**COUNTY COUNCILLOR REPORT**

**TO**

**ALL PARISH COUNCILS**

**IN PETERSFIELD HANGERS**

**3 JULY 2023**

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1. Pothole repair boost

An extra £7.5 million each year for the next three years will be spent on repairing more potholes across Hampshire under new plans outlined by the County Leader Councillor Rob Humby in June.

Anyone using roads in Hampshire and elsewhere will be fully aware of the impact of sustained severe weather on our highway network. We are currently fixing record numbers of potholes and road defects – currently around 1,000 repairs every week – but it’s still not enough to keep up with the number of defects on Hampshire’s 5,500 miles of roads.

As part of these new proposals, we have asked the County Council’s contractors Milestone to relook at how we programme repairs so that when a single repair is made, smaller ones nearby are also filled at the same time. Currently, repair gangs are being asked to focus on the defects that pose the biggest risk, but under our new approach we want to empower and equip teams to fill more potholes in a single visit and help deliver stronger roads today.

Our firm commitment to fixing the roads will address the demand for action right now, but it does mean rebalancing the highways budget to scale back how much we spend on the larger planned maintenance activity (Operation Resilience) which seeks to prevent potholes forming in the first place. This is not a decision we take lightly, but it reflects the national picture of sustained underfunding which has led to a decline in road conditions across England.

Despite extra money awarded to the County Council by Government earlier this year, to mend potholes, unprecedented levels of damage combined with soaring costs, means that current funding levels are simply not enough. We are not alone in facing this considerable challenge. The cost of repairing roads has risen steeply in recent years, but local authority highways teams in England are estimated to have only received around two-thirds of what they need from the Department of Transport to maintain local roads.

The County Council currently spends around £13.5 million on reactive pothole and road defect repairs each year. Under the new proposal, funding would increase by £7.5 million starting in this financial year and across 24/25 and 25/26. Excluding one-off grants from the Department for Transport and other temporary budget adjustments, this will mean a core annual budget specifically for reactive highway repairs of around £21m through to spring 2026.

1. Repairs to King William III Statue in The Square, Petersfield

The statue of King William III (William of Orange) has been a focal point of our market town for over 200 years. People from right across the Western Downs have visited the markets in Petersfield Square for as long as William has been there.

The Square in Petersfield is actually owned by EHDC but the statue of William III is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and hence it falls under the purview of Hampshire County Council. You may be aware that William’s arm has become detached and requires repair. HCC will this month be removing the statue. The timeline is as follows:

* Monday 10th July: Scaffold erection by RHC (Conservator)
* Thursday 13th -Friday 14th July: Removal of William.
* Monday 17th July: Scaffold down, followed by Heras fencing, installed around the plinth by HCC.
* Repair period of 10 weeks (Provisional)
* PROVISIONAL Monday 18th September: Scaffold erection by RHC

PROVISIONAL Thursday 21st -Friday 22nd September: Reinstatement of William.

PROVISIONAL Monday 28th September: Scaffold down, Heras fencing removed.

The second batch of dates are provisional as they depend on how the repair progresses in the workshop in London.

William will undoubtedly be missed; no-one likes to look at an empty plinth. But we can look forward to William returning in September in fully restored condition. PTC may wish to consider organising a ceremony to celebrate his return?

Since Petersfield Urban District Council purchased William III for the town in 1911, it has been repaired at least seven times. In September 1913 Petersfield residents held jumble sales and concerts to raise money to repair the statue. The townspeople filled the Square to celebrate the unveiling of the newly restored statue, which was decorated with laurel leaves. Amazingly the event was filmed and that film is available to view at Hampshire Records Office in Winchester (I have watched it myself).

Finally I would also like to mention that Cllr Robert Mocatta and I have recently met with the Petersfield Area Historical Society with a view to developing a new plaque which would provide more historical detail and context for the statue. We are both supportive of the concept of this additional plaque. Work on this is ongoing. Planning permissions are needed so this new plaque may not be ready in time for William’s return but hopefully it can be installed before the end of the year.

