the highest traffic volumes and support London's transport network, residential streets and footways represent the majority of the asset and require different maintenance approaches based on risk, usage and deterioration characteristics.

Brent maintains its highway network using the principles of asset management, seeking to maximise the life of existing infrastructure through timely intervention, preventative maintenance and risk-based investment rather than relying solely on reactive repairs.

3.2.2 Types of Highway Maintenance

Highway maintenance activities broadly fall into two categories:

Reactive Maintenance

Reactive maintenance addresses defects that present an immediate or developing safety risk. These defects may be identified through scheduled safety inspections, reports from members of the public, councillors, utility companies or Council officers. Typical reactive activities include:

- Pothole repairs;

- Footway trip repairs;
- Damaged kerbs;
- Blocked gullies;
- Defective ironwork;
- Damaged signs, bollards and street furniture;
- Emergency responses following severe weather or collisions.

Reactive maintenance is primarily concerned with managing safety risk and meeting the Council's statutory obligations. Intervention times are determined through a formal risk assessment process which considers both the severity of the defect and the likelihood of harm occurring.

Planned and Preventative Maintenance

Planned maintenance involves interventions identified through condition surveys and asset management analysis before defects become safety hazards. Rather than waiting for roads to fail, planned maintenance aims to preserve asset condition, reduce whole-life costs and minimise disruption.

Examples include:

- carriageway resurfacing;
- surface dressing and thin surfacing;
- preventative patching;
- reconstruction of footways;
- renewal of road markings;
- bridge maintenance;
- drainage improvements;
- public realm improvements.

Preventative maintenance extends asset life by treating roads while deterioration remains relatively limited, reducing the likelihood that more expensive reconstruction will be required in future years. This approach reflects national best practice contained within the UK Roads Leadership Group's *Well-Managed Highway Infrastructure* Code of Practice.

3.2.3 Decision-Making and Intervention Strategy

Brent follows a risk-based asset management approach when determining the most appropriate maintenance intervention.

Reactive repairs are undertaken where defects exceed the Council's published investigatory levels and are assessed as presenting an unacceptable risk to highway users. Safety inspectors undertake scheduled inspections at frequencies determined by the hierarchy of each highway, ranging from weekly inspections on the busiest roads to annual inspections on lower-risk highways. Each defect is assessed using a formal risk matrix that considers both the consequence of failure and the likelihood of an incident occurring before determining the required response time.

Longer-term investment decisions are informed by the Council's Highway Asset Management Plan and supported by annual condition surveys of the carriageway and footway network. Brent has increasingly adopted digital survey technology, using vehicle-mounted cameras and artificial intelligence to identify defects rapidly across the highway network. This enables condition information to be collected across the borough within a matter of days and translated quickly into prioritised maintenance programmes.

The Council's asset management software evaluates each road using a combination of engineering condition data and wider prioritisation criteria, including:

- Structural condition;
- Whole-life treatment benefit;
- Highway hierarchy;
- Frequency of defects;
- History of compensation claims;
- Councillor nominations;
- Traffic volumes and network importance; and
- Engineering judgement following site inspections.

The software generates prioritised maintenance programmes designed to achieve the greatest improvement in overall network condition within the available capital budget. Officers review these outputs before finalising annual maintenance programmes to ensure local knowledge and engineering judgement are appropriately reflected.

This evidence-led approach aligns with Department for Transport expectations for highway asset management and forms an important component of the Government's Highways Maintenance Incentive Funding assessment process.

3.2.4 Balance Between Reactive and Planned Maintenance

National best practice recognises that highway authorities achieve the greatest long-term value by investing in preventative maintenance before assets deteriorate to the point where expensive reconstruction or continual reactive repairs become necessary. The annual Asphalt Industry Alliance (ALARM) Survey consistently concludes that preventative investment delivers significantly lower whole-life costs than a predominantly reactive maintenance approach.

Brent's investment strategy reflects this principle. The majority of funding is capital, directed towards planned maintenance programmes, including resurfacing, preventative treatments, drainage improvements and asset renewal. Reactive maintenance remains essential to fulfil the Council's statutory duty to maintain highway safety but is intended primarily to address individual defects rather than widespread asset deterioration.

The Council also seeks to reduce future reactive demand through targeted preventative interventions such as injection patching, which enables large

numbers of deteriorating defects to be repaired quickly before they develop into larger potholes requiring more expensive repairs. Although injection patching does not replace conventional resurfacing, it has proved to be an effective complementary treatment for extending carriageway life and reducing defect growth across residential roads.

Despite this strategic approach, maintaining the optimum balance between reactive and planned maintenance remains challenging. Highway assets naturally deteriorate over time, while inflation, increasing traffic volumes, utility reinstatements, climate change and severe weather events continue to increase maintenance pressures. Consequently, Brent's asset management approach seeks to maximise the effectiveness of available resources through evidence-based prioritisation, continual condition monitoring and timely preventative intervention rather than attempting to address deterioration after failure has occurred.

3.2.5 The Department for Transport Highways Maintenance Transparency Report

The Department for Transport (DfT) introduced the Highways Maintenance Transparency Report in 2025 as part of wider reforms to increase accountability for local highway maintenance funding in England. The annual report demonstrates how the Council is managing its highway assets in line with national best practice by providing information on highway condition, investment, asset management policies and performance.

It enables residents, elected Members and Government to understand how maintenance funding is being used, supports benchmarking between local highway authorities, and demonstrates that Brent is adopting a risk-based, evidence-led approach to maintaining its highway network in accordance with the principles of "Well-managed Highway Infrastructure: A Code of Practice".

Brent's 2025 report makes up Appendix A.

3.3 Reactive Highway Maintenance

3.3.1 Overview

Reactive highway maintenance forms an essential part of Brent Council's statutory duty under Section 41 of the Highways Act 1980 to maintain the public highway in a safe condition. Whilst the Council's long-term strategy is to maximise investment in planned and preventative maintenance, reactive maintenance remains necessary to address defects that present an immediate or developing risk to highway users or arise unexpectedly through deterioration, severe weather, traffic loading, utility works or accidental damage.

Reactive maintenance complements the planned maintenance programme by ensuring that safety defects are addressed promptly while longer-term asset renewal programmes continue to improve the overall condition of the highway network. The objective is not to eliminate reactive repairs entirely, as this would

be neither achievable nor cost-effective, but to reduce reliance upon them through sustained investment in preventative maintenance and timely intervention before assets fail.

3.3.2 Managing Reactive Maintenance

Brent operates a risk-based approach to reactive highway maintenance which is consistent with the principles contained within the UK Roads Leadership Group's Well-Managed Highway Infrastructure Code of Practice. Potential defects are identified from several sources including:

- scheduled highway safety inspections;
- reports submitted by residents via the Council's online reporting system or Contact Centre;
- enquiries from Ward Members and Members of Parliament;
- reports from Council officers undertaking routine duties;

Each reported defect is inspected and assessed against the Council's published investigatory criteria. Officers consider the nature, dimensions and location of the defect together with traffic conditions, pedestrian usage, the likelihood of deterioration and the potential risk to highway users before determining the appropriate response.

Where a defect presents an unacceptable safety risk, it is programmed for reactive repair within the appropriate response time. Defects which do not meet the intervention criteria are either monitored through future inspections or incorporated into planned maintenance programmes where this represents a more effective long-term engineering solution.

This approach enables finite resources to be directed towards defects presenting the greatest risk while ensuring that planned investment remains focused on improving the long-term condition of the network.

It should be noted that, whilst all high priority highway defects are repaired within the available revenue budget, current funding levels mean that only around 35% of medium priority defects (although this varies depending on demand and available resources) can also be repaired. As a result, defects that meet the Council's investigation criteria may not be addressed immediately if they do not present the highest level of risk. This can lead to understandable frustration amongst residents and Members, who despite messaging may perceive that repairs are being delayed due to poor contractor performance or inadequate oversight by the Council. In reality, these decisions reflect the need to prioritise limited resources towards the defects that present the greatest risk to highway users, in accordance with the Council's risk-based approach to highway maintenance.

3.3.3 Trends in Reactive Maintenance

The demand for reactive maintenance varies considerably from year to year and is influenced by a range of factors including weather conditions, ageing

infrastructure, traffic volumes, utility reinstatements and the level of planned maintenance investment.

