

Street Lighting

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Report to and date:	Cabinet	8 November 2022
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Decisions Plan: The decision made as a result of this report will usually be published within 48 hours and cannot be actioned until five clear working days of the publication of the decision have elapsed. This item is included on the Decisions Plan.

Wards impacted: All wards

Recommendation: It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. acknowledges the results of the street lighting audit;
2. returns to the issue of streetlight ownership as a part of the wider planned review of its relationship with town and parish councils in 2023, linking it to more holistic discussions around the management of the urban realm; and
3. shares the information gathered from the audit with Suffolk County Council and authorises officers to support parish and town councils in that dialogue.

1. Context to this report

- 1.1 The majority of streetlights in West Suffolk are owned and maintained by Suffolk County Council (SCC) as highway authority. However, West Suffolk Council (WSC) has the power to provide lighting as a local authority, acting with the consent of the Highways Authority via the powers conferred by the Highways Act 1980. Town and parish councils have similar powers for their areas.
- 1.2 Over 2,300 non-SCC lights are in the former Forest Health District Council (FHDC) area, with the largest number (around 2,000) being run by parish councils. In comparison, around 1,500 lights are estimated to be in the former St Edmundsbury Borough Council (SEBC) area, with very few run by the parishes. However, research reveals that, within these totals, there are some marked differences in ownership between the three tiers of local government within and between the two former district areas.
- 1.3 In both former districts there are places where SCC provides over 80 percent of the lights, and places where a larger proportion of lights are owned by WSC or the town and parish councils. This may be due to historical factors, but also other factors – such as whether lights are located adjacent to the highway or linked to footpaths, housing areas, garage blocks or parks and open spaces. For example, in Lakenheath, Mildenhall and Brandon, the town and parish councils support a disproportionate number of lights, whereas in Newmarket, Haverhill and Bury St Edmunds they do not.
- 1.4 In Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill and the whole of the former FHDC area, WSC's ownership of lights is fairly consistent at between two percent and seven percent. Any inconsistency in WSC's ownership mostly relates to rural areas (including the town of Clare). In the rural parts of the former SEBC, WSC owns a large proportion of the lights alongside SCC, ranging from 40 percent to 80 percent. In contrast, a rural parish in the former FHDC can often own over half of the lights in its area (although this is not universally the case). However, for rural parishes, the number of lights in question is usually relatively small for each individual parish.
- 1.5 It was indicated at the Council meeting in February 2022 that, following the delay caused by the response to the pandemic, Cabinet intends to carry out the planned review of West Suffolk Council's future relationship with town and parish councils in 2023.
- 1.6 At Cabinet in June 2022, it was decided that the council would undertake an audit or survey of lighting at district-level, including all parish and town council lighting, over the summer of 2022. This would provide an opportunity to:
 - a. find out which parishes want to work with WSC and SCC on the review or not

- b. investigate district, parish and town lights to consider whether all lights are felt to still be relevant locally

1.7 It was also decided to investigate the potential costs to upgrade lights. Specifically, to work with SCC and parish and town councils to understand accurate cost implications. In addition, it was agreed to work with Suffolk County Council to review feasibility and costs and savings involved in incorporating district, parish and town council lights into the SCC Central Management System.

2. Proposals within this report

2.1 Audit process

2.1.1 A short survey of parish and town councils took place between 20 July and 31 August 2022 – however, upon request from individual parishes, the deadline was extended to allow them adequate time to respond if needed.

2.1.2 The structure of the audit was dictated by the data kindly provided by Suffolk County Council – as well as the information provided by Mildenhall High Town Council (who maintain their own lights). Broadly speaking, this could be separated into three separate groups:

- a. Former Forest Heath parishes
- b. Former St Edmundsbury parishes
- c. Hybrid parishes in either former district – such as parishes where there are 'unknown' lights in the SCC data-set, the parish (such as Cavendish) is shown to own just one light or where parishes hold different datasets to those of SCC (such as in Mildenhall where the town council manages the lights and has the latest information).

2.1.3 Tailored messages were developed for each group, with emails or letters sent to each parish in the district. Follow up conversations were offered and held where requested.

In addition, an online survey was developed (this was also made available as a document for parishes experiencing technical issues). The survey set out a series of optional questions, primarily focused on acquiring:

- a. intelligence on streetlights in each parish
- b. an understanding of parishes' main motivations or objectives when considering streetlights
- c. an understanding of their relative willingness to work with West Suffolk Council and Suffolk County Council on this issue.

2.2 Response summary

2.2.1 In total, 16 councils responded to the audit. As all questions were optional, some were skipped by parishes in their responses. In addition, a number of parishes did not respond via the online survey, instead opting to either fill out a document version of the survey or a freeform response by email.

2.2.2 Clarity on streetlight data

Mildenhall, Haverhill and Barningham councils provided detailed returns on their streetlight data. Through discussion, Mildenhall were able to clarify that the SCC data that didn't match their own streetlight information was out of date and should instead be attributed to the newly formed West Row parish. Likewise, Haverhill were able to provide information of ownership of their 'unknown' streetlights. Barningham, in great detail, mapped their streetlight allocations, including information on the state of each streetlight, relative visibility etc. which will enable specific issues to be followed up. Chevington council also provided some information on obscured lighting, which they requested assistance with.