1. Pulens Lane Traffic-Calming Project

This scheme is the highest priority for the Petersfield Strategy Group and for Hampshire County Council. Cllr Mocatta and I have been pushing this scheme strongly behind the scenes for the last three years and we are very pleased to have a great team of people working on it and strong commitment from the HCC and EHDC Leadership and senior officers at HCC to deliver the scheme.

Raised crossings will form the basis for slowing traffic and for making it easier for people to cross the road at key points. Cycling and environmental improvements will be embedded within the scheme.

An in-person Workshop with stakeholders took place in Penns Place on 14th June. I know that the Placemaking Team at HCC found this extremely useful. A second Online Workshop will be held from 4.00-5:30pm on either Tuesday 18 or

Thursday 20 July. The date will be confirmed this week.

The purpose of the second online Workshop will be to show emerging designs and discuss them in Workshop Groups, with a view to the Project Team developing the proposals in more detail over the Summer. If you would like to be invited to this Teams workshop please let me know.

1. HCC Budget Consultation

A brief reminder that the closing date for the HCC Budget Consultation is 23 July. If you have not already completed the questionnaire I would like to invite you to do so by clicking on this link:

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/aboutthecouncil/haveyoursay/consultations/budgetconsultation>

1. Agroforestry Workshop

At the Hampshire Forestry Partnership we are keen to win hearts and minds when it comes to planting more trees and hedges on agricultural land. There are benefits to the bottom line because farmers can make extra profits from the timber, fruit and nuts whilst also increasing output. Trees can improve grazing pastures by providing shade for animals and improving soil and water retention. And by providing a natural habitat, trees can naturally increase numbers of helpful predators such as spiders and beetles, controlling aphid crop pests without the need for costly and harmful insecticides.

We have organised a free Agroforestry workshop for land managers and farmers which takes place in Alresford on the afternoon of 28 July 2023. It’s a great opportunity to learn more from the experts. Please share this opportunity with anyone you know locally who might be interested. To register for the workshop please follow this link:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/silvoarable-agroforestry-workshop-for-arable-farmers-land-managers-tickets-668673238657?aff=oddtdtcreator>

1. Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Hampshire

Hampshire County Council has been appointed by HM Government to prepare a ‘Local Nature Recovery Strategy’ for Hampshire, including the areas of Portsmouth and Southampton. £388,000 will be provided to coordinate the development of the new strategy in collaboration with key partners.

The Strategy will bring together organisations and residents to restore precious habitats, protect wildlife and combat climate change. Hampshire County Council is one of 48 individual local authorities across England designated as leads for the delivery of Local Nature Recovery Strategies and will work with Southampton and Portsmouth unitary authorities, the region’s two national parks and all eleven district and borough councils across Hampshire.

1. South Downs Park Protectors is launched

The SDNPA has launched a new scheme which gives corporations a significant opportunity to get involved with nature recovery and staff volunteering in the great outdoors. The South Downs Protector scheme is inviting corporate partners to support the South Downs National Park with a £10,000 contribution.

The donation will help fund the National Park’s ambition to create 13,000 hectares – or an area almost twice the size of Southampton – of new habitat where plants and animals can thrive. The ReNature initiative is tackling biodiversity loss by creating significant new areas of woodland, hedgerow, wildflower meadow, and wetlands over the next decade.

Businesses that sign up to the scheme receive volunteering days in the incredible landscape of the National Park, a ranger talk, as well as corporate getaway opportunities at the breathtaking Seven Sisters Country Park.

They will also receive a one-year subscription to the Green South Downs Sustainability Certification Program, which focuses on helping businesses reach sustainability goals.

It would be great to get local firms to sign up and I hope Councillor colleagues will help to spread the word. Joining the scheme will be good for businesses and good for nature!

To find out more about becoming a Park Protector visit <https://oursouthdowns.co.uk/page/SupportNP>

or email james.winkworth@southdownstrust.org.uk

**RUSSELL OPPENHEIMER**

**County Councillor for Petersfield Hangers**