

Roads and Infrastructure

Roads Factsheet

Potholes: FAQs

January 2024

As a Local Authority, we often get asked for information relating to potholes in slightly different ways. Depending on the information requested, sometimes we can answer these queries and sometimes we can't. This isn't an attempt by us to prevent data from being made public but we can only provide the information we have at the time.

Several enquiries relate to trying to find out how many potholes we have, how many we have repaired and what it has cost. The following questions and answers attempt to provide the information we have in the various formats requested.

1. How many potholes are within your Area and how many have been fixed?

- a. The total number of potholes in the Area and those fixed by The Highland Council is unknown. Potholes are recorded as 'works instructions' which can be for a single or multiple number of potholes. We also occasionally use a 'find and fix' strategy where potholes are repaired as they are found and therefore they may not be raised as a works instruction. Therefore, the number of potholes and those repaired are higher than shown in the tables below.

Data in the following tables was provided at 19/01/24.

Calendar Year	No. of WORKS INSTRUCTIONS Raised	No. of WORKS INSTRUCTIONS Completed
2024	43 (to 19/01/2024)	6 (to 19/01/2024)
2023	2801	1077
2022	2718	1443
2021	2664	1534
2020	2126	2326
2019	3469	1753
2018	3474	2638
2017	1752	940
2016	2925	2711
2015	3793	3726
2014	2321	2083

Financial Year	No. of WORKS INSTRUCTIONS Raised	No. of WORKS INSTRUCTIONS Completed
2023-24	1564 (to 19/01/2024)	666 (to 19/01/2024)
2022-23	3435	1472
2021-22	2205	1637
2020-21	2000	1886
2019-20	3503	1784
2018-19	3187	2602
2017-18	2440	1529
2016-17	2458	2120
2015-16	3712	3496
2014-15	2860	2186
2013-14	3634	2468

Roads and Infrastructure

Roads Factsheet

Potholes: FAQs

January 2024

2. **What size do you consider a pothole needs to be before the Council will repair it?**
 - a. This depends on several factors and there is no 'one size' fits all for classifying and repairing a pothole. For instance, we would consider repairing a relatively small pothole in a footway outside a hospital or school where it presents a trip hazard to a vulnerable group of users before a similar sized one in the carriageway where it has no or little effect on vehicles passing over it.

3. **How many potholes have had to be repaired more than once?**
 - a. We do not record this information and therefore cannot give an answer. A temporary fix may be applied to a pothole before a permanent one can be carried out. We would still consider this to be 'one repair' as the temporary fix is to ensure it is safe for the travelling public. If we did not temporarily fill potholes, then we may need to start coning/ signing them off which would cause more network disruption as road users would need to go around them.

4. **Why won't you repair the pothole I reported to you?**
 - a. It isn't a case of 'won't'. It may be that the pothole has been classified as a lower priority than others and has been put into a programme for repair in the future. There may also be a programme of works where we won't repair a pothole if we are going to resurface the road in the near future. We are unable to respond instantly to all pothole reports by the public but by using a risk based approach to categorise them, we aim to repair those which are most urgent in a timeous manner.
 - b. Weather can also be a factor with respect to available staff resources, effectiveness of available repair materials and freeze/ thaw cycles. Staff may be deployed on winter maintenance duties or storm clear up operations. Bitumen based repair materials are susceptible to water ingress and cold temperatures. This combination may result in the defect returning within a short timescale. We understand that this is frustrating for road users but temporary repairs may be necessary, in some circumstances, to protect the travelling public.

To report a pothole or other road maintenance defect to us, please use the online form or phone the call centre.

ONLINE FORM:

https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/20005/roads_and_pavements/96/road_faults

CALL CENTRE: 01349 886601

Roads and Infrastructure

Roads Factsheet

Potholes: FAQs

January 2024

5. **I've been driving past the same bad pothole for months, why haven't you fixed it?**
- a. In some cases, we may not know about it! Roads are inspected on a monthly, quarterly (every 3 months) or annual basis. We rely on others to tell us of potentially hazardous defects at other times.

6. **What would help the Council in identifying the 'worst' potholes?**

- a. In short, we're looking for defects that present a significant hazard to users of the road network (this includes adopted footways/ paths and cycle routes). A grid reference (co-ordinates) is the most helpful location tool and this can be achieved by submitting a report online through our webpage:
https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/20005/roads_and_pavements/96/road_faults

DO NOT, UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES, STAND IN THE ROAD (CARRIAGEWAY) TO MEASURE A POTHOLE OR TAKE A PHOTOGRAPH OF IT. ALWAYS USE A COMMON SENSE APPROACH. YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR OWN SAFETY.

- b. We're looking for location and size so it's helpful if you state if it's in the footway or carriageway along with a guess of how big it is. Something like:
'There's a pothole next to the gully in the road, outside number 12 Any Street, Any Town. It looks like the size of a car tyre and about as deep as the height of a 50 pence coin.'
OR
'The pothole is in the left hand side of the left lane as you travel from Place A to Place B, next to the Example Farm access. It's about the size of a piece of A4 paper but ankle deep.'
- c. If you can't describe it in this way, and it is safe to do so, you can take a photo and submit it with the online report, using the Council's customer reporting system.
- d. If the pothole is in the footway, then it should be safe to take a photo of it but ensure you are aware of other users, including cyclists. Similarly, a photo of a pothole in the carriageway can be taken from the footway – again, only if it is safe to do so.
7. **Why don't you fix potholes 'properly' the first time?**
- a. Potholes occur for several reasons. The main factor is due to water ingress of the bituminous layers in the road surface. During the winter period, water is subject to a freeze/ thaw action which can cause rapid deterioration of the road surface and eventually, in severe cases, complete failure. A road subject to high traffic flows will often see potholes develop over a short period of time. Where appropriate, surface dressing is a preventative maintenance measure used to try to stop water ingress to road layers.
- b. Where a permanent fix has been applied, the pothole can still redevelop over time due to the type of traffic travelling on it and their movements.

Roads and Infrastructure

Roads Factsheet

Potholes: FAQs

January 2024

For instance, repeated, consistent heavy traffic turning at a junction can cause stress on the pavement layers which eventually causes the pothole to form again.

8. What do you use to fix potholes?

- a. The Council purchased a spray injection machine in 2017. This is used to produce a more durable repair on potholes and other surface defects. Material is deployed using high pressure which enables it to be self-compacting and prevent the ingress of water. Vehicles like this are expensive and can't operate in all weathers (due to the constraints of the materials used). As we have one machine to cover the Highland area, other spray injection machines may be hired in, when necessary, to undertake repairs.



- b. Various other techniques and materials are used, depending on the circumstances. These include the use of hot boxes, hot material, cold lay materials (temporary and permanent), rolled, compacted by hand, etc.

9. How much does it cost to repair a pothole?

- a. This varies depending on the size and work required to fix the pothole. We do not record repair costs for potholes individually but they go to one budget which includes other road maintenance activities. Therefore, we do not have an individual or average cost for a pothole repair.

Updates

This document will be updated periodically without prior notification.

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