2.2.3 Central Management System (CMS)

The CMS, which was introduced by SCC in 2011, offers the chance to utilise dimming or 'part-night' settings. For example, dimming a LED light by 25 percent for some of the night is not normally detectable by the human eye, but saves on energy usage; likewise, a part-night setting has the potential to lower energy usage by 50 percent over the course of a year. It should be noted, however, that the CMS can only operate a dimming function for a streetlight that has already been upgraded to LED.

2.2.4 Most parishes who responded did not indicate willingness to explore being brought onto the CMS, with a number suggesting that it would not be applicable to them. Brandon, Exning, Mildenhall, Newmarket and Red Lodge, however, all stated that they would like to look into this with Suffolk County Council and this will be followed up. Likewise, Bradfield St Clare stated that they were interested in dimming or part-time options. (Please note: Bradfield St Clare have been referred to SCC regarding options for dimming or part-night lighting. The parish is undertaking a short resident survey to establish what local feeling is regarding the streetlighting options.)

2.2.5 Commitment to work with West Suffolk Council and Suffolk County Council

Brandon, Mildenhall, Ousden, Risby and Stradishall councils all provided firm commitment to work with West Suffolk Council and Suffolk County Council on this issue moving forward. While the council did not answer this question, it can be inferred from other answers that Newmarket would also be willing to work with WSC and SCC on this issue – at least in the interest of exploring the possibilities of the CMS.

2.3 Proposed next steps

- 2.3.1 It is not possible to infer the views of the 66 parish and town councils that did not respond, and there will be other chances to follow this topic up in the future. This overall level of response is perhaps unsurprising because, as explained in the June report, parishes and town councils in former St Edmundsbury generally do not, for historical reasons, own any lights. Hence the different categorisations of engagement. However, of the 15 parish and town councils that did take part in the audit, the majority have indicated that they are satisfied with their current streetlights i.e. number, location, hours of operation, etc.
- 2.3.2 Furthermore, a number of councils provided very full information as part of the audit, with several – including Mildenhall, Brandon (which own 42 percent and 48 percent of their streetlights, respectively) and Newmarket (which owns eight percent of its streetlights) – willing to explore alternative arrangements moving forward. Meetings with a number of town and parish councils on streetlights have already taken place between WSC and SCC officers, and all information from the audit will be forwarded to SCC to allow them to update their datasets or discuss further with parishes. For, instance, following up any queries about whether lights owned by parishes are on the highway and any other anomalies. A priority for this work is also to focus on the conversion of lights to LED given the significant financial and environmental benefits.
- 2.3.3 This being the case, and given the current pattern of ownership summarised in paragraphs 1.2 to 1.4 of this report, it is recommended that West Suffolk Council returns to the issue of light ownership as a part of the wider planned review of its relationship with town and parish councils in 2023, linking it to more holistic discussions around the management of the urban realm.
- 2.3.4 WSC also still owns 691 streetlights, which have not been upgraded to LED. Cabinet has already agreed to work with SCC to survey and upgrade these remaining WSC lights. Initial estimates from SCC suggest that converting the remaining lights could remove 40 tonnes of carbon emissions and potentially save around £60,000 per year. To undertake a thorough survey, however, the Finance and Property teams will need to work with SCC to find accurate costings for implementation, and this will be funded from existing property or decarbonisation budgets.

3. Alternative options that have been considered

- 3.1 While the council has no statutory obligation to maintain streetlights and is not required to work with other local lighting authorities to review street lighting distribution and operation, it wishes to continue to support these important community facilities in the most efficient and appropriate manner for taxpayers across all three tiers of local government (also

reflecting the proposed vision and guiding principles for the 2023 review of WSC's relationship with town and parish councils).

- 3.2 To take this work forward, the Cabinet wishes to engage with town and parish councils to gather information before forming proposals. Therefore, no alternative options have been considered at this stage.

4. Risks associated with the proposals

- 4.1 There are no significant risks associated with implementing the proposals as they remain focused on fact finding and improving engagement. The main risk would not be addressing the issue at all, given the concerns raised and opportunities to develop potential solutions in the face of rising energy prices.

5. Implications arising from the proposals

- 5.1 Financial – there will be an opportunity cost in relation to the WSC staff time needed to work on the wider town and parish review from 2023/2024. Direct financial implications in respect of any lighting proposals will be contained in any options appraisal at the next stage. The cost of and financial savings from any adaptation of WSC's own lights will be built into the Council's future budget setting.
- 5.2 Legal compliance – not applicable at this stage.
- 5.3 Personal data processing – not applicable.
- 5.4 Equalities – not applicable.
- 5.5 Crime and disorder – not applicable at this stage. However, there is extensive research carried out in Suffolk and nationally on the impact of street lighting on crime and safety for parishes to draw upon when making future decisions about their own lights.
- 5.6 Environment or sustainability – covered in the report.
- 5.7 HR or staffing – work on the review will be carried out within existing workloads of officers.
- 5.8 Changes to existing policies – not applicable at this stage.
- 5.9 External organisations (such as businesses, community groups) – the audit and later options will affect parish and town councils, the county council and potentially registered social landlords.

6. Background documents associated with this report

- 6.1 [2017 Business Case for formation of a single West Suffolk Council](#)
- 6.2 [Transfer of Street Lighting Columns to Suffolk County](#)

[Council. Report to St Edmundsbury Cabinet/Council in October/November 2015, ref CAB/SE/15/065](#)

6.3 [CAB.WS.22.027 Street Lighting Cabinet Report](#)