

Essex County Council Highways and Transportation Asset Management Policy

Foreword - Supporting Everyone's Essex / Helping achieve Net Zero by 2050

The highways infrastructure is one of the highest value assets that Essex County Council owns, with current estimates valuing it at over £11 billion (excluding land value).

Our ambition is to maintain a highway network that provides access for all related modes of travel, supports economic recovery from the global pandemic, keeps users safe and continues to achieve our statutory responsibilities. All achieved within our vision for Safer, Greener and Healthier Travel for users of the transport network. Like all Councils, however, Essex County Council is not alone in facing significant budgetary challenges. The cost of maintaining our highway network at a level that supports our ambition, whilst meeting public expectations, remains a strong adversary.

In order to deliver a sustainable, well-managed highway network that provides increasing value for money, we must continue to integrate innovative new technologies, new materials and processes into our strategic, long-term approach. We must also ensure that everything we do helps address climate change through supporting Net Zero by 2050. For example, the highway network is a key infrastructure that can help towards meeting the Essex Climate Action Commission's recommendations for Transport, Built Environment, Land Use, Water Use and Green Infrastructure. It can also support the development of the Essex Local Nature recovery strategy, emerging in 2023.

While investments into the highway asset are no longer at historic, high levels, the scale and need of the highway asset, together with our need for environmental sustainability, dictates that investment levels must continue to be appropriate. The highways service is delivered through a long-term collaborative partnership contract between Essex County Council and its strategic partner Ringway Jacobs. To help us to deliver our ambition, we will maximise the commercial and strategic opportunities that are available to us through this partnership.

The strong focus on asset management within the partnership will continue to ensure we place people at the heart of our service, so that everything we do has a positive impact on everyone's lives, not just for current generations but for future generations too. This focus makes us agile and adaptive to change so we can continue to deliver the best possible service and value for residents, businesses and the travelling public.

Photo and signature Cllr. Lee Scott

Embedding this Policy

Essex County Council recognises the vital role that its highway network plays in the lives of residents as well as the travelling public and local businesses. This is especially relevant as the County responds to the recent economic and social impacts on society, and the urgent need to address climate change.

Effective asset management of the highway network, including its infrastructure, is fundamental in supporting the Council's strategic priorities. In so doing it contributes to the Local Transport Plan and the Council's vision of attracting sustainable economic growth within a sustainable environment, that helps deliver the best quality of life for the residents of Essex.

Photo and signatures Paul Crick and Simon Butt

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Essex County Council has developed strategic priorities to address the expectations of its residents and highway users. These are documented in the Essex County Council's 'Everyone's Essex - our plan for levelling up the county: 2021-2025' and the Local Transport Plan.

- **Economy** – strong, inclusive & sustainable economy
 - **Good Jobs** (*support business recovery and build a stronger economy for the future, enable people to build the skills they need*)
 - **Infrastructure** (*deliver and maintain high quality infrastructure, to improve opportunities for people*)
 - **Future growth and investment** (*grow existing businesses and the economic sectors of the future in Essex, including the arts, and secure high levels of new investment*)
 - **Green growth** (*enable our economy to transition to net zero and secure green jobs for the future*)
 - **Levelling up the economy** (*work to level up the economy by addressing the drivers of socio-economic inequality*)
- **Environment** – high quality environment
 - **Net Zero** (*work across the council and the county to hit our net zero targets*)
 - **Transport and built environment** (*deliver a step change in sustainable travel across the county*)
 - **Minimise waste** (*support residents and businesses to reduce waste and increase the amounts recycled*)
 - **Green communities** (*provide advice and support to enable and empower local action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions*)
 - **Levelling up the environment** (*enhance our county's green infrastructure and reduce air pollution*)
- **Health** – health, wellbeing & independence for all ages
 - **Healthy lifestyles** (*helping people to live fit and active lifestyles*)
 - **Promoting independence** (*work with key partners and the adult safeguarding board to help individuals to live free from abuse and neglect*)
 - **Place-based working** (*deliver better care that meets the needs of residents*)
 - **Carers** (*achieve a step change in the advice, guidance and support we provide*)
 - **Levelling up health** (*bring together partners and communities to address the socio-economic drivers that underpin poor health outcomes*)

- **Family** – a good place for children and families to grow
 - **Education outcomes** (*achieve educational excellence and high standards for all children and young people*)
 - **Family resilience and stability** (*embed an approach that tackles the drivers of family instability*)
 - **Safety** (*continue to improve the safety of Essex residents, including children and young people*)
 - **Outcomes for vulnerable children** (*work to improve outcomes for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups*)
 - **Levelling up outcomes for families** (*work to address inequalities affecting children and families*)

Effective asset management leads to a safe, accessible, serviceable and sustainable highway network which is vital for providing access to key services such as employment, healthcare, education, social services, sports and leisure facilities. It is also vital for providing access across the County for the police, ambulance, fire and other emergency response services.

The County's priority route network provides the main arteries for the flow of commerce, goods and people, and therefore carries high volumes of traffic through and around the County. Sustaining this network in appropriate condition promotes reliable access and journey times, thereby encouraging desired economic growth in the County by making Essex an attractive investment for employers. This is vital to support economic and social recovery and growth. In addition, preventing driving surfaces from becoming inefficient has a positive impact on use of fuel and its associated output of carbon emissions, thereby contributing to the County's target of net zero CO₂e emissions by 2050.

