

Guide to Highways

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Overview

This guide provides an overview of the service that is delivered by East Sussex Highways (ESH) and their contractor, Balfour Beatty (BBLP), whose contract commenced in May 2023. The service is delivered on behalf of East Sussex County Council (ESCC).

Our highway network is vital to the economic growth of the county and keeping local communities safe and connected. This network is the most valuable publicly owned asset which ESCC manages and is worth £4.17 billion. ESCC is committed to having the best road conditions based on available budget and uses an asset management approach for highway network maintenance. This means we plan and manage the maintenance of the highways to ensure best value for money while managing the risk and safety for highway users.

Assets

Some of the assets ESCC maintain are:

- 2499km of road markings
- 100,000 drains
- 505km of ditches
- 766 grit bins
- 514 bridges and 2 tunnels
- 246 retaining walls
- 43,695 road signs
- 40,000 safety bollards
- 26hectares of wildlife verges and 20 hectares of meadow verges
- 55,000 individual trees (estimated)
- 50 ornamental shrub sites
- 4468km of vegetated verges
- 35km of hedges
- 37,500 streetlights
- 66 signal-controlled junctions
- 140 signal-controlled crossings.



Highways responsibilities and funding

The Highways Act requires the Council to keep roads in a safe and usable condition. The Council does this through two types of maintenance programme:

Reactive maintenance: This is when reported safety defects such as potholes are repaired in line with the Council's maintenance policies to keep roads safe to use. Repairs are made ensuring they meet the certain criteria outlined in the [East Sussex Highways Inspection Manual](#).

Planned maintenance: These are works taken from a planned programme such as patching, surface dressing, resurfacing, and road reconstruction to maintain the road condition against the Council's performance targets.

What are defects?

The term 'defect' is used instead of using the word 'problem' or 'fault.' It generally refers to a safety concern outlined in our [The Highways Inspection Manual – Appendix 1 East Sussex Highways Investigatory Levels](#). This manual provides examples of the types of defects that occur on the highway and the various intervention criteria and repair categories that the Council uses to prioritise repairs.

Defects may include:

- Potholes
- Road cracks, crazing, channels, depressions
- Blocked drains
- Missing road lines
- Grass causing visibility issues.

Does that mean keeping the highway in a perfect condition?

In an ideal world, with unlimited funding, this would be the aim. However, the Highway authority is not required to make sure the roads are completely defect free.

The Highways Act 1980 provides a special defence under Section 58 to any claim brought against a highway authority. This means if the Council regularly inspect the roads and keep them safe, they won't be held responsible for incidents. ESCC will be liable only if it's proven they knew about a problem and didn't fix it on time.

The Council's [Asset Management Strategy](#) and [Asset Management Policy](#) are published on the Council's website. The Department for Transport (DfT) also requires the Highway's authority to use an asset management approach to get the most road maintenance funding from the government.



Planned maintenance

How we monitor the condition of roads

The Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) require all local authorities to gather data on the condition of local roads. We collect condition data on all A, B and C roads annually using a SCANNER (Surface Condition Assessment for the National Network of Roads) survey. SCANNER surveys use special vehicles with sensors to check road condition. They help us understand how good or bad a road surface is, so we can plan repairs and improvements. Roads are then placed into one of three categories:

- Green "good condition": where no immediate work is needed, they are safe and smooth to drive on.
- Amber "needs attention soon": these roads are showing early signs of wear and tear. They are most in need of preventative maintenance.
- Red "poor condition": these roads are likely to have cracks, potholes, edge wear or uneven surface. They will usually require major maintenance intervention.

The SCANNER surveys provide up-to-date information on road conditions. This regular assessment allows for timely interventions and supports the council's asset management strategy.

For roads not covered by SCANNER, such as unclassified roads, the council employs other methods like Course Visual Inspections (CVI) to monitor their condition. This approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the entire road network's health. The information is shared with the Department for Transport which helps them to understand the state of the national road network.

From 2026/27 a new methodology will be used based on the BSI PAS2161 standard. Local Highway Authorities will be required to use a supplier that has been accredited against PAS2161. This new standard will categorise roads into five categories instead of three to help the Council and the Government gain a more detailed understanding of road condition in England. This includes:

- Category 1: No deterioration: Not considered for maintenance.
- Category 2: Minor (and/or aesthetic) deterioration: Light maintenance, such as minor patching, may be required.
- Category 3: Moderate deterioration: Localised intervention or mid-life preventative maintenance (e.g., surface dressing, patching) is needed.
- Category 4: Moderate to severe deterioration: Rehabilitative maintenance, such as full carriageway resurfacing, may be required.

- Category 5: Severe deterioration: Structural maintenance, including full carriageway resurfacing or reconstruction, is necessary.

Data on road condition can be found on the East Sussex County Council website:

[Managing road condition | East Sussex County Council](#)



Reasons for decline in condition

The overall condition of roads in East Sussex has been gradually declining. In 2024 we carried out a modelling exercise to work out how much it would cost to maintain East Sussex's carriageway network in its current condition. The modelling looked at the whole lifecycle of our carriageways using data on the condition, typical deterioration rates, costs of treatments and inflation. The exercise found that it would cost £23m per year to keep carriageways in the same condition overall. It is important to note that this figure applies only to carriageways. It does not include the investment required to maintain other critical highway infrastructure such as footways, drainage systems, bridges, signs, or lighting columns. However, we are planning further exercises to look at these too.