See also Appendix E - Analysis of Customer Reports and Appendix J - Trends in Highway Reactive Maintenance defects identified.

3.3.4 Repeat Defects

Repeat defects are an issue faced by all highway authorities and do not necessarily indicate poor-quality repairs. In many cases they reflect wider structural deterioration within the carriageway or footway rather than failure of the repair itself. Common causes include:

- ageing road construction reaching the end of its design life;
- water penetration beneath the road surface;
- repeated excavation by statutory undertakers;
- increasing traffic volumes and heavier vehicles;
- tree root growth affecting footways;
- continued illegal vehicle overrun on footways;
- drainage defects; and
- freeze-thaw weather cycles.

Where repeated repairs are identified at the same location, officers review the site to determine whether continued reactive intervention remains appropriate or whether the location should instead be prioritised for patching planned maintenance. The distribution of recent reactive maintenance repairs is also taken account of in the planned maintenance resurfacing prioritisation process.

This feedback loop between reactive maintenance and asset management is an important element of Brent's evidence-based approach to investment.

3.3.5 Resident Experience

Residents most commonly experience the highways maintenance service through the reporting of defects.

Brent provides several reporting routes, with the Council's online reporting portal being the primary mechanism for reporting highway defects. Reports are geographically referenced and automatically allocated for inspection, enabling efficient management and monitoring. Resident satisfaction is influenced by several factors, including:

- How quickly defects are inspected;
- The speed with which repairs are completed;
- The durability of repairs;
- Communication regarding inspection outcomes; and
- Confidence that recurring problems are being permanently addressed.

The necessary reactive and planned maintenance processes can result in a negative resident experience because the demand for highway maintenance significantly exceeds the funding available.

As a result, many roads and pavements that residents consider to be in poor condition may not meet the threshold for immediate repair or may not be prioritised for planned maintenance. This can leave residents feeling that reported issues are not being addressed quickly enough, particularly where defects affect the appearance or comfort of the highway rather than presenting an immediate safety risk.

The need to prioritise limited resources also means that some locations may continue to deteriorate before they are selected for repair, leading to frustration and a perception that the highway network is not being maintained to the standard residents expect.

Trends in Customer Reports received by the Council are covered in Appendix E.

3.3.6 Reactive Maintenance Expenditure

Reactive maintenance expenditure is influenced by both network condition and external events such as severe weather. The principal areas of expenditure include:

- Carriageway pothole repairs;
- Footway safety repairs;
- Street furniture maintenance
- Drainage maintenance; and
- Emergency response works

See also Appendix A for details of Revenue expenditure over time

3.3.7 Compensation Claims

Compensation claims provide an additional indicator of network performance and customer impact, although claim volumes should be interpreted with caution as they are affected by many factors beyond highway condition alone. Where claims are received, the Council investigates whether:

- The defect met the Council's investigatory criteria;
- Inspections had been undertaken in accordance with policy;
- The Council knew, or ought reasonably to have known, of the defect; and
- Repairs were completed within the required response times.

The Council's documented inspection regime provides an important statutory defence under Section 58 of the Highways Act 1980 where it can demonstrate that it has taken reasonable steps to maintain the highway.

Information on claims received and settlements are presented in Appendix G.

3.3.8 Benchmarking and Continuous Improvement

Brent's reactive maintenance service reflects current national asset management practice by adopting a risk-based approach supported by digital condition surveys, structured inspection regimes and increasing investment in preventative maintenance. Compared with many neighbouring London boroughs, Brent has several notable strengths:

- Sustained investment in planned highway maintenance over recent years;
- extensive use of AI-enabled condition surveys and asset management software;
- Significant use of preventative treatments such as injection patching;
- Continued development of transparent highway asset reporting; and
- Alignment with the Department for Transport's Highway Maintenance Incentive Funding requirements.

The annual Asphalt Industry Alliance (ALARM) Survey consistently concludes that highway authorities achieving the best long-term outcomes are those that prioritise preventative maintenance, maintain robust asset management systems and invest consistently over many years. Brent's current strategy reflects these principles.

There remain opportunities to strengthen the service further. These include developing a more comprehensive highways performance framework, increasing benchmarking with comparable London boroughs.

The Committee should therefore note that Brent's direction of travel is consistent with national best practice. The challenge for the Council over the coming years will be to sustain investment levels, continue improving network condition alongside operational performance.

See also Appendix B - Highway Maintenance Benchmarking Dashboard.

3.4 Planned Highway Maintenance

3.4.1 Overview

Planned highway maintenance is the principal mechanism through which Brent Council manages the long-term condition of its highway assets. Unlike reactive maintenance, which responds to individual defects presenting an immediate safety risk, planned maintenance seeks to intervene before significant deterioration occurs, thereby extending asset life, reducing future maintenance liabilities and delivering better value for money.

The Council has adopted an asset management approach that aligns with the recommendations of the UK Roads Leadership Group's *Well-Managed Highway Infrastructure: A Code of Practice* and the Department for Transport's (DfT) Highways Maintenance Incentive Funding framework. This approach recognises

that investing in preventative maintenance at the appropriate time significantly reduces whole-life costs and improves the resilience of the highway network.

The Council's planned maintenance programme therefore forms the cornerstone of its long-term investment strategy and is intended to reduce the need for costly reactive interventions whilst maintaining a safe and serviceable network.

3.4.2 Planned Maintenance Programme

Each year the Council delivers a comprehensive programme of planned maintenance covering the full range of highway assets. The principal programmes include:

- carriageway resurfacing;
- preventative carriageway treatments,
- carriageway patching programmes;
- footway reconstruction and resurfacing;
- renewal of road markings;
- bridge and highway structure maintenance;
- highway drainage improvements;
- public realm improvements; and
- condition surveys and asset data collection.

These programmes are delivered through the Council's Highways Term Maintenance Contracts and are coordinated with utility works and other highway improvement projects wherever possible to minimise disruption to residents and businesses.

3.4.3 Investment Levels and Funding

Brent has significantly increased investment in planned highway maintenance during recent years.

Historically, the Council relied upon a combination of Council capital funding and Transport for London (TfL) maintenance allocations. However, TfL funding for principal road maintenance has reduced significantly since 2018 and no TfL maintenance allocation was received for the 25/26 programme period. To compensate, the Council has increased its own investment and has also begun receiving direct highways maintenance funding from the Department for Transport.

For 2025/26, Brent's planned highways maintenance programme comprised approximately £13.8 million of capital investment, including:

Programme	2025/26 (£000)
Carriageway resurfacing and preventative maintenance	2,425
Short section carriageway repairs	150
Highway structures and drainage	450
Public realm improvements	125

Programme	2025/26 (£000)
Footway short sections	150
Road marking renewals	100
Condition surveys and asset management	100
DfT Highways Maintenance Funding	759
SCIL Carriageway	4,764
SCIL Footway	4,779
Total Programme	13,802

In addition to the base £3.5m annual highways capital maintenance programme, the Council has delivered a significant multi-year investment programme through the previously implemented £20 million (footway) and £15 million (footway and A-road) highways improvement programmes, substantially increasing the scale of planned maintenance undertaken across the borough. The £15m was divided into £4m of Principal Road Resurfacing and £11m footway reconstruction. A £9.543 million Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy (SCIL) programme of Carriageway and Footway improvement programmes were also implemented in 2025/26.

Funding currently (26/27) comprises:

- Brent Council prudential borrowing to fund the annual programme;
- Department for Transport Highways Maintenance Block Funding;
- additional DfT Highways Maintenance Incentive Funding; and
- occasional external grant funding for specialist bridge and infrastructure schemes.

This sustained investment has enabled Brent to undertake substantially larger resurfacing and reconstruction programmes than would otherwise have been possible.

Whilst recent investment has significantly improved network condition, highway assets continue to deteriorate over time. Consequently, current funding levels remain below the level that would be required to eliminate the maintenance backlog entirely. Maintaining recent levels of investment will therefore remain critical if improvements in network condition are to be sustained over the longer term.

The funding levels over five years and the amount of planned maintenance that can be carried out is discussed in Appendix L - Carriageway & Footway Resurfacing 2021- 2026.

