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County Councillor Report for Salehurst and Robertsbridge

This report is written is for all residents of Salehurst and Robertsbridge for the Annual Parish Meeting.

As a reminder, I write a report each month for parish councils mostly covering items under the control or influence of the county council. I have not duplicated this here but have tried to pick out common themes for the year.

Potholes

Although road maintenance is a small part of ESCC budget (about £21M out of a total of more than £900M) it is safe to say that it dominates discussions with residents and parish councils, particularly after the recent period of such extreme weather. In Robertsbridge there are several roads with serious issues but in particular Station Road which I have inspected many times.

In response to the pothole crisis, ESCC Highways have suspended almost all other work and deployed staff on pothole repairs, more than doubling the number of 'pothole gangs' from the normal 11. This is certainly having an effect as the number of outstanding potholes is massively reducing. But this has suggested some questions which are posed by residents as well as county councillors:

- Why are some potholes repaired but others nearby are not? *Potholes are classified into three categories, each with maximum repair times, depending on the safety implications. Although it may seem obvious to fix all in one area, this can delay fixing more urgent ones elsewhere.*

- Pothole repairs seem to fail frequently. Are they not being repaired properly? *The proportion that fail is actually small though this year the sequence of weather (heavy frosts then heavy rains) seems to have made the problem worse. If a repair fails, it is repaired at no cost to the county.*
- Potholes are sometimes wet when filled. Surly this means they fail? *In fact in poor weather a 'cold fill' method is used which requires that water is present.*
- Is the quality of roads in the county getting worse? *Roads are inspected using an automatic scanning system at least once a year. Overall this indicates that the quality of roads is being maintained or slightly improved though I am concerned as to whether this will still be the case this year.*
- Given road maintenance currently uses only a small proportion of county budgets, why not just move more money to it from other areas? *It sounds good and all of us looking at the budgets are always looking for funds which could be used, but ESCC expenditure is dominated by important statutory functions: adult and social care, child care and education. We have not identified where these could be cut without affecting the most vulnerable in our community. Some monies are also being spent on highways improvements but these are counted as 'capital' and funded through government grants or ESCC capital funds which cannot be spent on road maintenance.*
- Why not just resurface or repair a larger area? *It has been estimated that bringing all of the 2000 miles of roads in East Sussex to good quality would cost about £350M, equivalent to about £600 for each resident (including men, women and children). This is clearly unaffordable so all we can do is to maintain road quality. Central government has on occasion provided funds but we still all pay for this.*

I am expecting that Station Road will have broader range of repairs or hopefully resurfaced this year and have pushed for this with Highways.

Please keep reporting road problems to highways, ideally via the Highways web site, but copy your case number to me so that I can monitor if it is being addressed.

Flooding and Drains

Robertsbridge has obviously has a history of flooding. Happily the flood defences seem to have alleviated this but there are still some serious areas:

- The northerly part of Northbridge Street has suffered from some flooding arising from water coming from the A21 via the layby, both of which are managed by Highways England. Our MP, myself and district councillor have all pushed for this to be addressed and it does look like progress has been made. Ditches have been cleared by the A21, higher kerbs put in the layby and improved methods of diverting overflow into ditches put in place, though some are temporary. Drains in the layby are being cleaned more (in one case by a public-spirited local resident!). I believe that these changes have worked, even with the recent heavy flash rainstorms. It understandably remains a concern for residents, but recent experience will hopefully reassure them, though I am not complacent.

- Ludpit Lane. A number of factors mean that this can get badly flooded, being particularly dangerous after rain followed by freezing conditions. East Sussex Highways working with myself and Cllr David Todd from the Parish Council are addressing this.
- High Street. During flash floods some houses in the High Street are getting flooded or having persistent water damaging outside walls. As with Ludpit Lane, David Todd and I are working with Highways to see how this can be alleviated.

Community College Parking Restrictions

Robertsbridge Community College is a real asset to the village and I believe is oversubscribed, showing its popularity. The junction by the entrance has been of some concern with inconsiderate parking causing problems for pedestrians and school buses. The Parish Council successfully applied for an ESCC Community Grant to address this with dropped kerbs and limited double yellow lines. It is not a magical solution but will hopefully improve the situation. Well done to everyone involved in this.

Thank You

I would like to thank the parish councillors and clerks for their work in supporting residents this year. Councillors donate their time to make life better for the residents and it is easy to forget how much work they do.