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## Report to Parish Councils – May 2025

This report is written is for Parish Councils meeting in May.

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

Just over a month ago I sent a document with my report for annual parish meetings which mostly occur in May. This includes two pages on devolution and local government reorganisation. I will be bringing ample printed copies to all annual parish meetings.

### My Activities

I've decided to include a separate section each month with bullet-point summaries of *some* of the meetings I have had, or actions carried out. As elections were originally expected to be held in May the current meeting load is fairly light.

- I met with the recently appointed Head of Highways who works for ESCC and whose responsibilities include managing the Balfour Beatty contract. We then drove round the division to give him an idea of the state of the roads. As I keep reminding residents, we have nothing like the funds we need to properly repair our roads, through the current patching programme (which is more than simple pothole repair) does seem to be helping.
- I am a member of the Fire Authority and chair the Policy and Resources Panel which reviews budget and other resource plans. At the last meeting in late April, we reviewed financial performance for the first 10 months of the 24/25 year. Finances of the Fire Service are just as challenging as those for county itself. The papers and minutes of these meetings are public and easily found with search engines.
- I am one of three councillors on the Discretionary Transport Appeal Panel which considers cases where a child, or occasionally young adult, with special needs is not granted free transport to their school. We met in early April. The substantive meeting papers and minutes are not published as these concern individuals.
- I have been working with Beckley Parish council and many local residents on a difficult case where a convicted sex offender was released on probation back into the

community where he offended, in my view and those of others, a bad decision. I have had several meetings, and many emails with residents but also the police and the probation service, working closely with Cllr Tony Biggs who is also a magistrate. The offender has now been moved many miles from here – I am trying to establish the reason, but this is good news.

- I often attend (normally remotely) and sometimes speak at lead member meetings which are those run by ESCC cabinet members. In this last month I have attended a lead member meeting for education and special needs.

### **Queensway Gateway**

I am sure that any of us who drive into Hastings down the A21 are frustrated at the delay in completing this. In accordance with normal national guidance the two-way traffic lights were removed over Easter as they were at Christmas/New Year. I understand that some of the delay is due to an unmapped water main in an earth bank which needs to be moved by Southern Water, but this is not the whole story.

Current plans are:

- Monday 5<sup>th</sup> May 10pm to 6am. Road closure to reinstate temporary traffic lights though this will now be for a shorter distance
- Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 10pm to 6am. Road closure to remove traffic lights for the bank holiday weekend
- Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> May 10pm to 6am. Road closure to reinstate temporary traffic lights.

I still do not have a date for the final opening of the junction with traffic lights.

### **Newenden Bridge/ Bodiam Bridge/ Hawkhurst Crossroads**

I still have no date for the closure of Newenden Bridge which will cause major challenges for several parishes in the Division, not only those with residents that use the bridge but also those in others such as Bodiam/Ewhurst where there is valid concern that Bodiam bridge will be used by trucks in excess of the 18-ton limit. I liaise with East Sussex Highways (who in turn are in close communication with Kent Highways) and the Kent County Councillor for the area, as well as Newenden Parish Council.

However, as I reported verbally in April, Kent Highways are still waiting for approval from the Environment Agency. The materials used are apparently dependent on weather – I am presuming this is lime mortar which must be used as the bridge is listed.

I have been pushing for:

- 24 hour a day/7 day working to reduce the closure time
- Advanced signs to help trucks avoid Bodiam bridge including on the A21
- Camera enforcement of the 18 ton limit at Bodiam bridge

### **Grants for Parishes**

This section will occur each month and is a list of possible sources of funding for parish level projects. I have had a number of enquiries as to whether any of these could help with areas such as allotments. Sadly the answer is no – these are all intended for community/parish council projects.

- Dungeness Power Stations. I sit on the Site Stakeholder Group which liaises between the massive project to decommission these and the local community. They often provide grants for local activities including some in East Sussex even though the power stations are in Kent. For example, this Christmas Rye food bank is their designated charity.
- Veolia Green and Food Waste Composting Facility. As a member of Place Scrutiny I recently visited this site near Lewes. Their 'output' is compost and they deliver 'one tonne bags' at no cost to local community gardens and similar. I put Peasmarsh parish council in contact with them and they have already received two bags for the community gardens.
- Southeast Water do make grants to local communities, for example to support playgrounds
- Gatwick Airport are keen on funding local projects, at least partly driven by their desire to open a second runway which would have some impact on East Sussex, though less in the Eastern part

If you have a project which might benefit, please let me know and I will put you in contact and try to help get it approved. It seems that the best will be for those seeking funds to send me an email which I will then forward.

Please let me know if you come across any new sources of funding and I will add them to the list.