3.4.4 Scheme Prioritisation

The Council uses a structured asset management methodology to determine which roads and footways should receive planned maintenance each year.

Annual condition surveys are undertaken across the network using independent survey technology that measures structural condition in accordance with nationally recognised standards. Survey information is imported into the Council's Highway Asset Management System, which evaluates each highway section and recommends the most appropriate treatment based on engineering need and available funding. In determining priorities, factors considered are:

- Structural condition;
- Asset deterioration rates;
- Lifecycle cost analysis;
- Highway hierarchy;
- Traffic volumes and strategic importance;
- Frequency of reactive repairs;
- History of compensation claims;
- Coordination with utility companies;
- Ward member nominations; and
- Engineering judgement following site inspections.

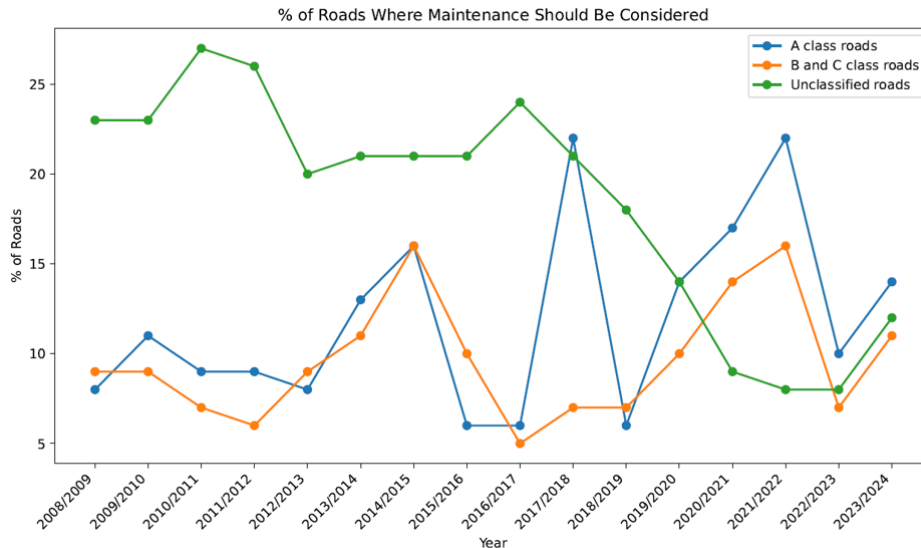
The programme is reviewed by experienced highway engineers before being finalised, ensuring that data-driven decision making is supported by local knowledge and operational experience.

This evidence-based methodology enables the Council to target investment where it will deliver the greatest overall improvement in network condition and best long-term value for money.

3.4.5 Network Condition

The Council monitors the condition of its highway network through comprehensive annual condition surveys. Road condition is assessed using nationally recognised condition indices and classified into Red, Amber and Green condition bands.

We have presented below a number of years of data, of the percentage of roads where maintenance should be considered (i.e. in "Red" condition).



This visualization helps highlight trends, such as:

- A class roads showing significant fluctuations, especially in 2017/2018 and 2021/2022.
- B and C class roads generally staying within a narrower range.
- Unclassified roads showing a steady decline in maintenance needs, (that is, a steady improvement in the condition) over the years.

The condition data demonstrates a significant long-term improvement in Brent's unclassified road network, with the proportion of roads requiring maintenance reducing from around one-quarter of the network in 2008/09 to approximately one in twelve roads by 2022/23. This reflects sustained investment in residential road maintenance over many years.

In contrast, the condition of the A road network has shown greater year-to-year variation, reflecting the impact of traffic loading and the timing of major resurfacing schemes. Classified B and C roads have remained relatively stable overall, with periodic fluctuations associated with cyclical maintenance programmes.

Overall, the trends indicate that long-term investment has delivered substantial improvements in network condition, although continued investment will be required to maintain these gains and address deterioration on the strategic road network.

Highway Structural Condition trends over time are covered in more detail in Appendix C.

3.4.6 Impact of Planned Maintenance

The principal objective of planned maintenance is to improve the overall condition of the highway network whilst reducing future maintenance liabilities.

The Council's recent investment programme has already demonstrated measurable benefits, including:

- improved structural condition across substantial sections of the network;
- longer asset life through preventative treatments;
- reduced whole-life maintenance costs; and
- improved resilience of the highway network.

Increased preventative investment is improving the overall condition of the network, although it will continue to fluctuate depending upon weather conditions and many other external factors.

Investment has also enabled the Council to adopt a more preventative approach, shifting expenditure from emergency repairs towards planned resurfacing and asset preservation, consistent with modern highway asset management principles.

Continued investment will be necessary to sustain these improvements and prevent deterioration returning as assets continue to age.

3.4.7 Benchmarking and Best Practice

Brent's planned maintenance strategy is consistent with current national best practice and compares favourably with many local highway authorities.

The Department for Transport's Highways Maintenance Incentive Funding framework increasingly rewards authorities that demonstrate mature asset management, robust condition data, lifecycle planning and evidence-based investment decisions. Brent has made significant progress in each of these areas, including:

- Comprehensive annual condition surveys;
- Use of AI-enabled survey technology;
- Asset management software to optimise investment;
- Increasing transparency through publication of maintenance information; and
- Alignment with the principles of the *Well-managed Highway Infrastructure* Code of Practice.

The annual Asphalt Industry Alliance (ALARM) Survey consistently concludes that highway authorities delivering sustained preventative maintenance achieve lower long-term maintenance costs, improved network condition and greater resilience than authorities relying predominantly upon reactive maintenance.

Brent's investment strategy reflects these findings and demonstrates a clear shift towards preventative asset management over recent years.

Whilst this represents good practice, opportunities remain to strengthen the service further. These include continued development of the Highway Asset Management Plan, enhanced performance reporting, greater benchmarking with comparable London boroughs, and further refinement of lifecycle planning as

new condition survey technologies and Department for Transport requirements evolve.

A Highway Maintenance Benchmarking Dashboard, showing how Brent compares with London Borough good practice, makes up Appendix B.

3.5 Deep Dive – Carriageways (Road Defects)

3.5.1 Overview

Brent Council is responsible for maintaining approximately 470 km of adopted carriageways, comprising principal (A), classified (B and C) and unclassified residential roads. Carriageways are the most heavily trafficked element of the highway network and are subjected to continual deterioration from vehicle loading, weathering, utility excavations and the ageing of the underlying road construction.

Whilst potholes are the defect most visible to residents, they represent only one category of carriageway deterioration. Effective highway asset management therefore focuses on identifying and addressing deterioration before individual potholes develop.

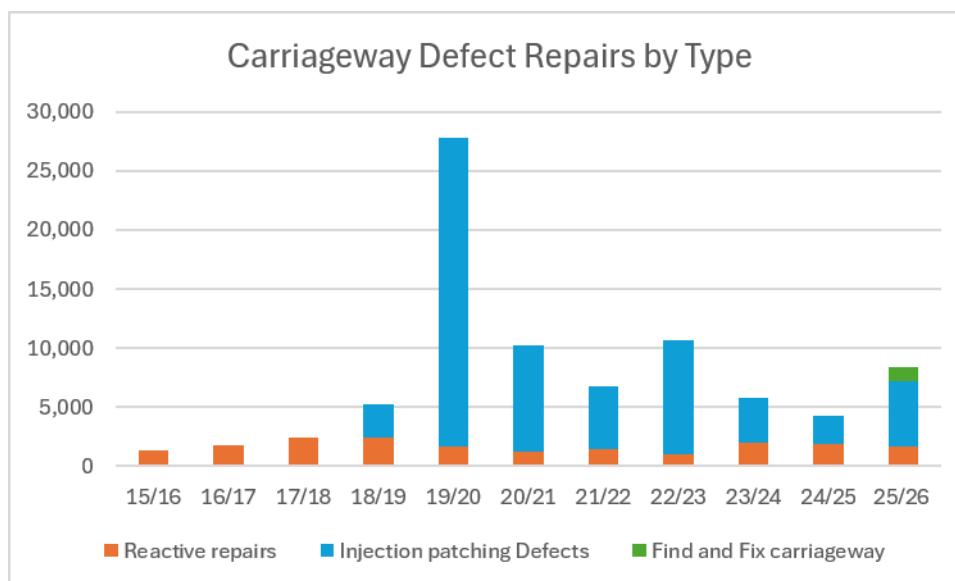
3.5.2 Scale and Distribution of Carriageway Defects

The principal categories of carriageway defects encountered across Brent include:

- potholes;
- fretting and surface ravelling;
- cracking;
- rutting and deformation;
- failed utility reinstatements;
- edge deterioration;
- depressions and settlement;
- rocking or sunken ironwork;
- carriageway drainage defects; and
- loss of skid resistance.

