



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2021/22

**PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY,
COMMUNITIES & PROSPERITY
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

18th NOVEMBER 2021

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF
FRONTLINE SERVICES**

Agenda Item No: 5

**HIGHWAYS INFRASTRUCTURE
UPDATE**

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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to provide Members of the Public Service Delivery, Communities & Prosperity Scrutiny Committee with an update on the highway infrastructure within the County Borough.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Note the update on highways infrastructure within the County Borough with particular reference to the asset management strategy and investment strategy.
- 2.2 Note the expenditure required to maintain the highway infrastructure asset.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The highways infrastructure is the single biggest asset that the Council owns, valued at £3.2billion (2021 gross replacement cost).
- 3.2 The highways infrastructure consists of:

- 1,295km of carriageways
- 1,159km of footways
- 1,567 highway structures including 196 road bridges
- 29,404 streetlights
- 134 traffic signals (signalised junction and pedestrian crossings)

Plus surface water sewer systems and road gullies, miscellaneous street furniture, signs, bollards, vehicle barriers, pedestrian barriers, etc.

- 3.3 A Highway Asset Management Plan (HAMP) sets out a structured approach to managing the highway asset based around the following core elements:
- Hierarchy
 - Inspection
 - Defect
 - Repair
 - Programmed Repairs
 - Planned Maintenance
- 3.4 The first HAMP was published and then updated by the Council in 2012 and since that year the Council has utilised this and the evidence from the inspections to undertake a capital programme of works.
- 3.5 The UK Roads Liaison Group published guidance in 2016 – “Well Managed Highway Infrastructure: A Code of Practice” which is supported, endorsed and recommended by key organisations including Department for Transport and County Surveyors Society Wales (CSSW). The Code of Practice promotes a risk-based approach to inspection and maintenance.
- 3.6 In 2019 CSSW published Highway Asset Management Planning: Recommended Practices which contains the practices that CSSW recommends to local authorities to apply.
- 3.7 The CSSW document recommends that the HAMP is produced no later than every 5 years and an Annual Status Report (ASOR) is produced on an annual basis with both documents helping the authority to identify works programmes and priorities.

4. UPDATE / CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 Due to the extensive investment in the highway infrastructure, with delivery a priority, the COVID pandemic and lack of staff resources (which has been recently resolved) a new HAMP and ASOR will now be upgraded.
- 4.2 Historically, the Council has successfully obtained funding from the Welsh Government (WG) for funding in its highway infrastructure via Local Government Borrowing Initiative, Highways Refurbishment Capital Grant and Local Government Roads Maintenance Grant. The Council in accordance with its predecessor Corporate Plan and the current Corporate Plan have recognised the

