

Cumbria Highways/ LAP meeting

Monday 16 November 2015

2.00pm

Georgian Room, Kendal Town Hall.

Notes of the meeting

Attendees: Nick Cotton (Chair, CCC councillor), Arthur Capstick (Staveley and Ings), Marian Smith (Cartmel Fell), Sandra Lilley (Windermere), Jim Atkins (Sedbergh), Tom Clare (Kendal), David Peters (Natland), Rob Fowler (Lower Allithwaite), Carol Last (CCC), Cherrie Trelogan (CCC), Robert Courtier (Kentmere), Jennifer Harrison (Burneside), Stan Collins (CCC councillor), Mandy Lane (Colton), Nancy Cowshill (Urswick/ Stainton/ Bardsea), Amanda McCleery (CALC), Peter Hosking and Kieron Tetchner (Cumbria Highways Network Managers).

Apologies: Nick Raymond (CCC Highways).

The objective of the meeting was to improve Parish/ Highways communications, clarify the Highways structure and reporting arrangements and improve Parish interaction with the Highways Capital Programme.

Summary of points:

Parish aspirations:

1. County Council to explain the rationale behind how budgets have been allocated.
2. Area Steward to be the Highways contact for Parishes priority work for the area.
3. Email contact with Area Stewards.
4. Need clarification on value of Highways Schedule.
5. Parish requests should be given priority as Parishes: represent their communities, see the bigger picture and provide higher quality data.
6. Parish need a formal point of input into capital programme.
7. Parishes to be able to track Hotline requests and outcomes.
8. Allow photographs to be emailed to the Hotline.
9. More information on Hotline site on Highways structure and response times.
10. Parishes need a process to identify and transmit to Highways forward (preventative) thinking.
11. Highways to inform Parishes when in their Parish.
12. Explanations are required on South Lakeland priorities as a whole.

County Councillor Stan Collins' aspirations:

1. Basic training for parishes in using the HIMS system and Highways processes.
2. Parishes should be able to track faults and Highways to log a completed job.
3. Highways need to identify needs of the area (with help of Parishes) and get projects ready for any future funding opportunities.
4. How can the Hotline be made more effective? App for mobile phone which takes pictures and reports for you? Options are open.
5. Local Historical Society (or similar) could identify vulnerable points/ infrastructure/ drainage. Information gathered will help Highways engineers.

Key messages: Parishes:

1. Parishes want to help Highways do their job.
2. Parishes to form a working party of interested LAP delegates to improve the flow of information and the transparency of decision making.
3. Parishes can provide consistently high standard information that is welcomed by Highways and will enable Highways site visits to be productive.
4. However currently Highways do not recognise local parishes knowledge of their area.

Key messages: Highways:

1. Area Stewards are a key relationship.
2. Highways do not want to maintain a separate system outside of HIMS (Highways Information Management System).
3. There is a need to develop HIMS (for example a 2 way dialogue and feedback from the HIMS system made available to County Councillors, Area Stewards and LAP area representatives.
4. Capital programme: *revenue* is ongoing maintenance, eg street lighting, drainage, verges. *Capital* is bigger, end of life replacement of the assets.
5. County are undertaking review of Highways and Highways strategy. Will inform LAPs of any changes.
6. Hotline is appropriate for a defect. Area Steward appropriate if not a current danger.
7. All requests (email/ telephone) go onto HIMS.

Meeting notes:

Cllr Nick Cotton:

- Parishes can offer very valuable information of a consistently high standard. This information will enable Highways site visits to be productive. Quality information eg photos with a GPS tag. It should speed up time for Highways to enter information on their database. Information should be 2 way: Parishes can

prioritise Highways problems, but they don't know about budget and staff pressures/ other County priorities. Rationale / explanation of how budgets have been allocated would be useful.

- Both sides can influence each other. Parish can say to Highways this is the information we want. Highways recognise that parish information is higher quality/ high standard information.
- Parish examples of poor feedback by Highways: messages and emails not responded to statements made and not followed up. Communications is nil, never consulted. Promised schedule of works but nothing organised.
- Good examples of Parishes working well with area stewards. Hotline excellent.
- Highways often don't take advantage of local parish council's knowledge of their area. Parishes would like to help. Inform Parishes when in area. All LAPs need to help Highways to work more efficiently. Parishes need to understand structure, how jobs are allocated and more on programme.
- JH: Parish has tried to ask questions – how are queries dealt with at CCC?
- Signage by Croppers doesn't appear to be working as lorries are getting stuck in Burneside. Parish asked for a meeting with Croppers and Cllr Stan Collins. Agreed problems with signs exist. Very slow process once it gets to Highways in making a final decision.
- RC: Half way up Kentmere road is a semi mature oak tree in verge, leaning 45 degrees over road and with a horizontal branch across road. Tree gradually descending. Container trucks go up every day. Raised in Parish priority schedule and area steward passed into Highways. Arboriculturist declared tree to be in a good state. Highways took no action as proximity to telephone lines. Parish asked at what height would intervention happen and when Highways told existing tree was lower the bough was cut off the next day after meeting with area steward. No need for aboriculturist, as issue was a danger to lorries.