Over the last seven years, East Sussex Highways has faced a fluctuating level of investment in carriageway maintenance. The funding available to spend on carriageways has been significantly less than the amount needed to achieve this. This major funding shortfall, combined with inflation and rising costs, has meant we have not been able to invest as much in preventative maintenance as needed to prevent long term decline.

The first roads to show signs of decline are usually the local unclassified roads. These were often not constructed as robustly as more major roads and without maintenance they will generally deteriorate more quickly. However, with limited funds we must prioritise our A and B roads, which are key for business, transport and emergency services. It is not a choice we take lightly, but it is widely regarded as the most effective way to manage risk and keep the county moving with the resources we have.

However, we do continue to inspect all parts of the highway for hazards and repair them promptly to ensure the highway stays safe for users.

The asset management approach to road repair

East Sussex County Council's approach to highway asset management is set out in our Highway Asset Management Strategy. This is available on the ESCC website: [Highway asset management policy](#). It emphasises a risk based and data driven methodology to maintain and enhance the county's road infrastructure where possible. This strategy aims to optimise the use of available resources, ensuring safety, sustainability, and value for money.

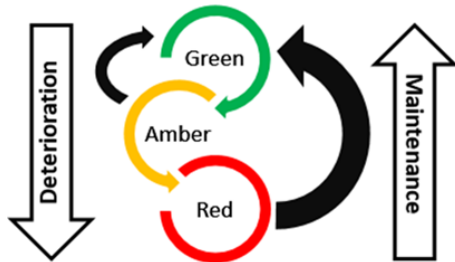
Key components:

- Risk-based maintenance – prioritising maintenance activities based on the likelihood of and impact of asset failures, focusing resources on areas where they are most needed to prevent deterioration and ensure safety.
- Resilient network identification – this is a network of critical routes, essential for economic activity and access to key services. This network receives prioritised maintenance to ensure functionality during adverse conditions.
- Lifecycle planning – by considering the entire lifespan of highway assets, the strategy supports timely interventions that extend asset life and reduce long term costs.
- Performance monitoring – regular assessments and surveys, such as SCANNER inform the condition of the network, guiding maintenance decisions and investment planning.

- Stakeholder engagement – our strategy involves collaboration with stakeholders, including local communities and transport partners, to ensure we align maintenance activities with user needs and expectations.

‘You just surface dressed that road, but this road is worse.’

The lifecycle modelling diagram below shows that focusing maintenance on amber roads (in the middle category) is more beneficial than on red roads (the worst category) because treating amber roads costs less and allows us to cover more roads. The diagram shows that assets deteriorate over time, and early intervention is cheaper than waiting for major repairs. This investment offers good value for money.



Reactive maintenance

Reactive road maintenance happens when a problem is highlighted to us by our Highway Stewards or a customer report. The most common form of reactive road maintenance is pothole repair.

What is a risk-based approach?

The Council uses a risk-based approach for managing road defects. Highway Stewards can adjust the priority of a defect based on its location or other relevant factors. Highway Stewards carry out risk assessments of defects during inspections which includes considering the likely risk to all road users. For example, defects posing hazards to pedestrians, cyclists or motorcyclists may receive higher priority.

“I reported an issue on your website, but you said it wasn’t intervention level.
What does that mean?”

Intervention levels are decided based on risk. For example, deeper potholes on main roads are higher priorities. These levels help us allocate resources to address urgent safety concerns. The intervention levels are set by elected members through policy, not by contractors or officers.

Road maintenance types

We use various types of road maintenance techniques. Our experienced highway engineers choose the best and most cost-effective technique for each situation:

Preventative measures such as surface dressing. This aims to prevent deterioration on roads with a high number of amber sections as well as some red ones.

Intervention works such as overlay resurfacing. This is usually done on roads with a higher number of red sections and are therefore assessed to be near the end of their life cycle.

Structural works such as road recycling and reconstruction. This is necessary when a road has completely failed and needs to effectively be rebuilt.

Layers of a modern carriageway:

- Surface Course
- Binder Course
- Base
- Subbase



In East Sussex, 55% of roads are rural lanes and estate roads. Most of our rural lanes are not built like modern roads and have evolved over time from 'unmade' tracks that have later been surfaced with asphalt.

Preventative maintenance types

Micro asphalt

Micro Asphalt is a cold-applied, thin, bituminous surface course that includes bitumen emulsion and fine-graded aggregate with fillers. Micro-surfacing uses a polymer-modified bitumen emulsion and is often applied in two coats. It can be laid mechanically or manually to a maximum dried thickness of 15mm. Micro Asphalt restores surface texture, improves skid resistance, prevents water from entering the road structure, seals and preserves existing surfaces, and can reshape and re-profile the road.

Crack sealing and joint repair: Crack sealing and joint repair help keep a road surface safe and serviceable, extending its life. If left untreated, cracks and open joints allow water to enter which cause further damage and shorten the road's lifespan. Timely intervention of crack sealing and joint repair can seal the surface against water and restore the surface profile.

Surface dressing: Surface dressing involves spraying a layer of liquid bitumen onto the road surface to seal it, followed by spreading stone chippings on top. The surface is then rolled to embed the chippings. This process improves skid resistance and can extend the road's life by up to 10 years by preventing water damage to the underlying structure. Excess chippings are swept away approximately 24 hours, 3 days, and 7 days after the work is completed.