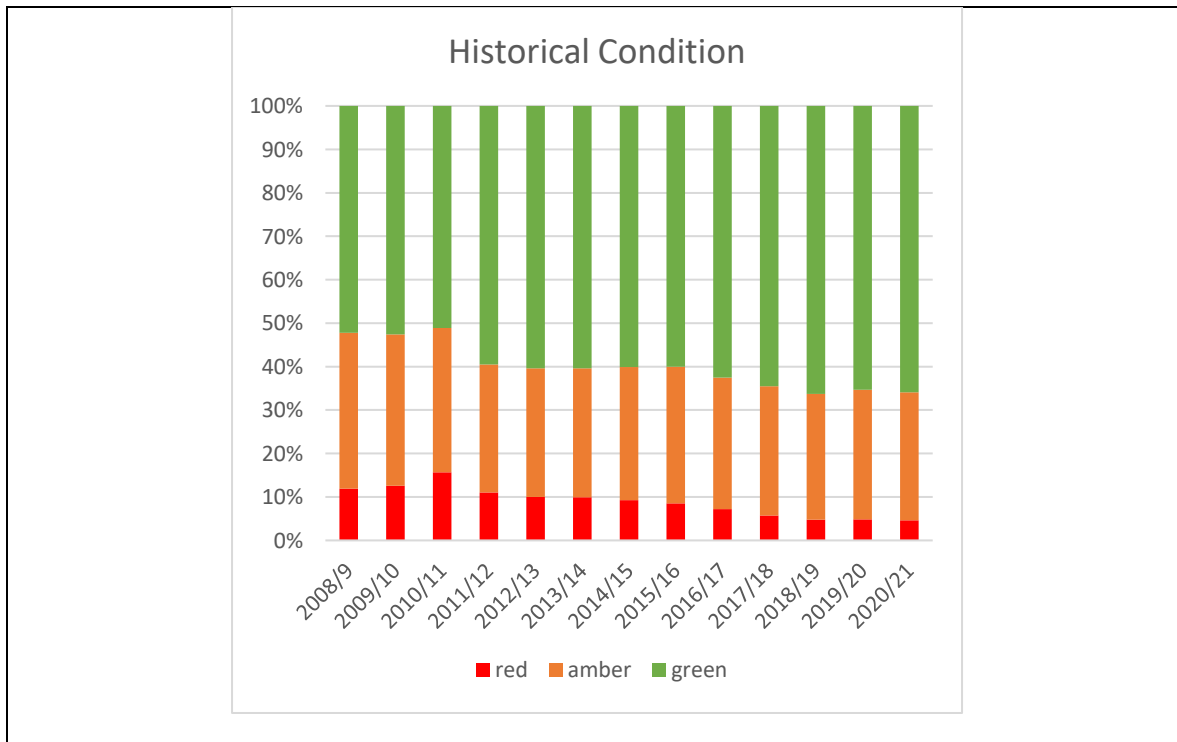
importance of the highways infrastructure asset and has made sustained and enhanced asset investment via its RCTInvest programme.

- 4.3 The Infrastructure Asset Management Group staff resources has increased since 2015 in order to deal with the important highways infrastructure asset. A dedicated structures team is now in place which undertakes the general and principal inspections of the structures without having to outsource this resource to deal with it, thus making it more efficient and less costly. The traffic signals management has also been taken back inhouse from consultants and this has again improved efficiency and costs for the service.
- 4.4 Due to the extensive funding, the condition of the highway assets has improved. This has resulted in the following:
- **Investment in A class roads.** The amount of A class roads in a poor condition is 4.6%, while this is 0.68% worse than the Wales Median of 3.92% it is an improvement of 0.1% from last year.
 - **Investment in B class roads.** The amount of B class roads in a poor condition is 5.9%, while this is 1.43% worse than the Wales Median of 4.47% it is an improvement of 0.1% from last year.
 - **Investment in C class roads.** The amount of C class roads in a poor condition is 3.4%, 10.61% better than the Wales Median of 14.01%, an improvement of 0.6% from last year.
 - **Investment in U class roads.** The amount of U class roads in condition band 4 is 5.64%, with 20.32% in condition band 3. It was anticipated that as part of the current investment programme the percentage in condition band 4 will be reduced to >6.5% which has already been achieved and the condition band 3 reduced to below 20% which is expected to be achieved in the current financial year.
- 4.5 As a result of the investment in the highways infrastructure assets the amount of third party claims has reduced considerably from 446 in 2012/13 to 158 in 2020/21.
- 4.5 All street lighting has now been converted to LED units. All concrete columns have now been replaced within the borough and the authority continues to maintain a testing and replacement programme for street lighting columns as part of its highway infrastructure asset management strategy. The Authority continues to replace its lit bollards with unlit bollards with 461 remaining to be replaced out of a total of 636. Lit signage has been steadily replaced with LED units on the signage / poles with 2,300 out of 3,800 converted to date.
- 4.6 Unfortunately, our bridge stock is in poor condition. Our average bridge condition indicator is 75.96% having improved slightly from a figure of 75.36% (two years ago). This trend is likely to continue over the forthcoming years as the number of inspections continues to rise. It should also be noted that the condition of our bridges has improved from 57% in 2012/13. Having enhanced our bridge

