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Report to Parish Councils – November 2021

Corrected version with working link to BSIP

This report is written in late October and is for Parish Councils meeting in November. It is for all 7 parishes in Northern Rother

Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)

All parish councils and others were asked for feedback for this which was in response to the government “Bus Back Better” strategy launched in March. The brief was to be ambitious and to find ways of making buses more attractive for users, such as making them more affordable, more frequent, more responsive and addressing climate change. A one-month consultation/survey was set up starting in mid-August. Parish councils were specifically invited to give their views.

The resulting document was reviewed at the Lead Member Transport and Environment meeting on Monday 25th October and met with approval by a wide range of councillors from all parties. The document can be seen at

<https://democracy.eastsussex.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=177&MIId=4830>

Then click on Agenda reports pack.

This link is for the reports pack for the whole meeting but the BSIP forms the major part starting on page 4. It is an impressive document given the short time which has been taken to produce it.

Some summary points from the survey:

- The most important change requested was more frequent and reliable services including operation during the evenings and on Sundays
- Other major requests were lower fares, particularly for those who do not have concessions, and real-time information.

The BSIP includes 17 separate objectives. Many might have an impact on Northern Rother, but I would highlight the following:

- BSIP Proposal 2. Improving frequency and time coverage for a range of routes including through Northiam, Bodiam, Peasmarsch, Beckley, Staplecross and Robertsbridge.
- BSIP Proposal 14. Introducing Digital Demand Responsive Transport (DDRT) which would provide a means by phone app or simple telephone call to request transport, which would dynamically respond to requests. This would be shared but the route/schedule would adapt to demand.
- BSIP Proposal 4. Mobility hubs which would be in smaller towns and have better facilities and information than currently exist. An aim is to make bus services more friendly, addressing the fact that in many ways bus stations are the least attractive places to pass through! None of the proposal locations are, of course, in Northern Rother but those in Bexhill and Rye could help us.
- BSIP Proposal 8. Fare concessions for those under 30, aligned with Young Persons Railcard. This combined with better frequency and time coverage could help encourage our young residents and children to use buses (and perhaps help relieve the mum/dad taxi service which many of us remember!).

There are many others – the full report is more than 250 pages but well worth at least browsing.

It is very important to note that this is an ambitious and currently unfunded plan, as directed by the government. I would not want to raise false expectations. It is expected that government will provide funds for at least some of this. It cannot be funded by council tax. I would expect only some to be funded but this well-thought-out plan will hopefully help to get funding. I would expect that first priorities will be in the main coast corridors where benefits are more, but I will be pushing for the rural proposals.

Highways and Footpaths

Last month I circulated some ideas on streamlining/documenting the process for addressing problems in hedges on the highway and footpath issues. In the wider sense there is clear dissatisfaction with the performance of highways regarding issues such as potholes and drainage. I have had various discussions with the Lead Member for Transport on this and passed her some feedback.

It is clear that some of the issues are due to communication but also, of course, due to funding constraints. The latter cannot easily be fixed but the former is being addressed and I hope will improve. Watch this space!

Cases

Each month I will give summaries/updates for a sample of current cases across Northern Rother. I currently have nearly 20 which are being progressed.

- **Flooding in Northbridge Street, Robertsbridge.** This continues to be a top issue with Huw Merriman's office dealing with National, me dealing with Highways East Sussex and Councillor Sue Prochak dealing with Rother district council. There is some small progress – for example Highways East Sussex have raised a drop kerb which was enabling relatively small amounts of rain to go into some back gardens, but the main response needs to come from National Highways. More interim measures have been taken but timescales on some of the surveys have slipped. Immense pressure is being put on National Highways by Huw's office. One challenge is assessing if measures are working given that flooding does not occur every year and seems to depend on a combination of factors.
- **Robertsbridge Youth Centre.** This was closed during the pandemic. Reopening has taken some time as a new fire alarm system and disinfection/checking of the water supply were needed – frustrating but important for safety. However, the building will now be open from 12th November, barring any unexpected events, allowing groups such as the toddler group to resume use.