These defects vary considerably in severity and risk. Whilst individual potholes often require reactive repair, more widespread deterioration is generally indicative of structural failure and is more effectively addressed through planned resurfacing or reconstruction.

The number of potholes repaired provides one indicator of network performance.



The data demonstrates a significant change in Brent's approach to carriageway maintenance over the last decade. Rather than relying principally on reactive pothole repairs, the service has increasingly adopted preventative maintenance techniques such as injection patching and, more recently, Find and Fix operations. These methods enable a substantially greater number of defects to be repaired within existing budgets, helping to prevent deterioration and reduce the future maintenance backlog.

While annual repair numbers fluctuate according to weather conditions, funding and network need, the overall trend reflects a shift towards more efficient, preventative asset management in line with the principles of the Well-managed Highway Infrastructure Code of Practice.

Injection patching is used not only to repair defects that have reached the Council's investigation levels but also to treat smaller defects before they deteriorate to intervention level. As such, it serves both as a reactive repair method and a preventative maintenance treatment, helping to extend the life of the carriageway and reduce future deterioration. These techniques enable a substantially greater number of defects to be addressed within existing budgets, helping to prevent defects from becoming hazardous, reduce the future maintenance backlog and improve overall network resilience.

The introduction of the Find and Fix programme in 2025/26 represents a further evolution of this approach, combining proactive inspections with immediate repair of defects identified on site, supporting a more efficient and preventative asset management strategy consistent with the principles of the "Well-managed Highway Infrastructure Code of Practice".

The high number of injection patching repairs does *not* indicate a dramatic increase in safety defects but rather reflects a deliberate policy of treating many lower-level defects before they become potholes requiring reactive intervention. That is an important distinction in considering the performance data.

See also Appendix H – Trends in Reactive maintenance Carriageway repairs.

3.5.3 Identification and Prioritisation

Carriageway defects are identified through several complementary mechanisms:

- Scheduled highway safety inspections;
- AI-enabled condition surveys;
- Reports submitted by residents;
- Member enquiries;

Safety inspections identify defects requiring immediate attention, whilst condition surveys identify wider deterioration suitable for planned maintenance.

Each defect is assessed against the Council's Highway Safety Inspection Policy using a formal risk-based methodology which considers:

- Dimensions of the defect;
- Road hierarchy;
- Traffic volumes;
- Vehicle speeds;
- Likelihood of deterioration;
- Location within the carriageway;
- Vulnerability of road users; and
- Overall likelihood of an incident occurring.

This enables limited maintenance resources to be directed towards the highest-risk defects whilst ensuring structural deterioration is addressed through planned investment rather than repeated patch repairs.

See also Appendix F - Benchmarking of Investigatory Levels.

3.5.4 Repair Methods

Brent uses a range of repair techniques depending upon the nature and extent of deterioration. Typical interventions include:

Defect	Typical Treatment
Individual potholes	Permanent hot asphalt patching
Multiple isolated defects	Machine patching / injection patching
Surface deterioration	Thin surfacing
Structural deterioration	Full resurfacing

One innovation introduced by Brent has been the extensive use of injection patching on residential roads. This process enables multiple developing defects to be repaired rapidly at relatively low cost and has proved particularly effective in slowing deterioration across lower hierarchy roads.

Although injection patching has a shorter service life than conventional resurfacing, it allows a significantly greater area of network to receive preventative treatment within available budgets and therefore represents an effective asset management tool rather than simply an alternative repair technique.

3.5.5 Performance

The Council measures performance through a range of operational indicators including:

- Response times for safety repairs;
- Percentage of emergency defects repaired on time;
- Completion of planned maintenance programmes;
- Network condition;
- Contractor performance indicators; and
- Customer enquiries.

Overall performance indicates that increased investment in planned maintenance is beginning to improve network condition.

Performance is monitored through monthly contract management arrangements and reported regularly to senior management. Current performance indicates that the Council continues to achieve high levels of compliance with safety repair response times, whilst planned maintenance programmes are being delivered normally in accordance with programme.

Increased investment in planned and preventative maintenance is beginning to improve overall network condition, particularly on the unclassified road network, although maintaining the condition of heavily trafficked strategic routes remains a challenge. Customer demand remains high, with defect reports influenced by factors such as severe weather and increasing public expectations.

See also Appendix I – Contract Key Performance Indicators.

Repair Times

Emergency defects are prioritised according to risk and repaired within the response times specified within the Council's Highway Safety Inspection Policy. Routine defects are programmed according to available resources and engineering priorities.

Backlog

Like all highway authorities, Brent continues to carry a maintenance backlog arising from many years of historic underinvestment nationally. Recent capital investment has reduced this backlog but has not eliminated it. Continued sustained investment will therefore be necessary if network condition improvements are to be maintained over the longer term.

Repeat Defects

Repeat defects are monitored through the Council's resurfacing prioritisation process. Where recurring repairs occur, locations are reviewed to determine whether patching or structural maintenance rather than further reactive intervention would provide better whole-life value.

The best way to reduce potholes is not simply to repair them faster, but to intervene earlier through planned maintenance.

3.5.6 Quality and Durability

The durability of carriageway repairs depends primarily upon the underlying condition of the road rather than the repair itself.

Where potholes develop because of localised surface failure, permanent patch repairs generally perform well.

However, where defects arise from wider structural deterioration, poor drainage, repeated utility excavations or ageing foundations, further deterioration elsewhere within the same carriageway is likely unless more extensive resurfacing is undertaken.

Common causes of recurring carriageway deterioration include:

- Ageing pavement construction;
- Increasing heavy vehicle traffic;
- Water ingress;
- Freeze-thaw weather cycles;
- Failed utility reinstatements;
- Poor drainage; and
- Utility trench settlement.

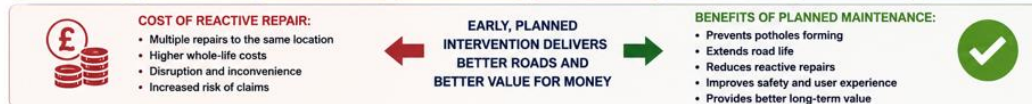
For this reason, Brent increasingly seeks to replace repeated patching with planned resurfacing wherever asset condition data indicates this represents better long-term value.

THE LIFE OF A POTHOLE

Why planned maintenance today prevents costly repairs tomorrow



Potholes do not appear overnight. They develop over time when small defects are not treated early.



Sustained investment in planned maintenance today prevents potholes tomorrow.
Better roads • Safer journeys • Better value • A borough we can be proud of

3.5.7 Financial Impact

Highway defects can expose the Council to compensation claims where highway users allege damage or injury resulting from highway defects. Claims are investigated individually having regard to:

- Inspection history;
- Repair records;
- Defect dimensions;
- Compliance with the Highway Safety Inspection Policy; and
- Statutory defences available under Section 58 of the Highways Act 1980.

Whilst claims represent a financial risk, they also provide valuable intelligence regarding recurring defects and help inform future maintenance priorities.

See Appendix G for analysis of Insurance Claims.

3.5.8 Public Confidence

Potholes remain one of the most visible indicators by which residents judge the condition of the highway network.

Although engineering condition surveys provide the most objective assessment of network performance, public confidence is often influenced more by the visibility of repairs and whether defects reappear shortly after repair.

Temporary repairs, whilst appropriate from a safety perspective, may therefore be perceived as poor-quality repairs if residents are unaware that permanent resurfacing has already been programmed.

There is therefore an opportunity to improve public understanding by communicating more clearly:

- Why different repair methods are used;
- The distinction between temporary and permanent repairs;
- How roads are prioritised; and
- When larger resurfacing schemes are planned.

Improving communication alongside continued investment is likely to increase resident confidence in the service.

See also Appendix E - Analysis of Customer Reports.