Preservative: Preservative is a spray-on sealer that soaks into asphalt to protect it from water and UV damage. It keeps the road surface in good shape, improving how well the asphalt binds with the aggregate. Using preservative helps extend the road's lifespan and reduces the need for costly resurfacing. It's an effective and cost-saving maintenance option.

Intervention maintenance types

Plane and inlay: If the road surface needs replacing and can't be overlaid due to its condition or level issues, the old surface can be removed with a planer. After this, a tack coat is applied, and a new layer of hot bituminous material is laid down to create a fresh road surface.

Resurfacing: If the existing road levels are suitable, a new surface can sometimes be applied directly on top with little or no patching; this is known as an overlay. This method adds a thicker, bound surface and is often more cost-effective than a full replacement. It's a surface-only repair, suitable only when the underlying road structure is intact. Overlaying is usually the first option considered because it uses the existing materials, strengthens the road, and is less disruptive.

Structural maintenance types

Structural Road Recycling: Structural Road Recycling restores a damaged road by reusing the existing materials to build a new road base. This method significantly reduces the need for waste disposal, new aggregates, and hot bituminous material, leading to lower costs and a smaller carbon footprint.

It also safely handles 'tar' residues, as the recycled mix encapsulates harmful contaminants, eliminating the need for hazardous waste disposal.

Reconstruction: Reconstruction is a costly treatment used as a last resort when the road surface and underlying layers are severely deteriorated. It typically involves deep excavation and replacing both the sub-base stone layer and the upper bituminous layers.



Other maintenance types

Retexturing – Restores Skid Resistance: Retexturing involves mechanically reworking a worn road surface to improve skid resistance and texture depth. This process ensures that the retextured area matches the surrounding surface levels. It can be done using hydraulic methods, like blasting water or mechanical methods, such as impact cutting or milling.

Quality management

ESCC understand poor-quality work negatively impacts our highway network and we do not pay to correct substandard work. ESH undertakes 250-300 projects a year, including road resurfacing, bridge repairs, and highway improvements. Each project is reviewed, inspected, and certified upon completion to ensure it meets the standards defined in the highways contract and specific job requirements.

Our 4 quality management checks

1. Works gang supervisors carry out checks as works progress to ensure that they are working to the agreed design and specification.
2. Our supervisors review works on-site at completion. If defective works are found they are repaired and, if possible, whilst works are ongoing. This reduces the disruption to road users.
3. Operations Managers carry out regular site audits to monitor quality of workmanship and the Contractor Service Director and the ESCC Contract Manager carry out monthly joint audits on completed schemes to monitor quality.
4. Any issues found are raised directly with the operational team involved and to ensure learning is captured.

Lessons learnt

'Lessons Learnt' reviews are held to understand what went wrong, why it went wrong and identify improvement actions to prevent the same mistakes from happening again. These reviews also identify good practice. The output from these meetings is shared with all ESH team members.

Potholes

The Council uses a risk-based approach to repair potholes. To qualify for repair, potholes must be at least:

- 40mm deep
- 300mm wide in every direction.

Potholes that meet these criteria fall into different repair categories based on their urgency:

Carriageway:

- Category 1 - Greater than 100mm and at least 300mm wide in all directions. Make safe within 2 hours.
- Category 2 - Greater than 60mm and less than 99mm deep and at least 300mm in all directions. Repaired within 5 days.
- Category 3 - Greater than 40mm and less than 59mm deep and at least 300mm in all directions Repaired within 28 days.



Footway:

- Category 1: Greater than 40mm deep - Made Safe within 2 hours.
- Category 2: Greater than 30mm deep - Repaired within 5 days.
- Category 3: Greater than 20mm deep - Repaired within 28 days.

The Council's investigatory levels are based on experience and local conditions. When officers review criteria, it includes comparing them with other local authorities (particularly neighbouring ones), complaints and claims, and feedback from Highways Stewards.

Our current criteria for intervention levels can be found in our [East Sussex Highways Inspection Manual](#) and [The Highways Inspection Manual – Appendix 1 East Sussex Highways Investigatory Levels](#) can be found on our website.

What causes a road surface to deteriorate?

Several factors can cause a road surface to deteriorate and lead to defects such as potholes. These can include:

- Weather conditions – sunlight, rainwater and freezing causes the surfacing to degrade. If water gets into the road surface it can cause roads to break up through vehicle pressure and the freeze/thaw cycle in cold water. This speeds up pothole formation.
- Wear and tear caused by traffic
- Utility company excavations
- The construction of the road – historically, many roads in East Sussex, particularly in rural areas, have not been constructed with a sub-base that would meet modern standards.

“Why did you fill in that pothole but not the one right next to it? Surely that would be more cost effective?”



When our repair teams are out fixing reported potholes, they can also repair other nearby potholes if they pose an immediate safety risk. They send a photo of additional potholes to our control centre and get permission to fix them right away.

Fixing all potholes at once, regardless of urgency, would require more resources and money. This approach, known as reactive maintenance, is more costly than planned maintenance and doesn't provide the best value for money. Our highway maintenance contract covers repeated visits to the same location without extra costs to the Council. This means we can manage our budget effectively and still address safety issues promptly.

Dealing with clusters of potholes which do not meet the intervention.

