

Street Lighting FAQs

LED Upgrade Programme

What is an LED?

LED (Light Emitting Diode) is a more energy efficient type of light that we are rolling out across MK. The light is a more efficient, white light compared to the older orange glow lights.

We can target the light where it is needed unlike the older lights which illuminate the whole area causing light pollution and energy wastage. They also help to make CCTV footage clearer.

LEDs last for much longer than the traditional lanterns (bulbs) in fact up to 25 years and they give off virtually no heat or contain hazardous substances so they are environmentally friendly too.

Why are you switching to LEDs?

We have over 58,000 street lights across Milton Keynes. This is a very high number and we need to reduce our energy bill to save money but also to be more energy efficient. All councils need to be looking at becoming carbon neutral.

LEDs need less energy than the older orange lights and we can target the light exactly where it is needed towards the road or pavement so they also reduce light pollution.

The LED lights don't need as much maintenance so we are reducing future costs on this too. Older street lights can take up to ten minutes to reach full brilliance but the LEDs are on full brightness straight away.

Once the LED roll out is complete we'll be able to save between 50-70% of energy. Good news for us and the environment.

Will every street light be upgraded to LED?

Our upgrade programme has already begun and we've covered a lot of estates already and all the grid roads.

We aim to roll out the LED lights to all council-owned and maintained street lights as quickly as possible but we have a fixed budget each year to do this.

Are LEDs safe?

LEDs contain no hazardous chemicals unlike many of the older street lighting that is still in place in some areas. The LED lights that we use are RoHS (Restricted of Hazardous Substances) compliant too. Older street lights burn sodium which gives the orange or yellow glow. The LEDs don't contain any of these harmful elements like mercury or sodium.

Are LEDs harmful to your eyes?

LEDs do not pose any health risk to the eyes for short exposure times. You would need to be looking directly at an LED from a very close distance for a long time regularly to cause health issues. In fact the brightness of our LEDs is less or equivalent to the brightness of moonlight.

How much energy have you saved so far converting to LEDs?

We're now in the final phase of the LED conversion programme which includes around 20,000 streetlights in residential areas. This is due to be completed by the end of March 2024. We've already made savings of around 5million kWh of energy. With energy prices increasing significantly, this energy saving has meant we have not had to spend more keeping the streets lit.

I live in a conservation area – will you put modern LEDs here?

No – in conservation areas we will install lights that are specially designed to reflect the historical buildings around it. We work with a local company who've been designing street lights for MK since the late 1960's.

Will there be a reduction in council tax if energy savings are made?

No - we are making these changes now to save on energy costs in the future. We need to reduce our spending overall and energy bills is an area that we can do this in by being more energy efficient across the whole network.

Will there be any disruption?

Usually an upgrade will take 15-20 minutes to complete using a platform vehicle that can take the engineer right up to the light so there won't be any digging and any traffic management will be minor. The work will take place during the day so there will be no impact to lighting after dark. You may notice the light levels appear different. This is because the lights will come on slightly later after dusk and are targeted onto the road and footway unlike the previous lights. The light is crisper and will pick out elements of the street better than before.

Will I be able to access my drive or park on the street whilst the upgrade works are going on?

There may be some minor disruption whilst the lanterns on the street lights are being upgraded however it only takes 15-20 minutes to complete.

What happens to the old lights when you remove them?

The orange lights are properly disposed of under the WEEE Directive* set in place by the government. If we do need to remove a column (lamppost) we recycle all of the materials associated with this.

*The Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive (WEEE Directive) is the European Community Directive 2012/19/EU on waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE). It sets out standards and guidelines for collection, recycling and recovery of all types of electrical goods.

The new LEDs are too bright – can we keep the orange ones?

The old orange lights are not energy efficient, create light pollution and contain harmful elements like sodium and mercury. They are no longer fit for purpose and cost a lot to maintain and to light. The orange glow spreads light in all directions, including upwards which causes light pollution and intrudes into people's properties. LED lighting is cleaner, crisper, are more energy efficient and cost less to maintain. The LEDs should not be too bright, they are set pre-dimmed and are targeted only onto the highway, not into people's property. However should you feel there is an issue with the new light, please report it to us through our website.

Will you be doing consultations before you upgrade an area to LED?

No - the LED upgrade is part of a transport infrastructure investment programme which was approved by full council in 2012 and it will provide cost and energy savings. Any conservation areas in MK will have designs that are sympathetic to the local area.

What are other councils doing?

Many other councils have taken measures to reduce their street lighting energy consumption too. Some have trialled turning off or dimming street lights where there is little or no traffic overnight. Over 70 per cent of councils responsible for street lighting now have or are planning to dim street lights or do partial night-time switch-offs.

Lots of other councils are also upgrading their street lights to LED although they have less to convert than in MK. For example we have over 56,000 street lights whereas Newcastle has 36,000 and Wiltshire has 40,000.

Do LED lights disrupt sleep by the production of blue light?

LED street lights are normally at lower levels than the ones found in your home. Handheld devices have a greater impact on melatonin* levels than street lights e.g. mobile phones, laptops or tablets.

LEDs can be made either as cool white or warm white light. Cool white has the blue element to it with warm white light having red elements. Studies show that to impact on your melatonin levels the exposure to light would need to be over 30 lux** and would need to be continuous for at least one hour. Even this level of exposure would not be enough to disrupt sleep patterns.

*Melatonin is the hormone that regulates our sleep patterns (body clock).

**Lux is a measurement of brightness

The light outside my house is too bright – what can you do to fix it?

If you report this to us with the lamppost reference number we can check the light for you. If the brightness of the new light is causing an issue we can investigate it for you and look at options such as a guard on the side that shines into a property. At first you may notice that the newly fitted LED is much brighter than the older orange lights.

This is because LEDs give a white light that is brighter and picks out the colours of everything better. Visibility is improved for motorists and pedestrians and also on footage for security and CCTC cameras.

The light outside my house is not bright enough! Can you increase the brightness?

No - the brightness is set to our specific standards and to save energy cost. Lights are there to give road users, pedestrians and cyclists good visibility when they are travelling along the roads, redways and footways.

If the light is not bright enough due to a fault or obstruction then please report it so we can investigate further on 01908 252353 or use the Report It section on the website.