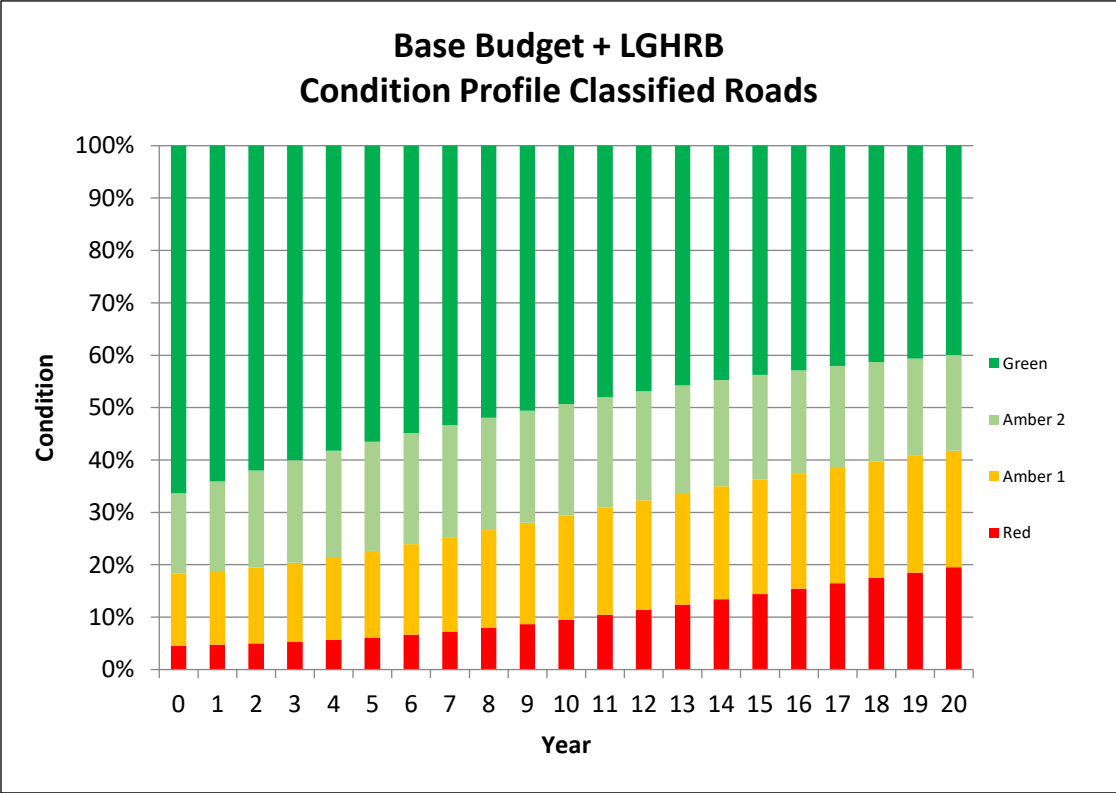
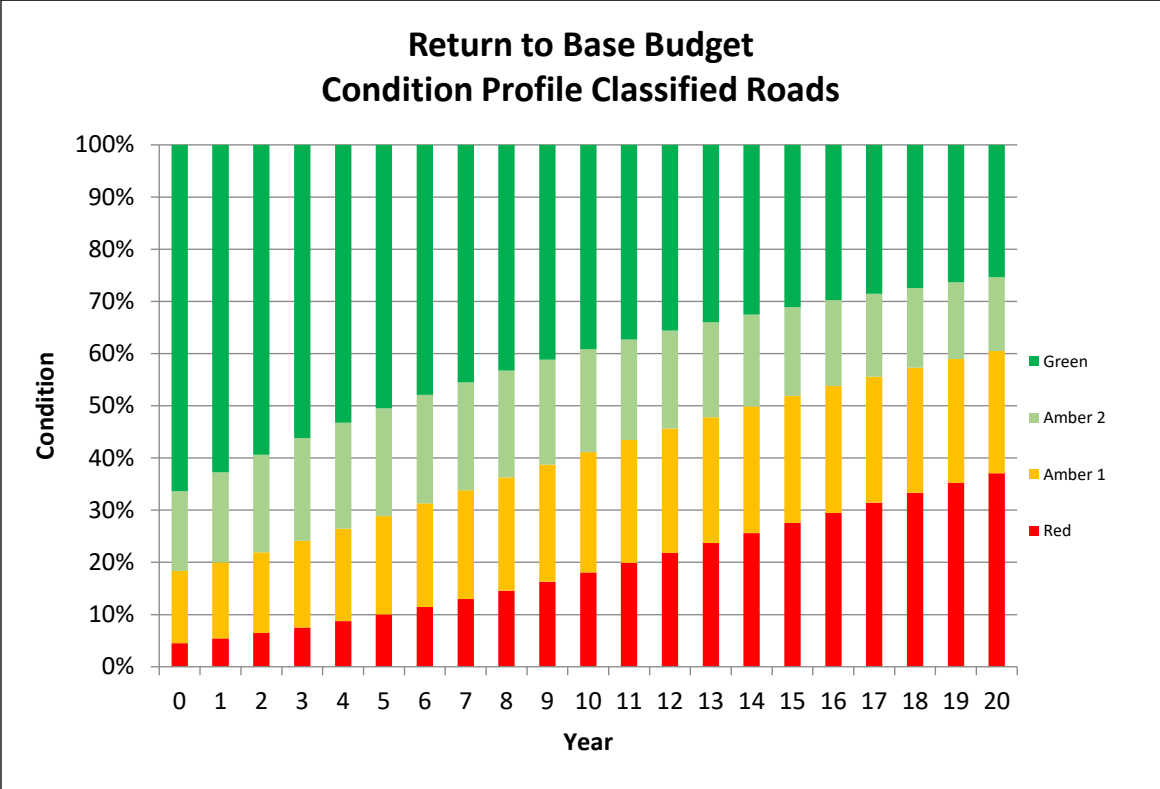
inspection regime, we are now in a much better position to effect early interventions, which reduce the long-term financial liability on our structures.