When Highway Stewards inspect reported potholes or carry out routine inspections, they can raise a larger repair called an 'advisory' if they think more resurfacing is needed for areas with many potholes or defects near safety levels. This is done if the Highways Steward believes the road is likely to deteriorate. The advisory request is then reviewed with planned resurfacing works and may be added to the list of patching works.

Patching repairs involve resurfacing small areas of road (usually under 5 square meters) instead of fixing each pothole individually. This method is more cost-effective for repairing clusters of potholes and defects. While fixing individual potholes costs about £200 per square metre, resurfacing costs only around £30 per square metre.

‘I pay my Council Tax, why can’t you fix all the potholes?’

Typically, we repair 30,000 safety defects at a fixed cost of approximately £3.17m per year. Council Tax and business rates provide approximately £40 per household/business per year for roads maintenance.

A pothole of around 0.5m x 0.5m typically costs £105 to repair.

Pothole repair methods

There are different methods for repairing potholes depending on the circumstance. Our preferred approach is to cut it out and fill with hot tarmac. However, sometimes we may use other cold products for less highway disruption. Repair methods include:

- Cut and fill method: For this method, we will cut a rectangle around the pothole a few inches from the edge, remove the debris and then fill it with hot tarmac. The result is a square or rectangular patch of new material.
- Cold products method: High-quality cold lay tarmac can be used when traffic management or weather conditions require it. These materials are designed to set quickly for a permanent repair and need water to activate the material. The crew will clean out the hole, add water, pour in the tarmac, and shape the edges. The surface is then flattened by either driving over it or tamping it by hand, as vibration does not work with these materials.
- Jet patching machines: Jet Patching machines are being used to proactively ‘find and fix’ potholes and defects (30mm or deeper) in unclassified roads. This method helps reduce the number of defects before the next routine inspection by Highway Stewards. It bonds well to existing surfacing and has good results in terms of the longevity of the repairs.

- Sink holes and voids under the road surface: We have procedures for dealing with 'sink holes' or voids under the road surface, which are different from surface depressions and subsidence. First, we investigate the cause, often due to material washed out by highway drains or leaks from sewer or water pipes. If the problem isn't caused by a highway drain, it can be challenging and time-consuming to get water utility companies to take responsibility and make the repairs.



Temporary repairs

We aim to fix all repairs first time within 28 days, but there can be rare occasions when we do carry out temporary repairs.

This is because it is not possible to carry out a permanent repair straightaway.

This could be because:

- there is an underlying problem with the road surface which needs to be investigated.
- it is too wet or cold for permanent repair material to stick properly.
- the team need to close part of the road to carry out the repair safely.
- special materials need to be ordered to carry out the permanent repair; or
- there are large scale repair works planned later in the year, and it would make sense to carry out the permanent repair as part of these works.

In all cases, the team will make the area safe and return at a later date to complete a permanent repair.

Footways

We are responsible for over 1542 miles of footways.

How do we prioritise footway works?

We prioritise repairs based on several factors including the depth, size, and location of the problem on the footway. Problems that are not considered to be causing a hazard are recorded and used to help decide which roads to prioritise for large scale repairs.

Inspections

Primary walking routes are inspected monthly, secondary routes every 3 months, link footways every six months and local access footways annually.

Overgrown vegetation

We aim to keep footways clear from obstructions such as overgrown vegetation. If a footway is restricted due to highways vegetation, we will arrange for this to be cut back. If it is restricted due to private vegetation, we will get in contact with the owner. For more information, please refer to the Licensing and Enforcement section.

Siding

Siding removes soil and vegetation that grows on or encroaches onto a footway. This often happens where a footway isn't used and is standard on rural footways linking villages.

Footways and verges

Footways generally have hard surfaces such as paving, asphalt, or concrete. Verges are not defined as footways and the public may use them as such. We do not have an obligation to ensure verges are accessible to pedestrians.



Rights of ways

Rights of Way footpaths are not maintained by Highways and instead are managed by the Rights of Way team. Further information can be found in the Other Teams section.

Street Lighting

ESCC maintain around 37,500 column and wall mounted streetlights. Some street lighting is owned and looked after by parish and district councils, and some are privately owned.

How do we look after our streetlights?

Our streetlights and illuminated traffic signs are regularly inspected, including:

- Monthly night patrols
- Inspections, tests, and cleaning

What happens when there is a problem?

The main reasons streetlights stop working is due to faulty equipment in the streetlight, such as a broken bulb or problems with the electricity supply.

- We aim to repair standard problems within 10 days of a fault being reported.
- We carry out emergency works within 2 hours of the fault being reported.

Electricity supply problem

If there is a problem with the electricity supply, we will need to inform the electricity supplier, and it could take more time to fix the light. UK Power Network are responsible for the maintenance of the cables and electricity and they have their own timescales for repair.

Reducing carbon emissions

We have replaced many old yellow streetlights with LED lights and are still making changes. We've also turned off some streetlights at night, reduced the number on certain streets, and dimmed others between midnight and early morning.

Old or damaged streetlights are usually replaced with standard streetlights. If the road is in a conservation area, we ask the other local councils to help with extra costs for non-standard streetlights. If funds are not available, standard lighting is installed.

We will then try to return the heritage columns for repurposing if they are in good condition. Standard streetlights are not generally painted. However, streetlights in sensitive or conservation areas are painted to help them blend in. They are usually painted every ten years.

