



Streets Ahead project director Mike Notman and Sheffield City Council head of highway maintenance Steve Robinson check in depth the condition of the roads

## Sheffield streets team starts city's core refurbishment

Sheffield residents are about to see their street lights replaced with 68,000 LEDs. But the new Streets Ahead PFI aims to shine in many other ways. Jackie Whitelaw reports.

**B**y the time you read this three areas of Sheffield will be undergoing a top to toe make over of their streets as the city's maintenance PFI starts in earnest. Over the first five years of the 25 year Streets Ahead deal concessionaire Amey will be spending £350M to tackle these and a further 105 zones of the city in order to reverse decades of underinvestment.

There are 1888km of road to be resurfaced and rebuilt along with 3280km

of footpath; around 50 of the total 630 bridges will be refurbished and new traffic signals set up at 480 sites. Also included in a very long list are items like replacing half of the city's 36,000 highway trees, replacing 28,000 new street signs and cutting of 2.95M.m<sup>2</sup> of grass verge.

It is not just the street scene on the ground that will alter. Above the heads of the population another change will be taking place as 68,000 conventional street lights are replaced with more energy

efficient but brighter LEDs that nevertheless emit far less light pollution.

"In five years you won't be able to see Sheffield from the Peak District at night anymore," says Sheffield City Council head of highway maintenance Steve Robinson.

As the city disappears from the view of one of the country's most beautiful regions the plan is that it will itself be transformed into a far more desirable place to live, work and crucially invest. The intention behind the £2.18n Streets Ahead PFI



scheme is to change Sheffield's reputation from pothole city and all the connotations of decline and greyness that suggests into a smart, go ahead conurbation that is the envy of the north and probably, given the sharp decline in road maintenance budgets just about everywhere else.

"The attraction of the PFI concept has always been that it will lead to the regeneration of the city," Mr Robinson says. "And there was no other way of getting done the amount of work that is needed."

"In common with everywhere else, highways maintenance has always been targeted when there has been a need for budget cuts. Sheffield by some measures has officially the worst roads in the country. We've been known as pothole city for years. And when we asked the population what were the things they were least satisfied with the top answer that came back was 'the state of the roads and the pavements.'"

The city's street infrastructure had long ago passed the point of no return, Mr Robinson explains. "As the condition



Sheffield's reputation as pothole city was one of the drivers for pursuing the PFI

declined we got to a point when even if we had spent a little bit more we would never get on top of the problem. We have been in a situation of accelerated deterioration."

Sheffield and its fellow cities in the region are competing to attract new investors. "The poor state of the roads might be one of the reasons people would invest elsewhere," Mr Robinson believes.

"Now we are going to go from having the worst roads in the country to the best in five years. That will benefit our economy, not just because Sheffield looks better and with improved lighting, feels safer. We are repairing the roads with stone mastic asphalts where appropriate for longer life paving, there will be less ad hoc disruption for emergency repairs and journey times will be reliable."

An important part of the PFI is that utility and public transport works will be factored into the initial intensive capital works phase.

"We have a five year programme that is visible to the utilities and the bus companies. We have been talking to the utilities for the last four years and they know they can target their works to tie in with ours. If we work together it will reduce their costs and disruption to the public and businesses. And they are also aware that if we have resurfaced a street as part of the PFI there will be a restriction on them digging it up again for up to five years.

"The bus companies have also been asked what ideas they have to give them

an opportunity to bring their programmes forward into our core investment, again in the interests of reducing disruption and preserving the integrity of our new infrastructure."

Sheffield's PFI is one of three "pathfinder" pilots set up by the previous government to assess the value for money of maintenance PFIs. The other two are Hounslow in London and the Isle of Wight and are both in the hands of Ringway. Portsmouth won by Colas in 2005 and Birmingham won by Amey in 2010 were the first cities to introduce the arrangement.

The five areas meet regularly at Department for Transport to share their experiences and knowledge and although Government said it had cooled on the idea of road maintenance PFIs earlier in the year (*Transportation Professional* May) the outcome of the PFI Review may prompt a further reassessment.