5. **INVESTMENT STRATEGY**

- 5.1 The Council's strategy for investment in highways in the short term is to continue to invest to improve the asset for the next 2 years. It is then hoped that investment will continue at a level suitable to maintain a steady state condition in the medium term although it is uncertain whether long term funding at this level will be available.
- 5.2 It is estimated that funding provided by the Highways Refurbishment Grant along with the Council's investment will enable the condition of the carriageways to improve beyond the target condition within the next 3 years.
- 5.3 Classified road condition has improved dramatically in the last 10 years. Prior to the beginning of the Council's Highway Improvement Scheme in 2011, the network was deteriorating. Since 2011 the condition has been improving due in part to LGBI investment (2012/13 to 2014/15) and LGPHRG. However, without continued investment at or above the steady state projection deterioration will resume.

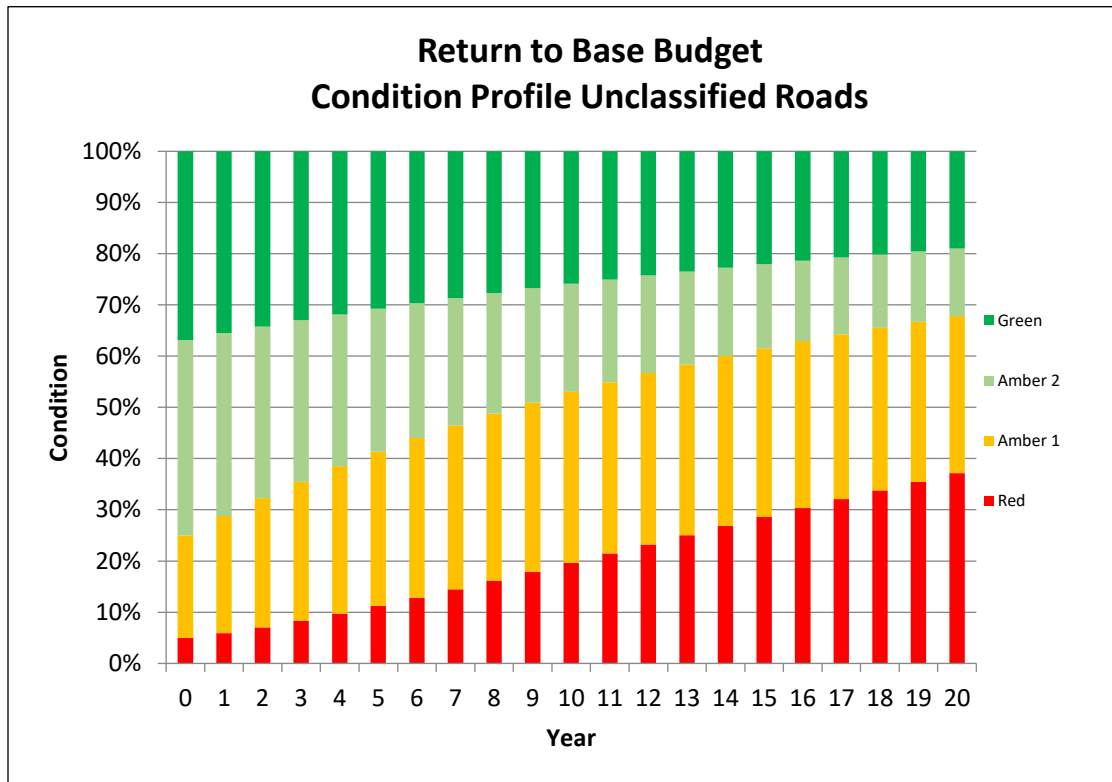


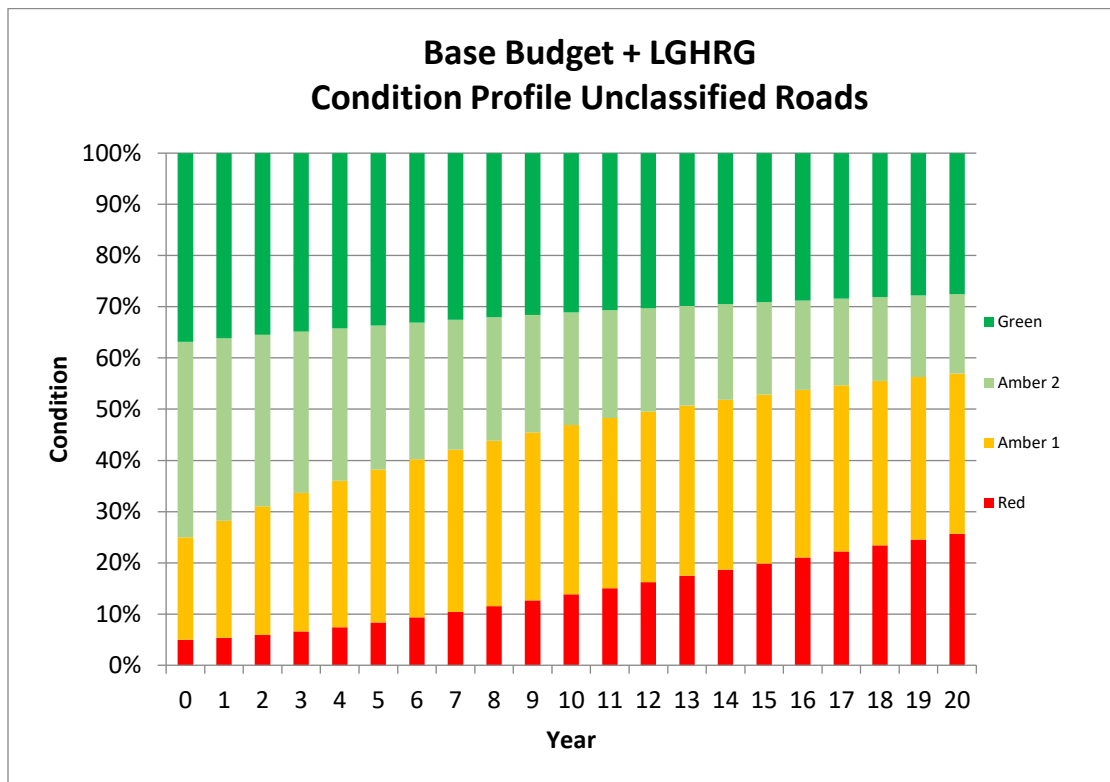
- 5.4 Condition projections for highways need to be made over an extended time period. The tables below project the condition of the classified and unclassified road networks for 20 years based on a continuation of current Council funding levels with and without the continuation of the Highway Refurbishment Grant.



