



## Not waving, but drowning

Overview by **Rick Green**, Chair,  
Asphalt Industry Alliance

**T**his year marks the 27th successive Annual Local Authority Road Maintenance (ALARM) survey and we are continually grateful to local authority highway teams for their ongoing support. We received a record number of responses, which allow us to build a robust picture of the effects of funding and maintenance levels on the condition of the local road network in England and Wales.

Against a backdrop of increased costs caused by rising inflation, the message from this year's ALARM research is clear: those responsible for maintaining our local roads are fast approaching the point where they are no longer waving but drowning. They have a legal responsibility to keep our roads safe, but flat funding allocations to carriageway maintenance in real terms – and rising costs – means they have to make difficult choices about keeping their networks open and safe today, versus improving structural resilience for today and tomorrow.

This has led to the reported backlog of carriageway repairs increasing by almost a quarter on last year's figure to £12.64bn – the equivalent of £75.7 million for every local authority in England and Wales. This is the amount local authorities told us they would need to spend to bring their networks up to conditions which would allow them to be maintained cost effectively going forward.

What's clear is that the current means of allocating funding – with capital budgets for enhancements to the network and revenue budgets for road maintenance – compounds a short-term approach. Revenue-poor engineers told us that they often have to opt for reactive maintenance treatments that can be completed within certain timescales, regardless of the whole-life implications for carbon emissions and their authorities' net zero pledges, which the majority have set for 2030 – just eight years away.

Although surface repairs have a part to play in extending the life of local roads, fixing potholes is indicative of a network on the edge and is less efficient when it comes to materials usage and carbon emissions. But ALARM again reports that 1.7 million potholes were filled over the last year – equivalent to one every 19 seconds – at a cost of £107.4 million.

And, with the total cost of compensation claims rising, the conditions of our local roads are out of kilter with the public's expectations and out of line with what's needed to achieve the country's levelling up and net zero ambitions.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Rick Green'.