Peter Hosking (Highways Manager South Lakes):

- Highways did meet Croppers last week and issue of signage is being picked up by CCC.
- Tree example demonstrates we are getting better.
- Highways Structure – **see attached maps of Highways area stewards and team leaders** (please don't contact team leaders directly).
- Across south (inc Barrow) Nick Raymond is senior manager. Kieron Tetchner manages Barrow area and gives assistance to South Lakes in areas 23 and 24 (operatives work out of Barrow area)
- County are undertaking review of Highways and Highways strategy. If changes Highways will let LAPs know.
- Highways prefer formal contact through Hotline or website to capture information being provided on their system.

- Area Stewards are a key relationship. Highways Area Steward is responsible for several teams but it may be helpful for LAP members to consider that their requests are the type of works that can be delivered by 2 men in a pick up (eg local drainage, patching, hedges etc).
- Capital programme: revenue is ongoing maintenance, street lighting, drainage, verges. Capital is bigger, end of life replacement of assets ie new infrastructure. Capital programme is ultimate maintenance. EG Kendal infrastructure programme: junction improvements.
- KT: Behind area stewards there is technical staff eg Victoria Upton. Construction gangs (4-5 men with JCB's, undertake bigger repairs eg footpath repairs in Arnside).
- NC: Highways hotline earlier referred to, but Area Steward also a contact?
- KT: Yes
- About 50% have spoken to area steward at this meeting.
- AC: Area Steward is crucial. Area steward should be the place for Parish contact for priority work for the area. Establishes a dialogue and place.
- PH – Hotline is appropriate for a defect. Area Steward appropriate if not a current danger.

- PH: Capital Programme: Highways gathering information throughout the year, from officers, county councillors and the public. End up with a long list of what needs doing. Over summer assessing all these requests. This helps formulate programme for next year. Look at usage in terms of ranking. The priorities list is shared with the Councillors through the Highways working group and then Local Committee. This becomes the programme of works.

- SC: A County Councillor sets the basic policy and keeps an eye on things. However Councillors get involved a lot more. Have to choose between works due to limited resources. Set a strategy for South Lakeland. Priorities: Safe to use, transparent service (report faults and find out what is happening and when can expect it to be done). Cumbria Highways strategy will pick this up. Want to cut out unnecessary jobs. Best value for money. Strategic plan for changes to Highways infrastructure to meet needs. Most County Councillors keep in touch with parishes. Vital to have people on the ground and parishes best way of doing this. Would like to see basic training on HIMS (Highways Information Management System), the reporting process and defect spotting for parishes. Local people should be able to spot small but serious defects before Highways. A684 – Sedbergh to Kendal. Trench in road. CCC cannot fix it as it's a National Grid works. In Cllr Collins division but greater impact on Cllr Cotton's. Should be able to track down faults and when the job has been done. What are the needs of the area? Highways need to identify and list these for future work programme. Need plans ready to go: funding could have been accessed in 2013 but went to other authorities who had project ready and waiting to go.

Open discussion: Ideas for improving communications?

- TC: Is it communication or decision making that's the issue? Councillors looked at Hotline a few years ago and were assured the public could map defects and county councillors could track them. This needs to be revisited. This would help officers to link jobs, even across divisions. Need to scrutinise the process again.
- ML: High Furness: Parishes that were happy had a common theme; CCC officer Dave Huck (brilliant), immediate response and knowledgeable. He's the only line of communications that works. Hotline works for potholes but nothing else. No feedback. Area steward OK but need email contact so parish has a record. Feel their County Councillor listen to individuals and community groups but doesn't come to parishes.
- AC: All our communications with area steward is with email – this should be across the area. Parishes Highway rep should be able to track hotline requests.
- NC: Hotline or Area Steward? Hotline is a black hole with no come back. Parish requests should be greater in priority. Parishes represent their communities.
- PH: Hotline goes to the front office where the knowledge is centralised. Better than in one person's head. Area Stewards working at night sometimes and so won't always be available. Area Steward is one person and could be lost.
- ML: role for the hotline for quick, dangerous jobs. Longer term jobs require discussion how are these recorded.
- SC: Highways Hotline recognised as not completely effective. Slow to load and have to enter requests independently. How can hotline be made more effective? App for mobile phone which takes pictures and reports for you? All options are open.
- RC: Hotline doesn't work and relationship with Area Steward does. A Kentmere pothole resulted in damage to cars/ punctures and wheel replaced. Hotline was used. Parish priority schedule had already identified this but ignored. A highways safety inspection missed it. Need to walk the road to identify problems before they happen. Hotline cannot handle this. Parishes can pre-warn before pothole has appeared. Parishes need a process in place which captures their forward thinking.
- DP: Schedule. How does it fit in? Is it working? In the notes of the last meeting it states the Schedule is higher level than Hotline.
- PH: Have received information from Schedules. Not looking to maintain a separate system outside of HIMS. Need to develop HIMS. Does not work as well as other management systems. HIMS is the database behind the Hotline. All requests (email/ telephone) should go onto HIMS. This is the point of knowledge.
- KT: However doesn't allow feedback on completion. Can allow Highways to report on potholes etc. Look at 2 way dialogue and feedback to be available to