Requesting a new streetlight

We have a power, not a duty, under the Highways Act 1980 to provide and maintain lighting. We carefully balance the need for lighting with conflicting demands such as the energy consumption reduction requirements and minimising CO² emissions and light pollution.

For us to add additional streetlighting, one of two requirements need to be met:

- The police advise us lighting levels are leading to incidents of nighttime crime and fear of crime.
- There is a history of nighttime traffic accidents.



What to do if the light from a lamppost is causing you sleeping issues.

If a streetlight is shining into your property and causing you a problem, we may be able to adjust the light to fix the problem. If adjusting the light doesn't work, a shield can be fitted.

Sometimes it's not possible to completely get rid of the problem, as this may prevent the streetlight from being effective so we may need to find a compromise.

If changes to the road or pavement need to be made to install a Vehicle Access Crossover to your property, you will need to pay for the streetlight or other highway furniture to be moved.

Highway Stewards

There are fourteen Highway Stewards, including two Senior Highway Stewards, responsible for different areas across the East Sussex highway network. Highway Stewards perform regular inspections to keep the roads safe and meet our legal duty under Section 41 of the Highways Act 1980.

Handling customer enquiries logged by our Customer Contact Centre is also a key part of their role. These inquiries are sent to the Highway Steward's mobile tablet, and once inspected, the response is available immediately for our Customer Agents to inform the customer. Highway Stewards are the main contact for ESCC members and parish councils, regularly communicating to help resolve issues.

Planned safety inspections

We conduct regular safety inspections year-round, either by walking or driving, with every road inspected at least once a year. The inspection route is pre-planned, and all assets within the highway boundary are checked against our repair criteria. Anything that exceeds these criteria is documented and raised for repair within set timescales.

Licensing and enforcement

ESH Licencing and Enforcement Team deal with licencing objects and some works on the public highway including vehicle crossovers. The team will also become involved if there are unlicensed objects or works on the highway and if there is overgrown vegetation from private properties.

Hedges and trees

If a private hedge becomes overgrown and affects the highway, our Highway Steward will inspect it and assess the situation. They can take several actions, including:

- Sending a responsibility letter
- Issuing a hedge cutting notice
- Sending a formal notice
- Arranging emergency work.

If the hedge isn't trimmed as requested, the Highways Steward can refer the issue to our Enforcement Team. The Enforcement Team will check the hedge again after two weeks. If the owner

hasn't responded or refuses to cut it, we will trim the hedge ourselves and charge the owner for the cost.



Can you always find out who owns the vegetation?

East Sussex is a rural County so sometimes it's hard to find out who owns what, especially parcels of land with no obvious associated property. This is particularly the case when the land is also unregistered. Unregistered land is land that has not been registered with HM Land Registry and therefore we cannot use our systems to find the owner.

In these cases, we evaluate the safety risk posted by the vegetation and if necessary, undertake works ourselves.

Can I prune vegetation overhanging my property?

Anyone is legally entitled to prune back vegetation which overhangs their property boundary line if it does not have a significant effect on the tree or plant's health, safety, or structure.

Network management and utilities

Do we have the power to decline roadworks?

The short answer is no. Our role is to coordinate all work on public highways to ensure safety, protect the street's structure, and minimise inconvenience for users.

Under the New Roads and Street Works Act (NRSWA), utility companies have the right to place, repair, and maintain their equipment within the public highway. They also have a duty to cooperate with us, the street authority.

Can anyone turn up on the public highway and undertake works?

Undertaking work on the Public Highway without a permit is a criminal offence.

Prior to undertaking works on the public Highway, both Statutory undertakers (utility companies) and ESCC must apply for a permit to carry out works.

Permit applications are reviewed to ensure there are no clashes with other planned works and to identify opportunities for collaboration between us and them, before works durations and timings are agreed. Where possible, utility works are undertaken before highway works.

How often can utilities dig up the highway?

NRSWA Section 58 Notices prevent utility companies from excavating roads or footpaths for planned works for up to 3 years. However, immediate works, such as emergencies, urgent repairs, or new connections, can still be carried out.

Quality of utility repairs

Utility companies have up to six months to permanently repair a road excavation following planned or emergency work. They are responsible for the quality of these repairs for two years and must fix any defects during this period.

The Network Management Team conducts a coring program to sample 10% of the utility companies' repairs. This involves taking samples 150mm – 300mm deep to check the quality of the top layers of the road surface. This ensures that the sub-base has been correctly reinstated with the right materials and compaction levels, which visual inspections alone cannot verify.

Improperly reinstated sub-bases can cause the road surface to subside or break up. Addressing defects after the two-year guarantee period can be difficult.



What else do we do?

We hold quarterly coordination meetings with all utility companies to review and coordinate planned utility and highway works. We also have regular performance review meetings with each utility company to discuss their performance. If necessary, improvement plans are developed and implemented.

We carry out random sample audits at 3 stages:

- Cat A – 10% inspected whilst works are in progress
- Cat B – 10% inspected within 6 months of completion
- Cat C – 10% inspected within the guarantee period (generally 2 years).

These inspections are all funded by the relevant Statutory undertaker (utility company) through their agreed performance-based Inspection quota's. Additional inspections are also carried out when we are alerted to a specific issue, or the performance-based inspection results are below the required targets.

If defective works (or the wrong reinstatement materials) are identified through these inspections, the utility company will be issued with a defect notice.