3.5.9 Benchmarking and Outcomes

Brent's carriageway maintenance strategy reflects current national best practice by emphasising preventative maintenance, lifecycle planning and risk-based investment.

Compared with many neighbouring London authorities, Brent demonstrates several strengths:

- Significant recent capital investment;
- Widespread use of AI-enabled condition surveys;
- Extensive preventative maintenance programmes;
- Adoption of injection patching to reduce defect growth;
- Evidence-based programme prioritisation; and
- Increasing transparency through publication of maintenance information.

The latest Asphalt Industry Alliance (ALARM) Survey continues to conclude that authorities maintaining sustained investment in preventative maintenance experience lower long-term maintenance costs, fewer emergency repairs and improved network resilience.

Brent's improvement in the network condition with continued investment in resurfacing, suggests that the Council is moving in the same direction as those authorities demonstrating good asset management maturity.

Nevertheless, benchmarking also highlights continuing challenges shared across the sector, including inflationary pressures, increasing traffic loading, ageing infrastructure, utility reinstatement quality and maintaining investment levels sufficient to prevent deterioration outpacing available resources.

See also Appendix B - Highway Maintenance Benchmarking Dashboard.

3.6 Deep Dive – Footways (Pavement Defects)

3.6.1 Overview

Brent Council is responsible for maintaining approximately 847 km of adopted footways, providing safe and accessible routes for pedestrians throughout the borough. Footways are one of the Council's most heavily used public assets and are fundamental to supporting walking, public transport, access to schools, town centres, local businesses and community facilities.

Unlike carriageways, where deterioration is primarily driven by vehicle loading, footway condition is influenced by a wider range of factors including pedestrian activity, tree root growth, ageing construction, utility excavations and surface weathering.

Although individual defects may appear relatively minor, uneven paving and trip hazards present a significant safety risk, particularly for older people, wheelchair users, visually impaired pedestrians and parents with pushchairs. For this reason, footway maintenance forms an important component of the Council's risk management strategy.

3.6.2 Footway Condition, Defect Volumes and Trends

Footway defects comprise a range of different forms of deterioration rather than a single defect type. The most common defects include:

- Trip hazards caused by uneven paving;
- Rocking paving slabs;
- Cracked or broken paving;
- Surface settlement;
- Depressions and ponding;
- Kerb deterioration;
- Damaged tactile paving;
- Utility reinstatement failures;
- Defects associated with tree root growth; and
- Localised surface wear.

The Council monitors footway condition through a combination of safety inspections, engineering assessments and planned condition surveys. Defect trends are analysed alongside reactive maintenance records to identify locations where repeated repairs indicate that reconstruction or more substantial planned maintenance would represent better long-term value.

In recent years, the Council has significantly increased investment in footway reconstruction through its planned maintenance programme. As part of the £15 million additional highways investment programme approved by Cabinet, approximately 80 footways, representing around 18 miles of pavement, were reconstructed or substantially improved. This investment is expected to reduce future reactive maintenance demand and improve accessibility across the borough.

See also Appendix J - Trends in Reactive Maintenance Footway repairs.

3.6.3 Inspection Regime and Defect Identification

Brent operates a risk-based footway safety inspection regime based upon the hierarchy and usage of each route. Inspection frequencies are determined according to the importance of the footway within the network, with heavily used town centre locations and transport interchanges receiving more frequent inspections than lower-use residential footways. Potential defects are identified through:

- Scheduled safety inspections;
- Reports from residents;
- Member enquiries;
- Council officers;
- Planned condition surveys;

Each reported defect is assessed against the Council's investigatory criteria, considering:

- Size of the defect;
- Likelihood of pedestrian trips;
- Surrounding environment;
- Pedestrian flows;
- Vulnerable users;
- Rate of deterioration; and
- Overall risk.

Defects presenting an immediate safety risk are programmed for reactive repair. Where wider deterioration is evident, locations are considered for inclusion within future footway reconstruction programmes. This risk-based approach ensures that resources are directed towards those defects presenting the greatest risk whilst supporting longer-term asset management objectives.

3.6.4 Performance

Repair Times

Reactive footway repairs are prioritised according to the assessed level of risk. Emergency defects receive immediate attention, whilst routine defects are repaired within the response times defined within the Council's Highway Safety Inspection Policy.

See also Appendix I – Contract Key Performance Indicators.

Maintenance Backlog

As with carriageways, Brent continues to manage a legacy maintenance backlog arising from historic underinvestment and the age of many footway assets. The recent capital investment programmes have enabled substantial progress to be made in reducing this backlog through reconstruction rather than repeated localised repairs.

However, continued investment will remain necessary if the Council is to prevent deterioration outpacing available resources.

Durability

Where deterioration is localised, reactive repairs generally perform well. However, where defects arise from wider structural issues, tree root growth or repeated utility excavations, localised repairs may only provide a temporary solution until more extensive reconstruction can be undertaken.

Consequently, the Council increasingly seeks to replace recurring reactive repairs with planned reconstruction where engineering assessments indicate this will provide better whole-life value.

3.6.5 Causes of Deterioration

Footway deterioration occurs for a variety of reasons, many of which are outside the direct control of the Council. The principal causes include:

- Ageing paving materials reaching the end of their service life;
- Tree root growth causing lifting of paving;
- Repeated utility excavations;
- Settlement of underlying foundations;
- Weathering and freeze-thaw cycles;
- Vehicle overrun, particularly by heavy goods vehicles;
- Defects associated with historic footway layouts.

Of these, tree root growth represents one of the most complex maintenance challenges because the Council must balance highway safety against its responsibilities to protect and enhance the borough's tree canopy.

3.6.6 Resident Experience

Residents generally judge footway condition through day-to-day walking experience rather than engineering assessments. Common concerns raised include:

- Uneven pavements;
- Trip hazards;
- Repeat repairs;
- Accessibility for wheelchair users and pushchairs;
- Delays before repairs are completed; and
- Uncertainty regarding when permanent reconstruction will occur.

The Council provides several mechanisms through which defects may be reported, including the online reporting portal, Customer Services and Ward Members.

Whilst inspection response times are generally good, there remains an opportunity to improve communication regarding inspection outcomes and

explain why some defects are monitored rather than repaired immediately or incorporated into future reconstruction programmes.

Improving communication is expected to increase resident confidence and understanding of the Council's asset management approach.

See also Appendix E - Analysis of Customer Reports.

3.6.7 Financial Impact

Footway defects are one of the most significant sources of highway compensation claims across local government due to the risk of pedestrian trips and falls.

Claims are assessed having regard to:

- Inspection history;
- Maintenance records;
- Compliance with inspection policy;
- Defect dimensions;
- Repair response times; and
- The statutory defence available under Section 58 of the Highways Act 1980.

Analysis of claims provides valuable information regarding recurring defects and assists officers in identifying locations where more substantial investment may be justified.

The Council's documented inspection regime continues to provide an important risk management control in defending claims where appropriate.

See also Appendix G - Insurance Claims.

3.6.8 Benchmarking and outcomes

Brent's approach to footway maintenance reflects the principles of modern highway asset management and aligns with the recommendations contained within the UK Roads Leadership Group's *Well-Managed Highway Infrastructure* Code of Practice.

Significant strengths include:

- Substantial recent investment in footway reconstruction;
- Risk-based safety inspection regimes;
- Increasing use of digital asset information;
- Integration of reactive maintenance with planned reconstruction programmes; and
- Ongoing development of lifecycle asset management.

The Council's recent investment programme is expected to maintain footway condition over the medium term, and in the long term reduce the number of safety defects requiring reactive repair and improving accessibility for pedestrians.

Nevertheless, there are challenges shared by many highway authorities, including ageing infrastructure, inflationary pressures, increasing expectations from residents and the need to maintain sufficient investment to prevent deterioration exceeding available funding.

Looking ahead, the Council will continue to strengthen its approach through enhanced asset data collection techniques as and when they become available and continued investment in planned reconstruction programmes.

Here is a table to compare carriageways and footways side-by-side.

