

**COUNTY COUNCILLOR REPORT
TO
ALL PARISH COUNCILS
IN PETERSFIELD HANGERS**

1 JUNE 2023

1. Highways Update

The drier weather in May has meant that the Highways teams have turned a corner when it comes to getting on top of the pothole situation. By the end of June, we anticipate being back to “business as usual”. The sustained heavy rainfall from January-April this year was unprecedented; roads across the UK were negatively affected. But we need to do better in Hampshire. At HCC we recognise that man-made climate change has led to a changing climate and we need to adapt to it. We are working hard to improve resilience for next Winter and we are bringing in extra funding.

Following all that rain, the hot sunny weather is now causing a lot of rapid vegetation growth. Any issues with overgrowth can be reported on the website at this link:

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/transport/roadmaintenance/roadproblems/othertree>

There is a new process to request a Highways Tree. I am pleased to hear that a new tree is coming to the corner of Pulens Lane and Love Lane following an early request from a resident. Here is a link to make a request:

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/transport/roadmaintenance/roadproblems/tree-planting>

2. Ancestry records now available for free at Hampshire Records Office (HRO) and at all Hampshire Libraries

You may be aware that many people pay £19.99 per month to subscribe to ancestry records at Ancestry.co.uk. I am pleased to inform you that the entire ancestry database is now available for free at the Winchester HRO and at all Hampshire Libraries. This is a great opportunity to do some research into your family or any local family of interest.

Baptism, burial and marriage records spanning 400 years of history are now available. Prominent Hampshire residents featured in the collection include Florence Nightingale, Jane Austen and Thomas Lord. Dating back to the 16th century, parish records are some of the longest running records available and are some of the best resources to use when tracing family roots. This free new facility may be worthy of an item in Parish Newsletters!

3. Update on Hampshire Forest Partnership

HCC was involved in planting over 10,000 trees during the winter planting season and we are building our partnership all the time. There has been good momentum and I would like to share some key recent highlights as follows:

- Young Tree Growers Guide – HFP have commissioned The Tree Council's Schools section to produce this guide for children and families, and schools. The guide will be broken down into approximately 40 resources which will be downloadable via a micro-website. The guide will enable children and families to enjoy seed collection, tree ID and germinating tree seeds.
- Disease-resistant elm project – Already 40 elms have been planted in the Cheriton Parish along rights of way. Another £3k worth of pot grown elms (40 trees) have been donated by the Tree Council and the HFP has been working with the Countryside service and parishes to find homes for these trees. I am very pleased that some are going to Ropley.
- Agroforestry Guidance – The new guidance will inform farmers on the benefits of agroforestry and how it can be implemented within their farming systems. Agroforestry is the planting of trees within arable and pastoral landscapes, both systems have benefits to crops and to livestock. The trees can have a commercial benefit in addition to provision of ecosystem services.
- Tree Guardians scheme – It is increasingly difficult to provide trees with enough water due to the hot and dry summers. This scheme aims to encourage more public involvement with the tree care element of tree planting. Hampshire Forest Partnership would like to give communities the opportunity to 'adopt' trees to be responsible for their care and maintenance for the first few years, becoming Tree Guardians. We will provide a guide to care which will involve watering, weeding and mulching. Participants will receive little updates by email to remind them to water during dry weather periods.

If you would like to know more about any of the above, or would like to get involved in planting a mini-forest or community orchard, please email treeplanting@hants.gov.uk

4. Stoner Hill: removal of Ash Trees

We are all now aware of Ash Die Back (ADB) and, in particular, of its potential impact on the Ashford Hangers. I would like to address some of the concerns which have been raised about the removal of ash trees along the highway during the closure of Stoner Hill. Many valid points have been made. All the feedback is being carefully considered and I can reassure everyone that lessons are being learnt.

Before addressing the concerns, I would like to highlight three positives from the Ash Tree removal programme:

- It turns out that many of the Ash trees had even more advanced ADB than we realised. Many of them were soft in the middle of the trunk and inevitably would have fallen very soon. These works have therefore been timely and have quite possibly saved lives.
- The extra light now coming onto the Highway has improved visibility and will therefore have an additional positive effect on road safety.
- The sunlight will improve biodiversity on the verges of the highway over the coming years. The stunning views across the valley are also now more visible although this is perhaps not so good for road safety!

