

Report of the Environment Working Group – February 2024

Submitted to Councillors

Matters of Concern:

Highway Litter Spreading – A separate report was issued to the Parish Council on 13 November 2023, regarding a contractor's tractor cutting the roadside hedge on the south side of the Pewsey to Burbage road which was seen to shred the top half of a temporary, white plastic sign ('Beware skid risk'). Not only does the highway have a pitted road surface, and non-existent drainage on that section, but now has also a shower of shredded plastic signage across the bank to join the general litter and plastic components of cars (who lost them travelling through standing water).

Closer to home, it would be considerate of road maintenance contractors to recover all their temporary road signs, to relieve us of the burden of clearing them for recycling.

Highway maintenance – The transition to electric vehicles (EV), as a replacement for those with internal combustion engines (ICE) is progressing only slowly and partly because of concern for lack of charging infrastructure. There is another issue, however, relevant to our rural parishes; road surface. The increase in heavy traffic and the development of Devizes as a transport/distribution hub, has seen the breaking up of the edges of our highways. Concurrently, EVs are heavier and fitted with low profile tyres, to maximise range (over functionality), and are suffering immense damage on our roads. An increase in Government funding for road maintenance is welcomed by Wiltshire Council, but until funding meets the broken-up surfaces, it is all wind and holes. The Parish Council is urged to press for a weight restriction on the A342 and for the elimination of potholes if the public wariness of EVs is to be eased. In the meantime, tyre replacement centres in Devizes report a roaring trade.

The destruction of road edges is sometimes, and erroneously, attributed to agricultural tractors (which will cut up damaged surfaces, but do not usually impact foundations). It is the heavy trucks with multiple axle trailers that on the A342 must use road edges (and beyond) to pass each other and by doing so break up the sub-structures with their wheel articulation; these edges were never built to withstand such weighty pummelling (the passing of one such truck is estimated to cause more surface wear than 120,000 passes of a car). Larger and more numerous trucks will exacerbate the situation, while Highways has insufficient funding to bring the A342 up to specification. In this respect, County and Central Government policies and agendas were at odds with each other.

The attached paper published in 2008 and available from Transport Research Laboratory is relevant and shows exactly why the A342 continues to break up due to inadequate foundations, inadequate width and inappropriate surface maintenance; see **Note 42 - Best practice guide for durability of asphalt pavements** at <https://trl.co.uk/publications/road-note-42---best-practice-guide-for-durability-of-asphalt-pavements>.

In this connection, it is also understood that Highways maintains as a defence, that it cannot deal with potholes that it is unaware of. Given the number of WCC employees and contractors travelling our roads, there should be no 'unidentified' holes. The Parish Council is urged to remind Highways and WCC that potholes affect us all, them included, and that employees and contractors, all of them, are encouraged to travel with their eyes open.

Highway classification – The condition of the A342, between Devizes and Upavon, is a disaster, being quite unfit for purpose and present usage. It is a risk to health and safety and damaging to vehicles.

Incidents – On the night of 8th/9th December 2024, a truck on the A342 left the road to the north side, destroyed 25 metres of hedgerow (planted in recent years by Manor Farm), and deposited its load in the cultivated field; a road roller, whose recovery damaged many metres of headland.

Highway diversion – Damage caused to the edges of Hilcott Lane by Cuttenham Farm, during diversion of traffic from the A342 through 2023, which damage is unseen during even the mildest flooding, has caused some drivers of cars to veer off the highway and become stuck or their vehicles damaged by the trenches alongside the highway.

Flooding – The flooding of December 2023 and January 2024 has caused access roads to flood in Wilsford (west and east, but not central) and at the west end of Charlton's main street, thereby preventing use by road traffic.

Warning signage was deployed by Wilsford Flood Wardens, East and West, and Flood Warden East cleared gullies either side of the central access road, which remained open throughout. The access road from Hilcott is cut when the River Avon overflows; the river being the responsibility of National Rives Authority.

Ditches alongside access road west did flood owing to the volume of water flowing from Manor Farm fields and those of Marden House Farm. A survey by Flood Warden West found that the confluence of drainage halfway along the Millennium Path (at the track junction and Halfway Stone) is partially obstructed, as is the ditch line from the east end of the Millennium Path east to the River Avon at Cuttenham Farm; all within the estate of Wilsford Manor Farm. Gully maintenance is provided through the Parish Steward, but the ditch line through Manor Farm might best be maintained annually for the benefit of farmers and road users alike.

Rural Crime – The Parish Council was represented at a talk on rural crime given by the Police & Crime Commissioner, Philip Wilkinson, at Fovant on 14th November 2023. Set out his role and priorities, The Commissioner has trebled the staffing of the Rural (police) Crime Team, has introduced night vision devices and additional drones, and has reduced central staffing and waste to refocus the constabulary. He is working with neighbouring constabularies in the south-west to improve intelligence and is promoting local, regional, national, and international links with a National Rural Crime Board.

For the **Environmental Working Group**
Parish Council of Charlton St. Peter & Wilsford