Measure	Carriageways	Footways
Length of network	505 km	847 km
Primary users	Vehicles	Pedestrians
Most common defect	Potholes	Trip hazards
Primary deterioration	Traffic loading	Tree roots / ageing / utilities
Typical treatment	Patching / resurfacing	Reconstruction
Main compensation risk	Vehicle damage	Personal injury
Inspection approach	Risk-based	Risk-based
Long-term solution	Resurfacing	Reconstruction

This comparison helps understanding that the two asset types require different maintenance strategies, despite both falling under the Council's highways maintenance service.

3.7 Deep Dive – Tree Root Damage

3.7.1 Overview

Damage to footways caused by tree root growth represents one of the most complex highway maintenance challenges facing Brent and many other urban highway authorities.

Street trees provide significant environmental, social and economic benefits, including improved air quality, urban cooling, biodiversity enhancement, carbon sequestration and improved public realm. However, as trees mature their root systems naturally expand, sometimes causing adjacent footways to lift, crack or become uneven, creating trip hazards and accessibility issues.

Managing these competing priorities requires the Council to balance:

- Its statutory duty to maintain a safe highway under Section 41 of the Highways Act 1980;

- Its responsibilities as the highway authority to minimise risks to highway users;
- Its commitment to protecting and expanding the borough's tree canopy in support of climate resilience; and
- The long-term sustainability of both highway infrastructure and urban forestry.

Consequently, tree root damage cannot be considered solely as either a highways or arboricultural issue but requires coordinated asset management across both services.

3.7.2 Scale and Distribution of Tree Root Damage

Although Brent inspectors note “tree root damage” as a free-text item when specifying footway repairs, it is not entered as a reportable category on the asset management system. Numbers and an analysis of distribution are therefore not available. While precise numbers will fluctuate over time, tree root-related defects represent a significant proportion of recurring footway maintenance activity and will be represented within repeat repair locations.

Tree root-related defects occur throughout the borough but are concentrated in locations where mature street trees are located within narrow footways or where historic footway construction provides insufficient depth for unrestricted root growth. Typical defects include:

- Lifted paving slabs;
- Uneven asphalt footways;
- Longitudinal cracking;
- Localised heave;
- Rocking slabs;
- Kerb displacement; and
- Recurring trip hazards.

The scale of tree root damage reflects the maturity of Brent's street tree population, much of which was planted several decades ago.

3.7.3 Service Performance

Tree root defects are managed through the Council's normal highway safety inspection process. Where defects exceed the Council's investigatory criteria and present an unacceptable risk to pedestrians, they are prioritised for repair according to the assessed level of risk.

Unlike many other highway defects, however, tree root-related repairs frequently require additional engineering assessment and consultation with the Council's Tree Service before permanent solutions can be implemented. Consequently, permanent repairs may require longer programming times than conventional footway defects.

See also Appendix K – Highways Inspection Regime.

3.7.4 Repair Approaches and Effectiveness

The engineering response depends upon both the severity of the defect and the condition of the tree. Where defects present an immediate safety risk, temporary or localised repairs may be undertaken to remove the hazard. These include:

- Localised asphalt repairs;
- Minor reprofiling; and
- Temporary surface treatments.

Whilst effective in restoring immediate safety, these interventions do not address the underlying biological cause where roots continue to grow. Consequently, repeat maintenance may become necessary as root systems continue to expand.

Where engineering assessments indicate that recurring defects are likely, more permanent solutions may include:

- Flexible asphalt footway construction;
- Local widening of footways;
- Root-friendly construction techniques;
- Root barriers where appropriate;
- Selective root pruning following arboricultural assessment; and

The choice of treatment is therefore determined by balancing:

- Public safety;
- Tree health;
- Engineering durability;
- Environmental impact;
- Cost; and
- Future maintenance liabilities.

Current best practice increasingly favours engineering solutions that accommodate root growth rather than repeated surface repairs or unnecessary removal of mature trees.

3.7.5 Financial and Legal Implications

Tree root-related defects are one of the sources of pedestrian compensation claims within urban highway authorities. Claims generally arise where individuals allege injury resulting from uneven footways.

Each claim is investigated having regard to:

- Inspection records;
- Maintenance history;
- Previous reports;
- Compliance with inspection frequencies;
- Defect dimensions;

- Repair response times; and
- The statutory defence available under Section 58 of the Highways Act 1980.

Whilst compensation costs represent a financial pressure, they also provide valuable information regarding recurring maintenance locations and help inform future investment priorities.

It is important to recognise that removing a tree solely to reduce maintenance costs may expose the Council to wider environmental, amenity and reputational impacts. Consequently, tree removal is generally considered only where engineering options have been exhausted or where independent arboricultural advice identifies wider concerns regarding tree health or structural stability.

See also Appendix G - Insurance Claims.

3.7.6 Joint Working Between Highways and Tree Services

Effective management of tree root damage depends upon close collaboration between the Highways Service and the Council's Tree Service. Joint working arrangements include:

- Joint site inspections
- Engineering and arboricultural assessments;
- Agreement of repair options;
- Coordination of maintenance programmes; and
- Shared decision-making where tree works may be required.

This collaborative approach ensures that decisions appropriately balance:

- Highway safety;
- Engineering requirements;
- Tree health;
- Biodiversity;
- Climate resilience;
- Financial implications; and
- Resident expectations.

The Council increasingly seeks solutions (such as “street-friendly” tree types) that achieve long-term improvements whilst retaining the environmental benefits provided by mature street trees.

3.7.7 Long-Term Mitigation Strategy

Recognising that tree root damage is likely to increase as the borough's tree population matures, the Council is continuing to develop a more preventative management approach. Current and future measures might include:

- Use of flexible surfacing materials around trees;

- Coordination between highway maintenance and tree management programmes;
- Selective root pruning following arboricultural assessment;
- prioritising permanent engineering solutions where repeat repairs occur;
- replacement planting where tree removal is unavoidable, where funding is available;
- ensuring that future highway improvement schemes incorporate sufficient rooting space for newly planted trees.
- earlier identification of recurring root-related defects through asset management systems

These measures seek to reduce whole-life maintenance costs whilst maintaining and enhancing the borough's valuable tree canopy.

3.7.8 Benchmarking and Outcomes

Tree root damage is a common challenge for London boroughs and other urban highway authorities with mature street tree populations.

National guidance increasingly recognises that traditional reactive repairs provide only limited long-term benefits where underlying root growth continues. Consequently, many authorities are moving towards integrated asset management approaches that combine engineering design with arboricultural expertise. Brent's approach is consistent with this direction of travel through:

- joint working between highways and tree services;
- increasing use of permanent reconstruction where appropriate;
- continued protection of mature trees wherever feasible;
- adoption of risk-based inspection and maintenance; and
- integration of tree management into wider highway asset planning.

Although repeat defects cannot be eliminated entirely while mature trees continue to grow, the Council's longer-term strategy is expected to reduce recurring maintenance, improve accessibility and enhance public confidence by addressing underlying causes rather than relying solely on repeated surface repairs.

3.8 Contract Performance, Value for Money and Future Direction

3.8.1 Overview

Brent Council delivers its highway maintenance service through two specialist term maintenance contracts which commenced in April 2023 following a competitive procurement process. The contracts run for an initial period of seven years, plus the possibility of three individual one- year extensions. Extensions will be subject to satisfactory performance as detailed in the contract.

The contracts were designed to support the Council's modern highway asset management approach by combining planned maintenance, reactive

maintenance and specialist engineering services within clearly defined performance frameworks. The current arrangements comprise:

- **O'Hara Bros. Surfacing Ltd** – Highways Maintenance Contract, responsible for all reactive maintenance, including an Emergency Call Out service, and gully cleansing across the borough; planned carriageway and footway maintenance and highway schemes, drainage schemes, highway structures schemes in the north of the borough.
- **GW Highways Ltd** – Highway Infrastructure Contract, planned carriageway and footway maintenance and highway schemes, drainage schemes, highway structures schemes in the south of the borough.

The contracts provide flexibility, resilience and improved value for money through long-term collaborative working, whilst maintaining competitive pricing and robust performance management.

