



Cllr Paul Redstone  
Email: [Cllr.Paul.Redstone@eastsussex.gov.uk](mailto:Cllr.Paul.Redstone@eastsussex.gov.uk)  
Phone: 07510 074267  
Address: Edgingtons  
Cripps Corner  
Robertsbridge TN32 5RY

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## Report to Parish Councils – September 2023

This report is written is for Parish Councils meeting in September. It is for all 7 parishes in Northern Rother. I have included most information from my July report as some councils did not meet then. I did not write a report in August as not that much happened at County!

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

### **Road maintenance**

As reported and discussed previously, road maintenance and in particular potholes have been a major cause of concern for all residents and councillors. The combinations of high rainfall and frost in the recent winter have exacerbated the situation. To address this ESCC transport were asked to come up with a plan which was submitted and approved at Cabinet on 27th June. Some aspects need full council approval which was given in the July meeting.

In summary the key points are:

- An extra £5.6M from reserves to pay for extra patching and drainage work
- An additional £5.1M for capital program for roads to be funded by borrowing
- Agree, subject to approval by full council, to spend an extra £5M to be spent on highway maintenance

These are in additional to the extra £8.9M allocated in 2022/23 which included some capital and some revenue items. The aim is to provide more resilience and improve the overall quality

of roads. Roads in East Sussex are classed as Green (meaning fine), Amber (meaning some maintenance needed) and Red (which need reconstruction or similar). Bringing Amber and Red to green standard would cost more than £300M which is clearly unaffordable. But the above expenditure should make a real difference.

The new highways contractor has made a very good start, despite a few logistics/communications issues and we expect this to continue to improve the quality of our roads. I welcome feedback, both positive and negative on their performance.

## **Water Supplies**

This has been taking a lot of my time. There are three primary issues with our water which in this area comes from South East Water (SEW)

1. In Mayfield and Rotherfield some houses lost water supply not due to mains bursts or similar, but due to infrastructure such as local storage tanks being unable to cope with demand.
2. As we know in Northern Rother, burst mains are a regular occurrence. We need to ensure that SEW are investing sufficiently to replace mains pipes at the end of their lives, for example as they have been doing in Beckley Road from Horns Cross to Clayhill. Where a burst occurs SEW need to move faster to inform residents and get bottle stations established in each village.
3. Hose pipe bans – now lifted. After a sustained period of drought if reservoirs are low we might expect these. But at the moment reservoirs are nearly full. The ban is because of the capacity of the system, (point 1 above).

The first of these is most worrying to me. It has not so far affected our area, but I will try to find out how much excess water *delivery* capacity we have. From a meeting with SEW in June it was clear that the configuration of mains supplies does not have natural resilience. For example a burst by the reservoir in Cripps Corner affected Staplecross, Beckley, Peasmarsh, Rye Foreign, Playden and Iden. SEW have said they aim to make the network more resilient, but I have not seen evidence or timescales on this.

I am in communication with SEW about all of these but particularly point 2. I have sent a list of 7 locations for bottle supplies. In the most recent burst main incident, some of these such as Beckley and Peasmarsh village halls were established and worked well, but it took some time and we need them in all affected villages. I believe that SEW have been in breach of Ofwat standards for when water is delivered.

I am a member of Place Scrutiny committee at ESCC. Last year we had a meeting with Southern Water about sewage issues. I have asked that we have a similar meeting with SEW and Southern Water about water supply problems and am meeting with the Operations Director of SEW on 8<sup>th</sup> September.

## **Flexibus and General Bus services**

Last month I mentioned the new Flexibus service which is generally getting positive feedback. Publicity for this has mostly been online which means that some of those who would benefit most are not aware of it, in particular those who do not have or do not regularly use online access,

I have asked for and received some posters from ESCC which can be put up on village

noticeboards. I am supplying these to parish councils. But I also ask parish councils and residents to help promote awareness, particularly amongst the most vulnerable.

Funding for Flexibus has come from the successful ESCC bid to government for BSIP (the Bus Service Improvement Plan). BSIP has also helped to fund extended hours and lower fares for some bus services, particularly those servicing local villages such as those in Northern Rother. I will be monitoring the usage of these and encourage residents to make maximum use of them.

## **Volunteering**

ESCC has long worked with VCSEs (Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprises) to provide help to residents, through funding and other support.

The contribution of volunteers across the county is being celebrated with the development of an app to make it easier for people to find opportunities. East Sussex County Council is working with [The Tribe Project](#) on an initiative to boost community involvement across the county and support voluntary for the right roles.

The app is currently in development and will help support the work of [Rother Voluntary Action \(RVA\)](#), [Hastings Voluntary Action \(HVA\)](#) and [Wealden, Eastbourne and Lewes Voluntary Action \(3VA\)](#). As the project develops, organisations that have volunteering opportunities are being invited to add these to the app ahead of its release in the autumn.

It enables people receiving support and those who support them to request help from people that live in their local community and are volunteers in trusted organisations.