Certainly Sheffield believes the schemes are the best way to address deteriorating streets. The city council's deputy leader Bryan Lodge believes "it has been clearly demonstrated that the

Sheffield project is the best value for money solution to resolving the city's backlog of highway works and wider highway maintenance issues" (*TP* May).

The Sheffield contract with Amey was signed on 31 July and after a short mobilisation period, began on 20 August when all 403 city council highway maintenance Street Force staff >



**"The council is working with police to collect statistics on safer streets as new lighting is installed."**



Sheffield's golden night time glow will no longer be visible from the Peak District beauty spot once the street lights have been changed to LEDs

> transferred to the Streets Ahead venture.

"We were working long before that to map individuals into the new structure so the changeover was pretty seamless," says Arney's Mike Notman who is project director for Streets Ahead. "We had committed up front to no redundancies and to increase jobs by 200 along with hiring 30 new apprentices locally so we believe people have found the whole experience very positive.

"We need a staff of 740 to deliver the whole service," says Mr Notman. The proportion of Arney staff in the team will be small at about 30 he says.

"We certainly didn't pick up any concern about the transfer from the workforce," says Mr Robinson. "And we particularly encouraged Arney and its rival bidders to focus on apprenticeships. The council is leading in that field in the UK and we take on 100 of our own each year."

All along the plan has been to minimise disruption during the intensive capital works period. Streets Ahead will refurbish and replace everything from street lights to drainage gullies in one hit in each of the 108 zones it has mapped out in the city. "As we get going we will be working on five or six zones at once but spread around the city so we don't bring everything to a standstill," Mr Notman says.

Communication with locals is going to be key and part of the set up is the employment of seven assembly stewards matched to each of the city's assembly wards to be the conduit for information, to reassure residents and to act as advocates for the investment. They will be there throughout the life of the PFI. "After the

core investment is completed Streets Ahead's responsibility shifts to maintenance," Mr Notman says. "But there will be five to six times the amount of that being done compared to what people have been used to so that will need explaining.

"But once we've done the major work, we won't be back in force for 15 years," Mr Notman promises. "It works out that every road will be refurbished 1.7 times over the 25 years of the PFI."

If there are going to be any problems they are most likely to be from people in



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Mike Notman



**"The utilities are aware there will be restriction on them digging up resurfaced streets for up to five years."**  
Steve Robinson

zones where work has not been done wondering why their area might not be tackled for four or five years, Mr Robinson believes.

Under the Streets Ahead contract Arney is paid a fixed fee by the council but has 753 key performance indicators to hit, some measured monthly, some annually. If the KPIs are missed there are penalties in the form of "service deductions", ie Arney doesn't get part of its fee. "We only pay for what we get," Mr Robinson says.

There are also milestones the achievement of which generates a new tranche of fee from the council. And if new works are accrued into the project there is a mechanism to change the scope of work.

KPIs are self assessed by the PFI although Mr Robinson has a small audit team as back up. Milestones are assessed by the project's independent surveyor URS.

"The council did a lot of work before letting the contract to determine what Arney and Streets Ahead did or didn't need to maintain," Mr Robinson says. "And we did a lot of work to find out what the state of the network was and who owned what which was given to Arney to take into contractual negotiations."

The Streets Ahead PFI includes capital improvement and a programme of accruing new private developer works into the project which could involve up to 100km of new road to service the city's

growth over 25 years. Traffic management remains the responsibility of the council so it can control where and when works happen and manage disruption.

Measurement of the impact of the PFI on the city's environment is important. The council is working with the police to collect statistics on safer streets for example as the new lighting is installed. "And Sheffield University is undertaking a perception survey next year to look at residential zones before and after to see if across the city there is an increase in the perception of safety," Mr Robinson says. "We expect there to be.

"This project is going to be a game changer for our city."

#### The Streets Ahead team

Client: Sheffield City Council  
PFI contractor: Arney  
Independent surveyor: URS  
Lenders technical adviser: Leigh Fisher