We coordinate streetworks to ensure that all works are planned and coordinated effectively and disruption is minimised.

Reducing disruption from streetworks

Permit scheme

East Sussex Highways run a roadworks permit scheme to coordinate all roadworks carried out by the council and others. This helps us to:

- reduce disruption to communities and road users,
- check that work has been completed to a good standard, and
- encourage better practices.

We can issue fines for breaking permit rules or for working without a permit.

Coordinating works

All organisations who carry out roadworks plan up to four years in advance so that work on the highway can be coordinated. Regular meetings with regional highway and utility committees take place to help ensure smooth collaboration.

We can also stop newly repaired roads from being dug up soon after maintenance work is done. This is a Section 58 restriction under the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991.

It stops utility companies from digging up the road:

- for 3 years after full reconstruction, or
- for 2 years after resurfacing.

The only exception is if there is an emergency or if new services need to be installed.

Ensuring lasting repairs by utility companies

Utility companies that dig up roads to repair equipment must restore the road to a high standard. The 'New Roads and Street Works Act' (NRSWA) allows them to make temporary repairs, but they must make these permanent within 6 months.

We meet regularly to discuss repair materials and methods. They are encouraged to minimise long-term road damage by using innovative methods.

This includes:

- repositioning equipment,
- using trenchless technology that avoids digging, and
- using the latest technology that offers value for money.

East Sussex Highways use 'New Roads and Street Works Act' (NRSWA) qualified inspectors. They check that repairs meet required standards.

We inspect their works within 6 months of the work being completed. If the quality is not good enough, the company must redo the work and a higher number of inspections will be carried out on their work in future. This helps to improve performance and protect the road.

Lane rental scheme

To further support our efforts to minimise congestion on the network, East Sussex was among the first local authorities to introduce a lane rental scheme in April 2025.

The scheme allows local authorities to charge for the time that street and road works occupy the highway on the very busiest streets at the busiest times. In East Sussex this is 5.9% of the highway network. Charges apply to works promoted by both utility companies and local highway authorities on the local road network. This encourages people carrying out roadworks to work as efficiently as possible.

Daily charges are:

- £1,500 for a lane closure
- £2,500 for a road closure

Once the costs of running the lane rental scheme are covered, the surplus money will be available for highway improvements, innovation and measures to further improve disruption and congestion-caused by works across the county.

Winter maintenance

The winter gritting season runs from 1st October until 30th April. Our team is on standby 24 hours a day.

We have a fleet of 23 gritters and 48 fully trained gritter drivers. A vehicle tracking system is installed in each gritter so that we can track the progress of operations at all times. There are also 24 local farmers and contractors on call with snow ploughs to assist during periods of heavy snow fall.

How do we prepare?

In preparation for winter, we stock approximately 10,000 tonnes of dry rock salt (not grit) which is stored at our 5 depots located in Ringmer, Heathfield, Polegate, Cripps Corner, and Maresfield.



Every year we encourage residents to 'get ready for winter' by keeping up to date with weather forecasts and road conditions, ensuring their cars are ready for winter weather and that they have essentials with them such as de-icer, a scraper, and a torch.



All gritting decisions are published on social media, X and Facebook, as soon as possible. These updates can also be seen on the homepage of the ESH website.

Each year during September we carry out 'Operation Snowdrop,' which is a test run of all our gritting routes. This ensures we can get any overgrown hedges cut back, contact residents about parked cars that may be in the way, and ensure all drivers are familiar with their routes.

Gritting routes

We spread salt on 778 miles of highway across the county on a typical cold/ frosty night on what we call our Primary gritting routes, this includes all A and B roads and some C roads. Roads are prioritised as those leading to schools, hospitals, fire and police stations and railway stations.

Secondary routes (224 miles) are treated when snow or severe icy conditions are forecast. These routes include link roads into a village, hamlet, urban estate, and main feeder roads. All gritting routes can be found on the ESH website.

Pavements

We don't have the resources to routinely grit footpaths or pavements, instead we encourage residents to help themselves by clearing snow and ice from public areas near their properties.

Deciding when to grit

Our weather forecasters use the latest technology to predict when road surface temperatures will drop below freezing or snow will fall. We then use this information when deciding when we need to grit the roads.

We aim to spread salt on the roads before frost and ice are formed by freezing temperatures. Rain or snow can wash salt away, so we try to grit after rain has passed but before the road surface freezes. Where possible, we avoid the morning and evening rush hours – which is why people don't often see our gritters in action; most of our gritting activity takes place in the small hours of the morning.

Gritting decisions are made at least once a day, sometimes more, in colder weather and when conditions are likely to change.

We monitor weather conditions through the day, using our six weather stations across the county, located in Rye, Lewes, Willingdon, Golden Cross, Wych Cross, and Mark Cross.

Grit bins

We currently have around 766 county owned grit bins and tubes. These are all filled with salt over the autumn in time for winter.

Parishes and residents' associations can buy additional grit bins from us if requested.

Drainage

We are responsible for making sure rainfall flows away from roads and pavement surfaces into the highway drainage system.

Our drainage network consists of approximately 100,000 roadside drainage gullies. These gullies connect to a system of pipes that outfall into watercourses (rivers, streams, ditches, and the sea).

To help prevent flooding, we carry out regular cleaning of the gullies, and where necessary, we clear the connecting pipework.