3.8.2 Contract Performance

Performance is monitored through a comprehensive contract management framework designed to ensure that works are delivered safely, efficiently and in accordance with agreed quality standards. Performance monitoring includes:

- Key Performance Indicators (KPIs);
- Monthly operational review meetings;
- Strategic contract management meetings;
- Site quality inspections;
- Financial monitoring;
- Programme monitoring;
- Customer enquiries and complaints;
- Defect inspections; and
- Performance dashboards

The principal KPIs include:

Performance Measure	Purpose
Emergency response times	Safety performance
Routine repair completion	Operational performance
Planned programme delivery	Programme management
Quality inspection pass rates	Quality assurance
Defect recurrence	Durability
Health & Safety compliance	Statutory compliance
Customer complaints	Customer experience
Carbon reduction measures	Environmental performance

Performance is reviewed jointly by Council officers and contractors to identify emerging issues, monitor trends and implement continuous improvement actions where required.

Overall, contractor performance has improved over the previous contractor, remained stable since mobilisation and has supported delivery of significantly increased planned maintenance investment alongside day-to-day reactive maintenance operations.

See also Appendix I – Contract Key Performance Indicators.

3.8.3 Contract Monitoring and Quality Assurance

Effective contract management is fundamental to achieving value for money. Brent has adopted an active client approach, recognising that successful highway maintenance contracts depend not only upon contractor performance but also upon effective client-side management. Quality assurance activities include:

- Routine site inspections during works;
- Post-completion inspections;
- Measurement of completed quantities;
- Compliance inspections against specification;
- Review of response times;
- Financial verification;
- Investigation of customer complaints;
- Performance scorecards; and
- Periodic senior management reviews.

Where quality issues are identified, corrective actions are agreed with the contractor and monitored through subsequent performance meetings. This collaborative approach seeks to resolve issues promptly whilst maintaining appropriate contractual accountability.

3.8.4 Value for Money

The Council considers value for money in terms of whole-life outcomes rather than simply the initial cost of individual repairs. The current contracts were competitively procured and provide:

- Economies of scale through long-term arrangements;
- Predictable schedule of rates;
- Reduced procurement costs;
- Improved programming of planned works;
- Flexibility to respond to emergencies;
- Integrated asset management;
- Opportunities for innovation; and
- Improved contractor familiarity with the borough's highway network.

Value for money is assessed through several measures including:

- Unit rates (at time of procurement, uplifted annually for inflation);
- Delivery against budget;
- Programme delivery;

- Defect occurrence;
- Customer outcomes;
- Health and safety performance; and
- Asset condition improvements.

Importantly, value for money is not achieved by reducing expenditure alone but by selecting interventions that minimise whole-life maintenance costs whilst improving network condition and reducing future reactive demand.

This asset management approach aligns with Department for Transport guidance and the principles underpinning the Highways Maintenance Incentive Funding regime.

3.8.5 Comparison with Alternative Delivery Models

Highway maintenance services are delivered nationally through a variety of operating models, including:

Delivery Model	Advantages	Challenges
In-house workforce	Direct control, local knowledge	Higher fixed staffing costs, reduced flexibility
Term maintenance contract (Brent)	Specialist expertise, economies of scale, flexibility	Requires strong client management
Framework contracts	Competitive pricing, procurement efficiency	Less continuity
Joint authority contracts	Shared procurement and resources	Reduced local responsiveness

Brent's term contract model remains the most widely adopted approach across London and is generally considered to provide the best balance between operational flexibility, specialist expertise and value for money.

The effectiveness of this approach is dependent upon maintaining a knowledgeable client team capable of managing performance, quality and contractual compliance.

3.8.6 Service Quality and Resident Experience

Ultimately, residents judge the highways service not by contractual arrangements but by visible improvements to the highway network and their experience of reporting defects. Since the commencement of the current contracts, the Council has delivered:

- Significantly increased planned maintenance programmes;
- Substantial investment in carriageway resurfacing;
- Increased use of preventative maintenance;
- Improved asset condition surveys;
- Greater transparency through publication of maintenance information; and
- Continued delivery of reactive maintenance to statutory standards.

These improvements represent a significant step forward compared with previous years when historic funding levels allowed only very limited planned maintenance. Nevertheless, customer perception does not always reflect engineering performance. Residents continue to express concerns regarding:

- Delays before permanent resurfacing;
- Repeat repairs;
- Communication following defect reports;
- Visibility of completed programmes; and
- Understanding of how maintenance priorities are determined.

These issues are common across the sector and demonstrate that improving customer experience requires not only good engineering performance but also effective communication.

3.8.7 Improving Communication with Residents

The Committee has highlighted the importance of improving communication with residents and businesses throughout the maintenance process. Whilst the Council already provides online defect reporting and publishes planned maintenance programmes, there are opportunities to strengthen engagement further.

We already:

- Provide pre-notification of planned maintenance or traffic schemes by letter drops and on-site messaging
- Provide automated updates following defect reports;
- Inform residents when inspections have been completed;
- Notify that defects do or do not meet investigation criteria;
- Notify residents in advance of planned maintenance works

Potential improvements include:

- Publishing programme progress dashboards;
- Increasing use of social media and ward communications;
- Introducing post-completion customer satisfaction surveys; and
- Explaining in detail why defects are or are not prioritised for repair;
- Using QR codes at work sites linking directly to scheme information.

Improving communication is expected to increase public confidence even where engineering priorities remain unchanged.

3.8.8 Lessons Learned

Previous Contractual Arrangements

TfL's London Highways Alliance Contract (LoHAC)

From April 2013 to March 2021, Brent was signed up to TfL's London Highways Alliance Contract (LoHAC). It was a joint initiative and collaborative framework

launched by Transport for London (TfL) and London's local boroughs to handle highways maintenance, improvement schemes, and street asset management across the capital. The contractor for the Northwest London sector was ConwayAECOM, a joint venture between contractors FM Conway and consultants AECOM.

The original LoHAC initiative was introduced in 2013 and ran until March 2021. Originally, highways inspection services were outsourced to ConwayAECOM, and the repair of all high priority defects were covered by a lump sum. The repair of medium priority defects was funded additionally by Brent. This arrangement did not work well in terms of the arrangements relating to high priority defects.

- *Contract Variation*

In 2018 a Variation to the Contract was agreed, the highway inspectors came back in-house, and the lump sum was abolished. This Variation was a great improvement, giving Brent back full control over what work was carried out and when.

- *Contract Extension and Novation*

In April 2021 Brent extended the contract for two years and novated it to FM Conway. At that time Brent was about to carry out a root and branch review of all environmental contracts, and arrangements were made to make all such existing contracts co-terminus, so that the new set of contracts could be re-packaged if, after review, it was felt advantageous to do so.

While having some advantages, notably the keen market-tested rates, the LoHAC / extended contract did not provide any flexibility in delivery should the contractor fall short in performance or capacity to deal with peaks in workload. Focus on Brent as a customer was also less than ideal.

- *£20m Footway Improvement Programme*

Around 2019 Brent allocated £20 million funding to a footway improvement programme. As the delivery window was tight, the decision was to divide the borough into three geographical areas and appoint a contractor to each of the three areas. This gave a large amount of flexibility to programme delivery, with contract clauses inserted allowing transfer of work if contractor performance or capacity affected programme delivery. The reduced size of the contracts tendered brought them within range of local contractors it was felt who would be more responsive to customer needs.

This arrangement worked very well and the £20m programme was delivered on time, within budget and to a high standard.

The Present Arrangements

- *How the contracts are packaged*

Carrying the lessons learnt from the previous arrangements forward into the present contracts, it was decided that the new arrangements should mirror the successful features of the delivery of the £20m Footway Improvement Programme. In other words:

- There should be flexibility in delivery, by having a back-up contractor; and
- Contracts should be of a size to allow Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to tender

The solution adopted was that for planned work, the borough was divided into two areas North and South, and a contractor appointed to each area. (Future planned maintenance budgets were not expected to be anything like the £20m footway improvement programme, and so would not sustain three contracts as before).

Likewise, as the revenue budget for reactive maintenance is already small, it would not be feasible have two contracts and run two viable services. Hence, it was decided to appoint one contractor boroughwide for the reactive & routine maintenance.

Again, contract clauses were inserted allowing transfer of work (planned and/or reactive) if the performance or capacity of either contractor affected programme delivery.

In accordance with current Council practice, Social Value targets are also included in the requirements.