The concerns that have been raised are mostly around the messy visual impact of the works, the leaving of tree stumps, the destruction of wild garlic banks and the impact on the natural habitat. I would now like to address those points.

We acknowledge that not all trees were removed immediately. The contract had a tight timescale due to the road closure and the teams had to work in a 5.5hr window each day to get as much work done as possible. This meant that trees were cut and stacked on the road edge ready to be chipped. All trees and arisings were chipped into trailers and transported to drying houses at South East Wood Fuels and then moved onto National Trust Properties to fuel their biomass boilers. The cutting machines sometimes worked at a quicker pace than the chipping machine, and this meant that piles were sometimes left on the road edge ready for chipping the next day. All material has now been removed from site bar a very few small remnants of twigs and branches which will break down naturally and in doing so will be good for insects and fungi.

Some of the tree stumps were left higher than normal, especially on the lower slopes. This was done deliberately to maintain some structure to the bank and to give some kind of barrier should a car leave the road. Some stumps were also left higher due to machine capabilities.

We acknowledge that the bank at the hairpin bend (also known as Garlic Corner) was damaged when the machine went up it. The machine had to enter the area on the corner to access the trees on that bank. The contractor kept this incursion to a minimum to avoid unnecessary damage. They parked the machine there for two nights over the weekend as it was felt that moving the machine back up off-site would have reduced the time they were able to carry out the felling works. They then used the laybys as they moved down the road. The damaged bank area will be reinstated soon.

Some people have asked why the cutting machine was necessary at all. I would like to explain that the contractors had to use the specialist tree-felling equipment due to the nature of Ash Dieback disease. The diseased trees often break apart when felled and therefore it is not safe for operators to fell trees by hand. Across the UK there have been numerous incidents where handcutters have been injured due to this and so as a council policy we require specialist machine equipment to be used.

Finally, I will address the concerns about biodiversity impact. The County Council does not normally carry out works during bird nesting season. It is our general policy to wait until winter. However, on this occasion it was decided that the works could not wait due to the safety risk to the road and its users. Inspections of each tree were carried out before it was felled. We had the HCC ecologist onsite working ahead of the contractors, and checking each tree carefully before works commenced. You may have noticed a few trees with pink crosses on them remaining. These are trees on which the ecologist stopped work due to bat interest or birds. These trees are undergoing surveys and we will be looking to put in another 2-day closure at some point to have the last of these trees dealt with as soon as we have clearance from the ecologist. I hope that the above is helpful and I hope you will agree that the road safety benefits mean that (overall) this operation can be considered a success.

5. Chawton Flood Alleviation work: next phase

Many people will remember the winter in 2013-2014, when the A32 at Lower Farrington, parts of Chawton, and the surrounding area were badly affected by flooding caused by a combination of rising ground and surface water. Hampshire Highways has since installed a series of flood prevention measures including ditches,

drains, and soakaways, alongside other engineering work to reduce the risk of flooding. The current work is the next phase of this.

The first elements of the construction work started on Tuesday 30 May and are expected to take up to three weeks to complete. For this part of the scheme, the A32 Gosport Road at Farrington will be closed from Woodside Lane to Kitcombe Lane. A signed diversion will be in place. The A32 will then be re-opened and the remaining works will then take place off the highway.

I am pleased to report that Hampshire Highways will complete a road resurfacing at the same time. We would like to thank residents and businesses for their patience as we undertake these essential works.

6. Parish Forum on Motorbike Noise and Speed

I will be hosting an online Parish Forum on MS Teams which will take place at 1500 on Friday 14 July. The online forum will include updates as follows:

- Update on Average Speed cameras on A32 and A272 and speed enforcement in East Hants and Winchester generally: PCC Donna Jones.
- Update on DfT Acoustic Camera trial: Damian Hinds MP
- Update on Community Funded Highways Initiative scheme; Cllr Nick Adams-King
- Update on HCC plans for reducing conflict on Byways Open to All Traffic (BOATs): me.

This online forum is open to all Parish Councillors and I hope you may be able to attend. The link has hopefully been forwarded to you by your Clerks.

RUSSELL OPPENHEIMER
County Councillor for Petersfield Hangers