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28th October 2022

Report to Parish Councils – November 2022

This report is written in late October and is for Parish Councils meeting in November, 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.

Medium Term Financial Plan and Funding

I have commented previously that the medium-term financial plan (essentially 3 years) for ESCC shows a growing deficit which is unsustainable. Although ideally central government would announce plans for the level of grants to local authorities covering 3 years to allow for proper planning, for understandable reasons this has not been the case recently with only single year commitments. We are hopeful that the new government's commitment to financial honesty and prudence will help alleviate the uncertainty.

New Highways Contractor

After a careful competitive tendering process, Balfour Beatty Living Places have been awarded the contract to maintain East Sussex highways, starting from May 2023. The tendering process included a requirement to show how the quality of work could be monitored, value of money, reduction of the carbon footprint of the work and increasing social value (such as developing local jobs and skills, supporting community events and projects). I know that the condition of our highways is a hot topic with most residents. We do not have enough money to bring all roads up to the condition we would all like, but this contract should

allow us to get the most benefits from the funds we have.

Support for Keeping Warm and Cost of Living

The rise in fuel prices and the costs of food and other essentials is causing hardship for the most vulnerable in our community. Help is available from both county and district/borough councils.

From ESCC the following links may be useful:

<https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/community/support-with-the-cost-of-living>

<https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/social-care/support-to-stay-at-home/keep-warm>

At one parish council we recently had an impressive presentation from the ESCC official responsible for the 'Keep Warm and Well programme'. I would encourage all parish councils to pass these links or information from them to any residents who you think might benefit.

East Sussex Long Term Transport Plan 4

As required by central government, ESCC is preparing a long-term transport plan for the period to 2040. This covers road, cycling, walking, buses, rail and has the aim of producing an updated integrated plan, reflecting the future needs of our community.

We have several officials and external consultants looking at this. I chair the cross-party subcommittee monitoring and helping to guide the work.

As part of this a consultation process is starting on 31st October and will continue for 2 months. This will be online but there will also be paper versions. We are taking special care to reach out to groups such as the elderly, disabled and people of all ages. Those that are children now will be adults and perhaps using buses, driving cars, cycling or walking during the period covered by this plan.

Could I ask all parish councils to look out for the consultations and to publicise them. Parish councillors are well attuned to local needs and I would encourage you to express your views. I will circulate the online links as soon as they are live.

Cases

Each month I will give summaries/updates for a sample of current cases across Northern Rother. I currently have about 20 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 shortly.

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. ESCC do not have this as a county asset. Their advice is that it probably dates from the time when the A21 included Northbridge Street which would make the catch pit the responsibility of National Highways.

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. Recently I noticed that one of the layby parking spaces seems to have gone due to a raised area by the entrance to the new site. I believe the new site parking will replace this but in the short term one slot often used by Paddock residents seems to have gone. I am checking this against the approved plans.
- 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. I understand that the developer has agreed with the Parish Council to fund a survey of the modified route and will await the results of this.
- There is understandable concern amongst residents about the disruption during the construction process itself. The developer is aware of this and has built 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 have regularly

visited the site and it seems to be running well.

I have been inspecting the site regularly and it generally seemed to be working well but in the last few days have had some reports of difficulties with contractors parking in the Goddens Gill. I saw this myself today and have raised it with the developer. Please keep me informed of any issues.

Emergency Water Bottle Stations

I have now received locations of water bottle stations in all 7 parishes in Northern Rother. I am assembling exact locations of these using latitude/longitude and what3words, as well as taking pictures. I will send these to SouthEast Water and see if they respond positively. I hope that they will do so as this should simplify their emergency procedures and ensure that where we have a water problem due to power cuts or burst mains, local residents can get hold of water without having to travel outside the village.