5.5 For the purposes of condition projection, it has been assumed that Council HRG the classified network will deteriorate considerably more with almost double

the amount funding levels will return to the base budget. As can be seen without a continuation of the network being in the RED condition and small increase in the amount in the AMBER condition by year 20. This equates to approximately an additional 75km of the classified network being in the red or amber condition bands, with the majority of this in the red band.





- 5.6 For the purposes of condition projection, it has been assumed that Council funding levels will return to the base budget level in 22/23 following the current 3-year investment programme. For unclassified roads the difference is less pronounced than classified roads as following a return to base budgets expenditure would have to be targeted more at classified roads than unclassified. However, an extra 12% or 110km of the network would be in the red band with the amber bands remaining approximately constant
- 5.7 The Council has invested in the repair of its structural assets including road bridges, footbridges, culverts and retaining walls. Currently there are 170 highway structures on the Council's priority list that require intervention to repair / prevent further deterioration. Some of these structures require repairs whilst others require replacement of critical members to the structures.
- 5.8 The Infrastructure Asset Management team are also responsible for the parks structural assets and the team are still currently still evaluating the extent and number of all the assets within the borough formally controlled by Parks. The structures that have been inspected and assesses to date are currently in a worse condition than the highway structural assets.

6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no negative or adverse equality or diversity implications associated with this report. However, it should be noted that lack of sustained enhanced investment within the highway infrastructure could lead to potential problems for people with mobility issues.

7. CONSULTATION

7.1 There are no consultation implications aligned to this report.

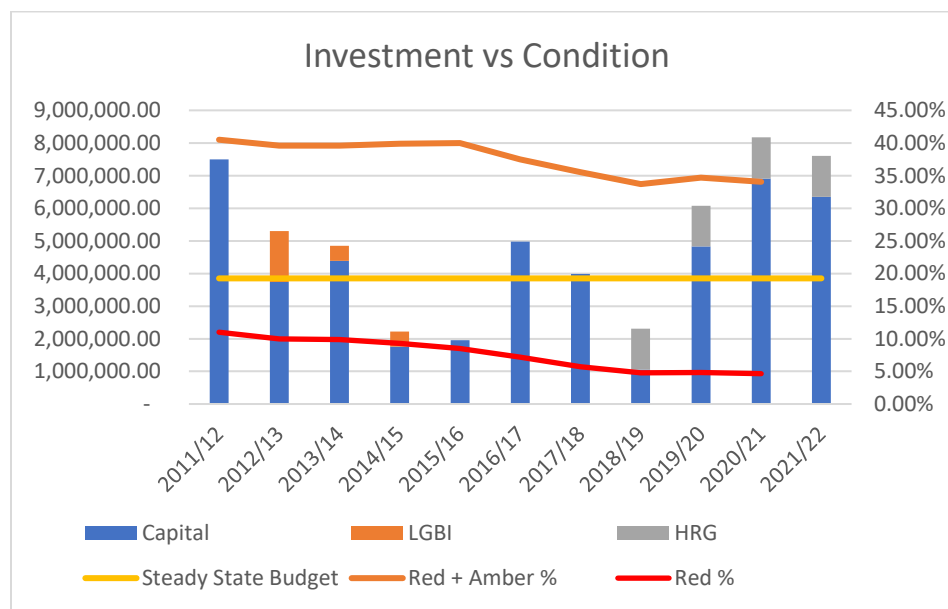
8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

