

COUNTY COUNCILLOR REPORT TO ALL PARISH COUNCILS IN PETERSFIELD HANGERS

2 APRIL 2024

1. Highways update

I was delighted to see that the A272 (Winchester Road) through Stroud has been included in a recently published list of 19 resurfacing projects which have been funded by Network North funding. This is basically funds released from the cancellation of HS2. The works will make the surface more resilient and improve drainage. The works will take place in the new financial year 2024/25 (i.e. before March 2025).

March was almost as rainy as February, which was the wettest February on record. In March it was very noticeable that the unusually high water table led to a lot of surface flooding every time it did rain. Inevitably, this has had a negative impact on highways surfaces with more defects appearing.

I acknowledge that it is very frustrating when this deterioration happens so quickly. Hampshire Highways will get on top of the issues over the coming month as we see drier weather. The £7.5m extra funding we have put in is making a difference. Please continue to report defects on the website. It does not hurt to report substantial defects more than once. I appreciate the patience of Councillors and residents. I am always happy to chase up problems if you wish to forward me the Issue Reference number.

2. Local Nature Recovery Strategy

I thought it would be helpful to update Councillors about the Local Nature Recovery Strategy process on which HCC is taking the lead. On 14 December 2023 we launched a public survey to find out what Hampshire's residents and workers felt about nature recovery - what was important to them and what they felt should form our strategy. We were overwhelmed with the response; over 1500 areas which would benefit from improvement for nature recovery were identified across Hampshire.

The survey results map can be found here: [Survey Results Map | Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Hampshire \(arcgis.com\)](https://arcgis.com)

Over a nine-week period starting at the beginning of January 2024 we held a series of 20 workshops - 10 community workshops which were hosted by the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust and 10 thematic workshops which were aimed at organisations and specialist groups. Over 450 attendees representing over 100 organisations attended the mix of online and in person sessions.

We now have a wealth of information which we will analyse to help shape the draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Hampshire. The next milestone in our timeline will be to consult on the draft Strategy in the Summer. The exact timeline and more information on the project can be found here: [Timeline of actions | Hampshire County Council \(hants.gov.uk\)](https://www.hants.gov.uk/timeline-of-actions)

I would like to mention that Local Nature Partnerships (LNP) still exist in the UK and HCC continues to be a Board Member and active participant in Hampshire's LNP which is chaired by Alison Potts of Natural England.

3. Community Transport toolkit

I know that a couple of Parish Councils in Petersfield Hangers already organise community transport. For those that do not I would like to invite you to give it some consideration.

I can recommend the Community Transport webpages on the HCC website. At this link there is a very clear guide for Parish Councils in how to assess transport needs and set up a regular minibus or taxibus service.

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/transport/transportoperators/community-transport-kit>

Locally organised community transport has many advantages over public transport. There is a community cohesion element because people meet regularly with other villagers. The journeys can be timed to coincide with market days or cultural events. I also feel that there is a health and wellbeing benefit because it reduces isolation and encourages moderate exercise.

I am optimistic that HCC will be able to retain funding for Community Transport following the Future Services Consultation. At this time East Hampshire does not take full advantage of the opportunities. In many other parts of Hampshire there is much greater usage of weekly minibuses. It would be great to increase the number of villages operating a regular minibus scheme around here.

4. BOATs Update

HCC is continuing to develop a new Byways Operating Procedure (BOP) for BOATs. A second meeting with East Hampshire parishes will take place in the coming month or so. HCC is also submitting bids for CIL funding to SDNPA in order to continue the roll-out of more gates and noticeboards.

The deadline for the lifting of winter closures was originally set for 1 April 2024. Due to the wet weather, winter closures have been extended for a month. As a consequence of the extra monitoring requirements officers will not be ready to produce their BOP update report in time for my May Decision Day. This issue is still a high priority for me and I am pushing for the update report to be brought forward as soon as possible.

5. Election Purdah

There are district elections taking place in many parts of Hampshire this May, as well as two County Council by-elections (Meon Valley and Fareham Sarisbury) and the Police and Crime Commissioner Election. Consequently, HCC is currently in a pre-election purdah. This means that there will not be any press releases or policy announcements happening in April and so my next report after this one will be in June 2024.

I look forward to seeing many of you during April.

RUSSELL OPPENHEIMER
County Councillor for Petersfield Hangers