Drains are cleared on a regular basis, with silt sucked up from the gulley pot into our gully emptying vehicles for later disposal. How often a gully gets cleared depends on the frequency it becomes blocked.



Blocked drains

Drains typically become blocked by silt, debris, or tree roots. Where this happens, our team undertakes clearance works using high pressure water jetting and root cutting equipment.

We know there are drainage 'hotspots' that often flood. We undertake a programme of detailed drainage investigations using CCTV equipment. This allows us to assess the condition of the drainage pipework.

Broken pipes

On some occasions, the drainage pipes will have broken completely. Where this is the case, we will replace the broken pipe with new sections.

We clean the drains on a regular basis. When there are significant amounts of rainfall in a short time, the size of the drainage pipes does not always have capacity to take the water away. Where this happens on a regular basis, we look at improving the local drainage system by installing wider drainage pipes.

Rural drainage

Given the rural nature of East Sussex, many of our drainage gullies feed into ditches alongside the roads. ESCC has a right to discharge highway surface water into ditches owned and maintained by local landowners. Our team liaises with local landowners to ensure the maintenance of these ditches.

We are also responsible for 505km of highway ditches across the county and have a 2-year cyclical programme of clearing and maintenance. All grips (the channels that connect the edge of the road with the ditch) are maintained yearly.

Improvements and backlog

As with any highway service, we are continually looking to improve our network. At present, we have a backlog of drainage work to carry out which is reliant upon available funding. This work focuses on optimising the resilience of the road network.

It is estimated that 20%-30% of the drainage network could be under capacity. This is something that will be addressed in the future to protect the condition of roads and stop potholes forming.

Environment and sustainability

In 2019, ESCC declared a 'Climate Emergency', acknowledging that human activities are negatively impacting the environment around us. Alongside the declaration, ESCC have created a '[Climate Emergency Plan](#)' which includes a roadmap to being carbon neutral by 2050, and earlier if possible.

Carbon and sustainability

Within ESH, we have been working hard to reduce carbon emitted from our activities and although we have made good progress, we have much more work to do. From the lighting of our offices and fuel used getting to work, to the materials used to maintain the highways, we have a wide variety of emission sources we need to tackle.



We are continuously changing the way we work. This may involve the trial and use of a new lower carbon technology or material, the rethinking of projects to less carbon intensive designs, or the development of sustainability action plans.

Waste and materials

Our operations require materials to deliver our work. This may be fuel for travel to site or aggregates and bitumen for the reinstatement of our highways.

We are extremely conscientious of our material use because there is a strong connection to the amount of carbon our works emit. We always look to minimise material use and waste where possible through our design process. We choose lower carbon alternatives such as recycled or re-used materials where possible. We responsibly source any materials we use and will always obtain these through local suppliers whenever possible, reducing the risk of damaging the environment and transport requirements.

Where waste is unavoidable, we separate this, making sure that when it is received at a local waste facility as much as possible is recycled and re-used.

Environment and biodiversity

We are very aware of the unique and special environment we have within our county, and are keen to not just protect, but also improve the area in which we operate.

All our works undergo an assessment by our environmental team to understand what impact we may have. We look to avoid any unnecessary harm or damage and have strict controls in place to prevent this from happening.

Wildlife verges

One way we support biodiversity is through our wildlife verges programme. Roadside verges can provide a home for many important species of wildflowers, insects, and other animals. We have a list of verges across the county that have been designated 'wildlife verges' because they are of particular importance for wildlife. Wildlife verges are often marked with a small yellow flower shaped marker.

We do not usually cut wildlife verges between 1 March and 31 August to help protect wildlife habitats.

One of our verges contains 68% of the UK population of Spiked Rampion, protected under Schedule 8 of the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act.

Residents and parish/town Councils can apply for verges to become wildlife verges through our online [application process](#). Verges may be designated for supporting rare or vulnerable species or communities, important habitats, or simply because they are valued by the local community and allow people to have contact with the natural world, especially in urban areas.

Community and social value

Our teams pride themselves in keeping the local community and social value at the forefront of their minds. We carry out projects each year which benefit the local community. We also support local employment and skills initiatives. Below is some of what we do.



Strengthening local relationships

Highway Stewards and Stakeholder Liaison Officers attend two 'Strengthening Local Relationship' meetings (SLRs) per year. They are parish led and have a fixed agenda. The SLRs provide a great opportunity to build relations, discuss local issues and any works coming up in the area with county and parish councillors.

Highway Stewards are also available to participate in site meetings, or local walk-arounds and are often accompanied by members of the public to discuss specific or general issues relevant to the area.

Citizenship days

We undertake voluntary work each year to support local communities and attend a host of careers events across the county. We support panels for HMP Lewes Employability Advisory Board, The Construction Task group, and the Special Educational Forum for the county. We support the DWP and other community organisations such as the People Matter Trust. Since the start of 2024, we have supported over 30 members of the community into local employment across our Supply Chain.

Traffic management for community events

Each year we arrange free traffic management for a variety of events. These have ranged from Lewes late night shopping and the Firle 5K to village days, street parties and the green cycle event in Lewes.

Apprentices

Each year we deliver 10 construction/engineering apprenticeships, giving local people the opportunity to learn and grow with us at East Sussex Highways. Where possible we engage those from key priority groups from across the county including those with disabilities, those previously unemployed and 18–25-year-olds not in education, employment, or training.