8.1 Between 2012/13 – 2014/15 the Council has secured £11.304m from WG via its Local Government Borrowing Initiative to invest in highway infrastructure assets.

8.2 Between 2017/18 – 2021/22 the Council has secured £6.912m from WG via its Highways Refurbishment Capital Grant.

8.3 The Council secured £756,621 from WG in 2020/21 via its Local Government Roads Maintenance Revenue Grant.

8.4 Between October 2015 to September 2021 the Council has invested £49.574m in its highway infrastructure assets ie carriageways, structures, park structures, etc.



8.5 The above graph summarises capital investment in carriageways since 2011/12 and the change in condition brought about by that investment.

8.6 The estimated steady state renewals investment requirement for A, B & C

classified carriageways is £3.850M per annum. This doesn't include unclassified carriageways, structures, etc.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 9.1 Under Section 41(1) of the Highways Act 1980, the Council as Highway Authority has a duty to maintain the highway, to keep the fabric of the highway in such good repair as to render its physical condition safe for ordinary traffic to pass at all seasons of the year.
- 9.2 The Active Travel Act 2013 requires continuous improvement to our Active Travel infrastructure.

10. LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES/SIP

- 10.1 The highway strategy and investment is in accord with the Council's Corporate Plan i.e. PLACES – where people are proud to work, live and play – keeping the County Borough moving, including improvements to roads and pavements and public transport, whilst also improving air quality. This will be delivered by continuing to improve the condition of our roads and pavements and investing in our bridges, retaining walls and sustainable flood drainage systems.
- 10.2 This strategy is in accord with the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 in particular the national well-being goal of A More Prosperous Wales by keeping people and traffic moving on well maintained roads and pavements and progressing schemes that will benefit communities now and in the future.

11. CONCLUSION

- 11.1 Without sustained levels of investment at, or above the projected steady state figure, the carriageway network will be subject to ongoing deterioration. This would result in increased sums being expended on inefficient small scale reactive repairs and third-party claims pay-outs, less efficient networks with longer journey times and increased levels of pollution.
- 11.2 As can be seen from the graphs earlier, without sustained levels of both Council and HRG investment, the network condition would return to a deteriorating state.
- 11.3 While it is not yet known whether the Council will be able to sustain any funding above the base budget level beyond its current 3-year investment programme, it is hoped that in the medium-term additional funding will be made available. It is however, very unlikely, even with a continuation of HRG, that steady state funding will be available in the long term.

- 11.4 If Council funding returns to base budgets, without HRG funding the network would deteriorate at an ever increasing rate with an additional 185km of the network being in the RED and AMBER condition bands after 20 years compared to the condition achieved through base council funding combined with a continuation of HRG.
- 11.5 Whilst the condition of our highways network is expressed within this report in technical terms, the practical implications of poor highway conditions should not be forgotten, nor should the poor public perceptions that are associated with having a failing network. Potholes are obvious and recognisable features of a highway in poor condition as are the impacts on car users. However, the impact on walkers and cyclists is even more significant, particularly against the backdrop of the Active Travel Act 2013 which requires continuous improvement in active travel infrastructure.
- 11.6 Investment is also needed to continue in highway structures and park structures to maintain the longevity of the asset and also ensure that the assets are inspected and maintained at an appropriate time to minimise expenditure.