A balanced approach to asset investment promotes choice as to where people wish to travel, as well as how people wish to travel; either through active travel such as walking and cycling, or by public transport or by driving. The highway network, including public rights of way, also affords opportunities for improving physical and mental wellbeing through exercise such as walking, jogging, cycling and horse riding. It also provides access to the countryside and other open, green spaces. Access to green spaces, however, need not be limited to the countryside, as this is achieved in urban areas through greening areas of public realm.

Essex Highways is in a unique position to support the Council's objectives to increase green infrastructure and aid Local Nature Recovery. Through management of highway verges and other soft estate, as well as through natural flood water management techniques, it can provide continuity of habitat that effectively 'join' together urban and rural areas of nature. This contributes to the Council's objective to increase 'green infrastructure' in Essex from the current level of 14% to 30% by 2040.

We will endeavour to aid nature's recovery, achieve biodiversity net gain, and support people having access to high-quality green and natural places that facilitate inclusiveness and integration. This creates great places to be and provides multiple benefits for people and biodiversity.

In addition, our continued exploration and adoption of low carbon materials and processes in our maintenance and renewals operations, as well as the promotion of active and sustainable transport, reduces carbon emissions in support of net zero targets.

To support these priorities the Council has developed a Highways and Transportation Asset Management Strategy which sets out how the highway infrastructure is managed and maintained effectively in Essex: how the Highways and Transportation Asset Management Policy will be delivered, and its desired outcomes realised. Central to the strategy is agility and flexibility, so that we can continue to balance competing and changing demands for investment across all asset groups. It achieves this by prioritising investment within an asset management framework that is based on sound data and evidence. It also places people at the heart of what it does, not only by considering the safety, needs, views and expectations of the travelling public and residents of Essex, but through acknowledging the importance of environmental sustainability.

The Asset Management Strategy explains how available funds and resources are utilised to maximise the benefits of the investment in the highway network for all current and future users of Essex highways. The key Outcome Objectives of the Essex County Council Highways and Transportation Asset Management Strategy are:

Economy – strong, inclusive & sustainable economy

The Essex County Council supports the commercial needs and economic growth desired in the County through ensuring its Highways assets are safe, accessible, serviceable and sustainable. This provides access to key national and international destinations, supported by reliable journey times, which creates the right environment to attract investment and employers to the area. It also provides access for machinery, materials and services to deliver new homes to communities. These benefits address the recent social and economic impacts on society by supporting business recovery and creating the right environment for building a stronger and more resilient economy for the future.

Environment – high quality environment

A safe, accessible, serviceable and sustainable highway network promotes a safer environment through access to emergency services such as the fire, police and ambulance services. It also enables people choice in mode of travel, which supports the Council's delivery of increased active travel and passenger transport, and it provides access to waste collection services and recycling centres. Effective maintenance of drainage infrastructure makes the county more resilient to the effects of climate change. Also, collecting and holding back water enables water to be reused or released slowly back into the environment, contributing to the objectives of the Essex Climate Action Commission. A considered approach to highway materials and processes, including reuse of materials to reduce waste, reduces carbon emissions, which contributes to the County's target of net zero by 2050. Promoting increase in green infrastructure by achieving connectivity through the appropriate management of verges and other soft estate and the greening of public realm spaces, contributes to biodiversity net gain and aids nature's recovery.

Health – health, wellbeing & independence for all ages

A safe, accessible, serviceable and sustainable highway network supports quality of life expectations through ensuring all users have access to key services such as social services, healthcare, education and employment. It also enables opportunities for cycling, jogging, walking and horse riding, as well as providing access to sports, green spaces, leisure and entertainment facilities – all of which address physical and mental health and wellbeing. Greening and improving the amenity of urban public realm spaces creates areas where people feel safe and comfortable, fostering the feeling of community and contributing to peoples' health. An accessible network also facilitates effective communications between communities and organisations, helping people to live independently. In addition, it enables domiciliary support which helps people overcome social isolation and safeguards people against neglect.

Family – a good place for children and families to grow

A safe, accessible, serviceable and sustainable highway network provides access to schools, colleges, universities and other training establishments, enabling children and people to pursue the standards of education and training they need to enter job markets and develop careers. It creates the right environment to encourage employment opportunities at all skills levels, which tackles family poverty. It also facilitates the engagement and support required to address family instability. Reducing carbon emissions, improving air quality, increasing green infrastructure, improving public realm spacing, providing choice of travel - especially improving active and sustainable travel - will sustain a focus on the family unit which will continue to make Essex a great place for families to be.

The Essex County Council strives for continual improvement and innovation in the use of technologies, processes and materials in the maintenance of its Highway assets. This is aimed at reducing costs as well as exploring opportunities for promoting biodiversity and reducing carbon emissions in order to assist with the County's target of net zero by 2050. Highway network maintenance is delivered through evidence and data based, robust asset management planning across all Highway asset groups. This delivers the best strategic, value for money solutions within the overall funding available.

The Essex County Council implements methods to monitor, evaluate and review the performance of its Highway assets, to ensure the effectiveness of strategies are sustained and aligned to the Council's strategic priorities.

Next review date January 2024