Work experience and school engagement

We offer local schools the opportunity for their students to visit us and gain important work experience. Since the start of 2024, we have supported 7 young local people with work experience, supporting both Kings Academy and Chailey College. We have also hosted several events from the depot which seek to offer local students' insight into what a career at East Sussex Highways looks like and to discover entry methods onto the contract. Through these 'Pathway events' we have supported more than 50 local young adults with either 'through care' experience and/or physical and mental disabilities.

Collaboration

Through our Community and Social Value scheme we have supported the Footbridge Project in Bexhill by providing specialist paint and people power to clean up the bridge and provide a fresh backdrop to the gallery. We also recently supported a local initiative to reduce crime by providing and installing specialist anti-graffiti paint to Mini Devonshire Temple in Devonshire Park. We were also proud to support The Child of Sussex Awards in partnership with More Radio, celebrating the amazing youth across the county at a very humbling awards ceremony.

We have been supporting the Crisp Packet project since 2023. This amazing charity takes unwanted waste and otherwise non-recyclable material and uses people power to create survival products for the homeless. Our teams volunteer regularly to create waterproof bags, survival blankets, wash bags and other valuable products which are handed out across the county by volunteers.



How to get involved

Information on community highways and how you and your community groups can get involved can be found on our website. [Community Highways Volunteering | Volunteering | live.eastsussexhighways.com](https://live.eastsussexhighways.com)

Other teams

ESH work alongside other ESCC teams to undertake highway works.

Public Rights of Way Team

East Sussex has around 2,000 miles (3,218km) of public footpaths, bridleways, and byways, providing access to some of the most beautiful countryside in the County. The Rights of Way and Countryside team manages these paths to ensure that they give safe and easy access for the public.

Maintenance of the public rights of way network is the responsibility of both ESCC and landowners. You can find out more about responsibilities of stiles, gates, vegetation, animals, and other aspects on the Rights of way pages on the ESCC website.

Transport Development Control Team

The Transport Development Control team are responsible for considering the transport implications of proposed new developments in the county. The team make comments on planning applications (including pre-application enquiries), Local Plans and Neighbourhood Plans.

Often, the comments provided on development proposals lead to the need to implement improvements to the highway. Although these improvements are generally undertaken by the relevant developer(s), the Transport Development Control team supervises these works to ensure that appropriate standards are met. The Transport Development Control team also hold, maintain, update, and respond to enquiries relating to land that forms part of the public highway.

Highway Land Information Team

The Highway Land Information Team provide information about the public highway including:

- Information regarding highway boundary issues
- CON29 Highway questions
- Information regarding proposed new roads or alterations to existing roads
- Information regarding road adoptions
- Information regarding private developments that may affect the public highway.
- Provision of plans to show highway extent

Major Projects and Growth Team

The Major Projects and Growth team are responsible for the development and delivery of larger scale East Sussex led transport infrastructure schemes. These include managing major scheme business case/bid development, as well as providing project and programme management support across their service.

They oversee the management and monitoring of various regional and Government managed growth funded programmes, such as the Local Growth Fund, Growing Places Fund and Getting Building Fund. They also manage their internal service-wide pipeline funding programme and lead work alongside other teams in the identification and prioritisation of new externally delivered pipeline projects with external delivery partners.



Infrastructure Planning and Place Team

The Infrastructure Planning and Place team are responsible for:

- Infrastructure planning and policy – the county’s Local Transport Plan and its constituent documents; engagement with strategic transport providers such as National Highways, Network Rail, Gatwick, as well as with TfSE and the Department for Transport; sponsoring major projects managed through the Major Projects and Growth team; managing externally funded active travel programmes; co-ordinating the Council’s responses to Local and Neighbourhood Plans; securing Community Infrastructure Levy and non-highways contributions as well as managing the use of these development contributions.
- Local transport schemes – client for the development and delivery of our capital programme of local transport improvements comprising small scheme transport schemes including pedestrian crossings/ footways, cycle routes and infrastructure, bus stop infrastructure, local junction improvements that are delivered through the highways contract, and the transport monitoring function.
- Electric vehicle charging infrastructure - roll out of EV on street infrastructure in the county in partnership with a ChargePoint operator.

Road Safety

The road safety team identify points on the road network that are shown to have the greatest crash risk and would therefore benefit the most from interventions to reduce casualties. They carry out studies into crashes occurring on the county’s road network and then put in place a programme of works to address these crashes.

Their focus is aimed at sites that show a high level of crashes happening over a sustained period. They review crash sites annually with relatively small-scale schemes being funded by the Road Safety Team and larger schemes referred to our Capital Programme for Transport Improvements.

The interventions that are available to the Road Safety Team are strictly controlled by national legislation, design standards to ensure conformity across the whole road network and best practice borne out of experience and academic studies.

Responsibilities:

- Speed limits
- Crash site identification and investigation
- Traffic movement prohibitions and restrictions
- Parking (in non-CPE areas)
- Traffic signs (regulatory/warning/advisory/direction/tourist)
- Road markings
- Road safety audit
- Strengthening local relationship meetings with local parish councils
- Internal driver training and minibuss training

- School Crossing Patrols
- Driver diversion courses (on behalf of Sussex Police)
- Cycle training
- Road safety education (in conjunction with the Sussex Safer Roads Partnership)
- Community road safety

