

Environmental Information Regulations – Response - 27715

NORTHUMBERLAND, AVENUE, BURY ST EDMUNDS POST CODE IS IP32 6ND.

I understand that Suffolk County Council works with Milestone Infrastructure to provide a range of services for Suffolk Highways, including maintaining roads, pavements, rights of way, improving drainage, hedge trimming and constructing new road schemes and so on.

A few weeks ago i asked our MP, Dr Peter Prinsley , if i could make a freedom of information request regarding a nearby road to where i live called Northumberland Avenue?

He replied that i could.

Work started on Northumberland Avenue many months ago. Residents were given notice that their road would be closed for approximately 3 weeks, whilst all of the perfectly good paving slabs were uplifted and replaced by 'blacktop' a form of asphalt.

XXXXXXX who lives in Northumberland Avenue and XXXX asked the workmen where these perfectly good paving slabs were going?

"To be broken up for hardcore," came the reply.

Well we knew that anyway, because in 1987 Highways uplifted all of the perfectly good paving slabs on the odd numbers side of Philip Road where XXXX live. Plus they did the same in Norman Road which runs parallel to Philip Road.

All of those slabs went to hardcore back then.

Now XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX, my nearby neighbour, was a surveyor for Suffolk Highways and we discussed this uplifting process at one of XXXXXX local resident's association meetings, which are attended by local councillors.

XXXXXXX stated that the uplifted paving slabs have an indefinite lifespan. That they are upto 50mm thick.

Whereas the 'blacktop' asphalt will degrade and crack leaving tripping points. In fact, XXXXXXXX driveway, at a point close to the footpath kerb, has worn down to hardcore with large stones poking through the surface. Another tripping point.

XXXXXXX did add that the asphalt being used now is of superior quality to the grotty asphalt we in Philip and Norman Road were left with and Philip Road is trodden on many, many, many times more than Norman Road, as the latter is a cul-de-sac.

Regarding Northumberland Avenue, XXXXXX there asked the workman how long the asphalt would last for? "12 years," came the reply from the workman. Hardly a durable period is it?

10 weeks on and more, the workmen were still working on the uplifting and asphalt laying. A lot longer than the original 3 weeks the residents were advised.

Apart from the noise, which i could hear in my property, residents of Northumberland Avenue were unable to move their cars off their driveways until 4pm each day. My friend had slabs piled up in the front of his driveway for several days.

Northumberland Avenue is not a very long road, so don't you think that 10 plus weeks is an inordinate lengthy period of time for a straightforward job?

I remember saying to XXXXXXXX that if that job had been undertaken in China, it would have been carried out in a week. Of course, Chinese workmanship might leave something to be desired, but on the other hand, maybe not so. However, they really work fast with more manpower than Britain does. Britain is known as the 'Cone Zone'. Plenty of cones but no active workmen.

Suffolk Highways has a bad reputation for dilly dallying on road and pavement work. Even when additional Labour government money has been made available to undertake certain work, i.e. repair of roads and potholes.

Bearing all of the aforementioned in mind, i felt it prudent to make a 'Freedom of Information Act' request.

Quite simply, how much has it cost in pounds sterling to uplift the paving slabs and replace them with black asphalt in Northumberland Avenue?

Phase 1: £150,127.87 (25/26 Financial year)

Phase 2: £206,211.25 (26/27 Financial year)

Phase 3: £179,147.01 (26/27 Financial year)

Your assistance, in that respect, would be much appreciated.

One final request, why is our part of Bury St Edmunds being infected with paving slab uplifting and all of the noise and inconvenience that comes with it?

The footway improvement works are being undertaken to address safety and maintenance concerns associated with existing paving slabs. Over time, slabs can become uneven due to factors such as tree root growth, ground movement, utility works, and general deterioration, creating trip hazards and increasing maintenance requirements.

Suffolk Highways prioritises footway maintenance using an asset management approach, focusing investment where it will deliver the greatest benefit in terms of safety, accessibility, and long-term value. In parts of Northumberland Avenue, the condition of the existing paving slabs has reached a point where more substantial renewal works are considered the most effective solution.

While we recognise that these works can cause temporary noise and disruption, efforts are made to minimise inconvenience. The replacement of paving slabs with alternative surfacing can also reduce whole-life maintenance costs, allowing available funding to be used to improve a greater extent of the footway network.