



Bleak expectations

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

The findings of this year's Annual Local Authority Road Maintenance (ALARM) survey make for bleak, if not unsurprising, reading. Local roads underpin all other local services, but findings show a worsening picture in their overall conditions and the means to improve them.

Resurfacing now takes place, on average, less than once every 100 years; local authority highway budget shortfalls in 2022/23 were up to record levels and the cost of the backlog of repairs to bring the network up to scratch is, at just over £14 billion, the highest it has been.

Rising costs due to inflationary pressures mean that despite a moderate increase in overall local highway maintenance budgets, engineers can do less, and many have been forced to postpone or cancel road schemes to make savings. This will only store up problems and additional costs for the future – and have a negative impact on network resilience.

The data shows that the shortfall in the carriageway maintenance budget has increased to £1.30 billion across England and Wales – a jump of 20 per cent on the figure reported last year. The shortfall is the difference between what local authorities received and what they said they would have needed to keep local roads to their target conditions and prevent further decline – so doesn't even consider what would be needed to improve conditions to an ideal situation.

Local authorities are also having to deal with the challenges of more extreme weather events, increased volumes of traffic, as well as an ageing network. It's therefore not surprising the data shows that structural conditions continue to decline with 8,000 fewer miles of roads classed as structurally 'good' than reported last year (see page 15).

Highway engineers can only do so much with the resources they're given and should be applauded for the steps they take to keep roads safe.

It's clear from the column inches and social media posts devoted to potholes that the condition of our local roads remains a key issue for the public. Materials innovation and technical advances can only go so far: they are not a silver bullet. Without a change to the funding structure and the amount allocated, local road conditions can't – and won't – improve.

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

The backlog of repairs is the **highest it has been**

Structural conditions **continue to decline**

Highway budget shortfalls in 2022/23 were **up to record levels**