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Report to Parish Councils – July 2022

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

Some of the items here are from information circulated by ESCC but which may not have drawn the attention of parish councillors and others.

Chairman's Teas for Volunteers

I have received more nominations for these events and have passed them on. I know some of those invited have been delighted to receive invitations and rightly see them as showing that their community recognises their contributions. Please keep them coming! The first event is in early July but there will be others.

County Budgets

ESCC have started the process of planning budgets for next year (i.e. from April 2023), in a process called RPPR (Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources). For those interesting in seeing the full papers, the cabinet meeting for 27th June has these as agenda item 5 – see [Agenda for Cabinet on Monday, 27th June, 2022, 10.00 am](#).

It is a particularly challenging year for budgeting for multiple reasons:

- Inflation is high, putting pressure on salary costs

- Fuel prices have increased significantly
- The government have again only provided a one-year financial settlement, making medium term planning more challenging
- There remain some effects from the pandemic
- We are proud to have welcomed many Ukrainian refugees but this has some cost implications
- Challenges arising from the reforms in health and social care, for example the cap on personal contributions

This means that we are currently forecasting deficits of about £6.5M in 2023/24 rising to £15M in 2025/26 but this depends on the financial settlements from central government.

Cases

Each month I will give summaries/updates for a sample of current cases across Northern Rother. I currently have about 16 which are being progressed. For ones which have been on this list for some time, this month's updates are shown in italics.

- **Flooding in Northbridge Street, Robertsbridge.** This continues to be a top issue with Huw Merriman's office dealing with National Highways, 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 – for example there are now sandbags down one side of the A21 to help prevent water from land coming across the carriageway, into the layby and then to Northbridge Street. (Footnote – not checked but I believe these may no longer be needed as the blocked ditch has apparently been cleared). 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. Recent experience has apparently been good, with no evidence of flooding.

National Highways have completed the surveys though are waiting the detailed report, though the drains do appear to be clear. However, they have found a number of other issues including infilled ditches and pipework which they are addressing. We should have another update in July.

Update from June. A survey has been carried out. Full results are not yet in but two more possible factors have been identified:

- *A ditch from an adjacent parcel of land which connects into the watercourse, and which is heavily silted. Discussions continue with the landowner*
- *A catch pit just off Northbridge Street which is silted up. Fixing this may also help. Apparently this is up to the 'local authority'. I am establishing if this is ESCC or Rother DC.*

Homewood School Bus Service

A number of children from Northiam, Beckley and Peasmarsh apparently attend Homewood school in Tenterden and travel on the 294 service provided by Hams Travel. Hams have said that this will be discontinued at the end of June. I understand that it is a discretionary service and it is also complicated because the school is, of course, in Kent.

I spoke last week to the East Sussex Lead Member for Education who is looking into it, but I think I may need to contact Kent County Council. I have to say I am not hopeful of a satisfactory outcome but this will cause significant expenditure and inconvenience to parents who then have to drive to Tenterden and back twice a day. It would be helpful to know the numbers who travel on this service, though I will also contact Hams. Could clerks or others let me know of numbers if possible.

I continue to chase this but am getting no response from the bus company.

Development off the Paddocks, Northiam

I have received multiple correspondence from residents and others about this development, but there are clearly several misconceptions about this, for example the need for a stopping up order. I have had multiple discussions with officials at ESCC and have passed on their comments to residents.

Some key points:

- Planning permission was granted in 2019 and mentioned stopping up orders but county have confirmed that none is required.
- Parking places are being moved not lost. In fact the number of parking places available seem to be more than guidance would require
- One part of a water drainage pipe (sometimes called a sewer though in fact it is not for foul water) is being rerouted. This was put in by a previous developer and the parish council given some funds which are held in a 'sewer account' to be used in case of problems and which I believe now total about £80k. I know of no evidence that the rerouting will cause problems. The sewer account has never been needed
- There is understandable concern amongst residents about the disruption during the construction process itself. The developer is aware of this and is building a car park for contractors within the site. They are also trying to maintain good communications with residents. ESCC officials are keeping close to this as am I. I would encourage residents to keep me informed of any issues

I understand that there was opposition to this development and sympathise with this, but planning permission was granted and it is going ahead.