- *Progress so far*

Three years into the current contracts, the arrangements have worked very well. Works are being delivered on time, to a high standard and to budget. Commercial friction between the client and contractor side is much reduced, which makes financial monitoring easier for both parties. Both contractors are flexible and responsive to the borough's requirements, and they actively work well together, sharing resources were beneficial. A number of key lessons have emerged:

Strengths

- Strong partnership working between client and contractors.
- Significant increase in planned maintenance delivery with increased funding.
- Improvement of asset management techniques.
- Greater use of digital condition surveys.
- Improved preventative maintenance.

Challenges

- Maintaining sufficient capital investment.
- Managing customer expectations.
- Continuing to improve customer satisfaction measures.
- Inflationary pressures affecting construction costs.

- Contractual CPA (spend) limits being exceeded with increased investment

Opportunities

- Greater use of predictive asset management.
- Expansion of digital technologies and AI.
- Enhanced customer engagement.
- Wider benchmarking against London authorities.
- Increased use of carbon reduction technologies.

3.8.9 Future direction

Looking ahead, the Council intends to continue developing the highways maintenance service in line with national best practice and the Department for Transport's evolving asset management requirements. Key priorities include:

- Maintaining investment in planned maintenance to reduce future reactive demand;
- Further development of the Highway Asset Management Plan (in progress);
- Expanding use of digital condition surveys and predictive analytics;
- Enhancing customer satisfaction measurement;
- Improving communication with residents and businesses;
- Supporting decarbonisation through low-carbon materials and construction techniques;
- Maintaining eligibility for the highest level of DfT Highways Maintenance Incentive Funding; and
- Ensuring that future procurement exercises continue to reward innovation, quality, sustainability and whole-life value rather than lowest initial cost.

Future procurement strategies will build upon the lessons learned from the current contracts, placing increased emphasis on measurable customer outcomes, asset performance, carbon reduction, social value and continuous improvement.

3.9 Pan London Benchmarking using the DfT Transparency report

3.9.1 Department for Transport (DfT) Highways Maintenance Transparency Reporting

In April 2025, the Department for Transport (DfT) introduced a new Highways Maintenance Transparency Reporting requirement as part of its Local Highway Maintenance Funding arrangements.

The purpose of the transparency reports is to improve accountability, provide greater public visibility of how highway maintenance funding is invested, and enable meaningful comparison of local highway authorities' asset management practices and performance.

All highway authorities are required to publish information covering areas such as network condition, investment levels, maintenance strategies, resilience,

climate change, customer engagement and service performance. Whilst the reports are not intended to create a league table of authorities, they provide a consistent framework for benchmarking the maturity of asset management, adoption of best practice and continuous improvement across the sector. See Appendix A for Brent's current edition of the DfT Transparency Report.

The benchmarking contained within the current report (Appendix B - Highway Maintenance Benchmarking Dashboard) has therefore been informed by a review of published transparency reports from London boroughs, together with the DfT's Transparency Reporting Guidance, Highways Maintenance Incentive Funding framework and the recommendations of the *Well-managed Highway Infrastructure: A Code of Practice*.

The scrutiny benchmarking compares Brent against best practice characteristics demonstrated across London authorities and the DfT's assessment framework, rather than isolated statistics. The new DfT transparency reports were specifically designed to enable this type of comparison and now form part of authorities' performance ratings.

3.9.2 Overview

Brent's highways maintenance service has been benchmarked against publicly available Highways Maintenance Transparency Reports published by London boroughs together with the Department for Transport's Highways Maintenance Transparency Reporting Guidance and Incentive Funding Framework.

Whilst direct comparison between authorities should be treated with caution due to significant differences in network size, road hierarchy, traffic volumes, funding levels and local priorities, the reports provide a useful comparison of asset management maturity, transparency and adoption of recognised good practice.

Overall, Brent compares favourably with many London authorities and demonstrates a mature asset management approach in a number of key areas.

3.9.3 Overall Benchmarking Conclusion

Comparison with published London borough transparency reports indicates that Brent has developed a mature highway asset management service which is well aligned with current Department for Transport expectations and recognised sector best practice.

The Council demonstrates particular strengths in asset management, digital innovation and sustained investment in preventative maintenance. These strengths position Brent favourably for achieving and maintaining a strong DfT local road maintenance rating.

The benchmarking also identifies opportunities for further development. In common with many authorities, greater emphasis could be placed on measuring customer confidence, communication and the wider social outcomes of highway maintenance.

Strengthening these areas would not only improve future transparency reporting but also provide Members and residents with a more rounded understanding of service performance alongside traditional engineering and operational measures.

4.0 Financial Considerations

Highway maintenance is funded through a combination of Council prudential borrowing, Department for Transport (DfT) Highways Maintenance Block Funding, DfT Highways Maintenance Incentive Funding and revenue budgets for reactive maintenance.

This report does not seek approval for additional expenditure or changes to existing budgets. Any future investment decisions arising from the recommendations of this report will be considered through the Council's normal budget-setting and capital programme approval processes.

The report highlights the importance of maintaining investment in planned and preventative maintenance. Preventative maintenance generally provides better whole-life value for money by extending asset life, reducing reactive maintenance demand and lowering long-term maintenance costs. It also can generally be treated as capital so can be funded from more sources. Funding highway investment from borrowing however carries interest costs, which will need to be covered by overall revenue budgets as highways investment does not directly generate income for the Council.

Continued investment in highway asset management also supports the Council's ability to maximise future DfT Highways Maintenance Incentive Funding by demonstrating compliance with national asset management best practice.

5.0 Legal Considerations

Brent Council has a statutory duty under Section 41 of the Highways Act 1980 to maintain highways that are maintainable at public expense.

The Council also benefits from the statutory defence provided by Section 58 of the Highways Act 1980, provided it can demonstrate that it has taken reasonable steps to maintain the highway through appropriate inspection, maintenance and risk management arrangements.

The Council's highway safety inspection regime, risk-based maintenance policy and documented asset management processes form an important part of this legal defence and help minimise the risk of successful compensation claims.

The report also recognises that highway maintenance decisions must be balanced with the Council's wider statutory responsibilities relating to street trees, environmental protection, health and safety, procurement and equality legislation.

There are no specific legal implications arising directly from the recommendations contained within this report.

6.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

The Council has declared a Climate Emergency and is committed to reducing carbon emissions whilst improving environmental sustainability.

Highway maintenance contributes to these objectives by extending the life of existing highway assets through preventative maintenance, thereby reducing the need for more carbon-intensive reconstruction works. Planned maintenance also enables greater use of lower-carbon construction techniques, recycled materials and more efficient programming of works.

The report recognises the important environmental benefits provided by Brent's street trees, including biodiversity, urban cooling, carbon sequestration and improved air quality. In managing tree root damage, the Council seeks to balance highway safety with the retention and protection of mature trees wherever practicable.

Future procurement and contract management will continue to encourage innovation, sustainable construction methods and the reduction of environmental impacts associated with highway maintenance activities.

7.0 Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Considerations

Under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the Council is required to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share protected characteristics and those who do not.

Highway maintenance has an important role in supporting inclusive access to the borough. Well-maintained carriageways and footways improve safety and accessibility for all highway users, particularly disabled people, older residents, children, visually impaired pedestrians, wheelchair users and those using mobility aids or pushchairs.

The Council's risk-based inspection and maintenance regime takes account of pedestrian usage, accessibility and potential risks to vulnerable highway users when prioritising repairs. Planned footway improvement programmes also provide opportunities to improve accessibility through the renewal of footways, dropped kerbs and tactile paving where appropriate.

The recommendations contained within this report are expected to have a positive impact by supporting a safer, more accessible and more inclusive highway network for all residents.

9.0 Human Resources and Property Considerations

There are no direct human resources or property implications arising from the recommendations contained within this report.

The report recognises the importance of maintaining an appropriately resourced and skilled client team to manage the Council's highways maintenance contracts, asset management responsibilities and statutory duties.

10.0 Communication Considerations

Effective communication is essential to maintaining public confidence in the highways maintenance service. The report identifies opportunities to improve communication with residents and businesses by providing clearer information on how maintenance priorities are determined and improving updates on the progress of reported defects and maintenance programmes.

These improvements will be delivered through existing communication channels and in accordance with the Council's Corporate Communications arrangements.

Report sign off:

Jehan Weerasinghe

Corporate Director Neighbourhoods
and Regeneration