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## Report to Parish Councils – January 2023

This report is written on 2dn January and is for Parish Councils meeting in January, It is for all 7 parishes in Northern Rother. As most did not meet in December, this report contains everything in my December report plus a few extra items which have occurred in December – notably the pothole situation and the prolonged lack of water which some residents suffered.

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

### Potholes

The snowy/frosty weather followed by heavy rain has clearly caused a big increase in potholes on many roads. Some of these caused a series of accidents or tyre/wheel damage. Highways East Sussex were mostly closed down over the break but there was an emergency number. Somewhat misleadingly the recorded announcement on this first said that it was closed but if you waited it let you press a key for emergencies then asked you to select the appropriate area. I used this to report a problem at Horns Cross and was immediately put through to a Highways person in their car on their way to another emergency.

The assistance director in charge of roads sent out this statement on New Year's Eve:

*The cold weather earlier in the month followed by the never-ending rainfall has played havoc with the roads and we have been plagued with potholes and flooding. I am told we have had over 100mm of rainfall locally this month.*

*Our maintenance gangs have been out between Christmas and New Year attending*

*to numerous potholes and reports of flooding and fallen trees. If you come across potholes or reports from residents, please report them in the usual way via the East Sussex Highways website - we will have additional resources next week and will attend to potholes as quickly as possible.*

I am sorry to anyone who has suffered from this perfect storm of weather and holidays but hopefully some emergency repairs will make driving and cycling less hazardous.

As a minor comment, I know that some residents have criticised repairs to potholes in wet weather. In fact in such cases Highways normally use a special filler that is good in such weather – it fact it requires water to properly seal!

### **Loss of power and water**

Once again many areas suffered a loss of power and also of water as a consequence of the snow. I had many phone calls and emails with both South East Water and UK Power Networks during this. I will not reproduce the full emails here but some key points:

- UKPN typically seem to be over optimistic about repair times. This delays the time they decide to bring in generators, prolonging loss of power.
- The SEW outage was apparently due to loss of power at a pumping/treatment station. This seems to be the same issue as occurred after Storm Eunice. I know Huw Merriman raised this with SEW at senior level as it suggests they need generators in place, which appears not to have happened.

I was also critical of the time it took to get bottle stations in place within the villages. In one case (Staplecross), following my prompting, they came and surveyed the designated site which they deemed OK for the delivery HGV but apparently the forklift truck was not able to work in the snow! Clearly needs some process improvement.

Restoration of supplies to some houses was also delayed by airlocks. With SEW saying water was back on but for some it was not. I would expect airlocks to occur in similar places after an outage so this information should be collected and used.

I am seeking meetings with both bodies to see how the situation can be improved for next time. We all recognise that outages occur but the response to them needs to be better.

### **Medium Term Financial Plan and Funding**

The budget deficits forecast in the medium term at county remain a major concern. The autumn statement provided some news on this. Local authorities can now increase council tax by 3% without a referendum (previously 2%) and additionally the adult social care premium by 2%. Of course, at a time when many are facing financial hardship any increase is undesirable.

The budget also depends upon the settlement from the government. We expect this to be known on about 21<sup>st</sup> December.

### **Fire and Rescue Service Budget**

The East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service (ESFRS) is managed by the Fire Authority which has ESCC and Brighton and Hove Councillors. I am a member of the Fire Authority and have also just become chair of the Policy and Resources Panel following the sad death of the

Brighton and Hove councillor who previously chaired it. ESFRS is funded by a separate precept, collected with council tax.

The service faces significant financial challenges with a forecast deficit of about £3m next year out of a budget of about £42M. Some of this could be funded by increases in the precept but this is limited, so some changes to the service are being discussed as you may have seen in the media. However, there is some misleading information being circulated so I would be sceptical of any scaremongering stories you read. I would encourage you to the proper assessments and strategy.

### **New Strategy for SEND children**

A new Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) strategy to enable young people to reach their full potential in every area of life has been launched. The strategy will be used to inform the work of everyone with children and young people with SEND across the county, providing them with the opportunities and support they need to achieve their ambitions and prepare for adult life.

Families, schools, and other professionals from services in areas such as social care and health took part in a ten-month consultation process to develop the strategy, including extensive work with children and young people to identify areas for improvement.

An East Sussex SEND Strategy Governance Board has been established which will oversee SEND work across the county and monitor the delivery of the strategy.

The SEND Strategy 2022-2025 is available online. [here](#)

A short video about the strategy can be viewed [here](#).

I have a particular interest in SEND children in East Sussex as a member of the ESCC Discretionary Transport Appeal Panel which decides on some individual cases concerning free transport for school for children or young adults, most of whom have SEND. I am also a governor of two schools and have special reporting responsibility for SEND. Providing for the needs of a growing number of SEND children is a challenge and taking an increasing budget, but such children deserve our support.

(In the interests of disclosure, I should add that I have a granddaughter with Down's Syndrome, though she is not in East Sussex).

### **East Sussex residents encouraged to discover their past at The Keep**

Residents across the county are being encouraged to find out more about their family history with free access to over six million digitised Sussex parish records. The digitised documents span 457 years of Sussex history and include details of baptisms, confirmations and marriages alongside birth and death records. These records are now available to search online via Ancestry, the world's largest genealogy website, with free access available at The Keep.

The entire Sussex Parish Registers collection has been brought online through an exclusive collaboration between the East Sussex and Brighton and Hove Record Office, the West Sussex Record Office and Ancestry. The records were digitised over the course of the pandemic whilst visitor access to The Keep was limited.

Those interested in researching their family background but are unsure where to begin may

benefit from attending one of the centre's visitor induction sessions, whilst 'Welcome Wednesdays' offer an opportunity for first-time visitors to learn more about The Keep and the specifics of research conducted at the centre. More information about these sessions can be found here. Free access to Ancestry is also available at all libraries across East and West Sussex.

## **Cases**

Each month I will give updates for a sample of current cases across Northern Rother. I currently have about 20 which are being progressed. I now only show updates or new information on significant cases. Please look at previous reports for the full background.

### **Flooding in Northbridge Street, Robertsbridge.**

Recent bouts of heavy rain have given some concerns to residents, but it does appear that the improvements made to the A21 and layby are helping. Leaf fall partially blocking some drains in the layby has not helped. I have been checking regularly and liaising with local residents, particularly during heavy rain. One local resident deserves particular praise for clearing leaves from some drains. The layby is the responsibility of Highways England. Our MP's office has continued dialog with Highways England to give more frequent clearing of leaves and other improvements.

More actions are needed, in particular a permanent solution to diverting any overflow from the layby. I have suggested to Highways England a 'speed bump' to ensure that runoff does not reach Northbridge Street itself rather than the current temporary sandbags.

### **Development off the Paddocks, Northiam**

The major issue at the moment is contractors parking in the Paddocks or Goddens Gill. Whilst this is legal in most cases, it causes inconvenience to local residents. I have continued liaison with the site manager and developer. This has helped in some cases. Some contractors have parked on the A28 but this in itself causes other issues. The use of the parking by the scout huts has been suggested and this sounds ideal, but does not yet appear to be being used.

*I met with the developer and site manager in December and as far as I know the scout hut area is now being properly used.*