county councillors and area steward. However not all info can go to parishes. Issues with tablet connectivity in rural areas and the system.

- PH: Street lighting also included now on HIMS. Working on it all the time.
- AC: Schedule: Would like to see all UK parishes to use the schedule. N Raymond is on record as encouraging the use of the schedule so is it being supported. Even if it isn't supported still useful to go through with County Councillor. Picking up about the status of Parishes. Is Parish knowledge being taken seriously? Look at capital programme – PH mentioned County Councillors and officers for consultation but not Parishes. Parishes aren't being included in conversations.
- NC: Good response from smaller jobs: But more complex jobs aren't tackled blocked drains with stones right across the parish. Low Furness has mines / sink holes appear some back lanes have been closed for up to 3 years. These lanes are farmers livelihood. To get people to be proactive need better performance from the County Council.
- KT: Complex cases need more thought, more personnel and take more time and are expensive.
- SC: Local people can contribute here. Local Historical Society can identify vulnerable points. If they gather the information it will help Highways engineers. Similar with drainage: some mapped but old County Lengthsmen went. CCC need help with identifying where the drains are.
- JA: Communications generally been good in Sedbergh, but this is due to wider formal structure in place and existing partnership. Problem is resources (money). All have to be alert that no amount of communications will substitute for lack of resources. Hotline works quite well, should be able to email a photo. Input from Parish required but if done helps.
- RF: Who to contact? Aside from potholes and minor works. If parish council doesn't work well with area steward. Do we contact network engineers? What is the response rate? Not good response rate to date.
- PH: Responding within a couple of weeks (in customer charter) holding response in ten days.
- KT: depends on the issue.
- SC: Content of suggested training for Parish Highways reps: safety training looking at defects. Tips for escalating the query. Identifying water pooling. This would enable CCC to identify problems in advance and maybe get funds from other organisations whose land it is ie National Grid.
- TC: None of this is new. Always been resource issues. This conversation has been going on for years. Schedule is a priority list. Partnership has to be in prioritising. Out of mobile range is not an issue will download later. Parishes need to be involved in capital programme.
- Chair: What information from a parish would be welcomed and what otherwise?
- KT: Location specific detail is vital. Need lamp number etc. Makes it easier. GPS/ grid reference.

- PH: Email of thanks is helpful. It is passed through to staff involved in the particular project or job.
- ML: understand about resource cuts and duty to reduce calls to Highways. Need to get back to partnership working. Parishes want to help. How can this be done?
- DP: LAPs should be the mechanism. However lack of District and County councillors.
- NC: Low Furness LAP worked with Highways and 80% jobs done (with LAP funding).
- Chair: Parishes want to help Highways do their job. Need specifics. Don't want to waste Highways officers' time. Group problems together for one trip. Saving money: quality of information from parishes will save officer time. Need information from Highways though. Problem with hotline is there is no feedback and no filtering of information for reliability. Parishes need recognition for quality of information. Need to build up relationship with Area Stewards. HIMS is a work in progress – need to get to a stage where parish reps can view the outcomes. Need clarification on Schedule. Explanations are required on South Lakeland priorities as a whole. Information from local historical societies. Contacting the right person is hit and miss. Time line for response? (PH – 10 working days). If parishes think the system isn't working contact the County Councillor.
- TC: What can be done so next year not the same?
- ML: Possible action: need a schedule of works. Hotline doesn't prioritise. Parish has kept the schedule and put hotline reference on it. Thinking about how this will work. How do these things work together?
- Chair: 3 or 4 levels – hotline / HIMS, Schedule / Area Stewards. Clarity on this. Parishes need more feedback from a hotline.
- AMC: Team structure of Cumbria Highways. How are jobs allocated/ decision making processes. This would help.
- DP/ Burneside: Useful to have this on the web. Who does what?
- CL: Constant restructures makes this difficult.
- KT: Could do something on a broader level.
- TC: Problem is overload and accountability. Last port of call is the area engineer (catch all) to give them the responsibility. We shouldn't be chasing flow charts/ should be a single point of reference.
- KT: Don't have area engineers now Network Managers (Peter and Kieron) who Parishes can contact.

Meeting ends.