

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

1 NOVEMBER 2023

1. HCC reaffirms support for veterans

Hampshire has a historic and long-standing close relationship with the Armed Forces. We have substantial military facilities and training grounds from all three services in our county. Hampshire is, I believe, the only county in the UK that can make that claim. Some 72,000 households in Hampshire include someone who has served in the UK armed forces which amounts to over 12% of households.

The County Council was selected some 12 years ago to be among the first to sign the Armed Forces Covenant, because of its strong track record and the significant beneficial work it does with its military partners. On 20 October 2023 the Leader of Hampshire County Council, Councillor Rob Humby reaffirmed our commitment by re-signing the Covenant in a ceremony with military leaders.

Our commitment to uphold the Armed Forces Covenant means that we look carefully at our services to ensure that there is no disadvantage to the Armed Forces community in the way services are provided, and that we are making special considerations where appropriate – especially for those who have given the most, such as the injured and the bereaved.

In line with the Covenant Duty, the County Council considers the needs of the Armed Forces when making decisions about service provision, particularly as part of its role in education and further education. For example, the County Council actively supports Hampshire schools and leads a network of school Service Coordinators in their pursuit of best practice for pupils from military families. The County Council's skills and employment programmes, such as the Construction Skills, Driving Futures, and Apprenticeship Levy Transfer programmes have created retraining and upskilling opportunities for former military personnel and their families to develop their skills and knowledge in sectors where there is a demand for talent, and which are important to the Hampshire economy.

Hampshire County Council is also a military-friendly employer with policies which support staff to work flexibly and have time off for key occasions such as homecomings. The County Council also has a Reservist policy in place allowing staff 10 days paid leave for reservist duties, and support for the mobilisation of staff – as was the case for some Reservist staff members who were mobilised as part of the national response to the Coronavirus pandemic.

Armed Forces Personnel and their families can find other sources of support through the County Council's [Armed Forces webpages](#) and [Connect to Support Hampshire](#).

2. Highways Update and Road Space issues

You will all have heard about the cancellation of the Northern leg of HS2 by the Prime Minister, saving £36bn. The Government is still releasing details of how that funding will be made available to local councils for road repairs. This is potentially good news for Hampshire. We are hoping to receive somewhere between £7-12m extra each year for the next three years, starting in April 2024. I will update you again when I know more.

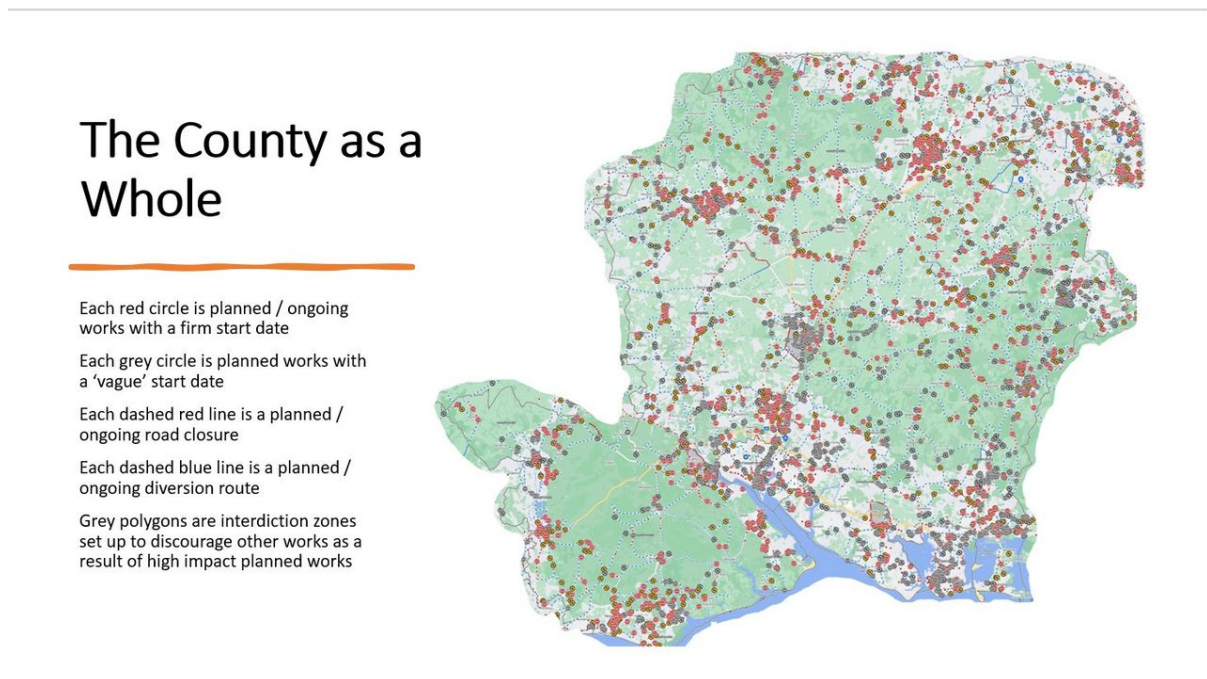
As mentioned previously, we have changed the operating procedures for the pothole gangs so that they now fix every pothole they see whenever they are out and about, rather than waiting for every pothole to be reported and assessed. We have also deployed an extra team with the £7.5m extra funding for Highways which we announced in August. This puts us in a strong position to cope with adverse weather this winter.

I want to mention a constraint which we are currently facing in Highways. Town and Parish Councillors will be aware that utility companies have the right to undertake works on the highway. We are currently facing an unprecedented number of permit requests for works from utility companies which is impacting on the availability of road space and consequently may mean that our own highway repairs are not able to be delivered as quickly as we would like.

It is worth noting that, whilst the County Council is responsible for controlling road-space and coordinating roadworks as part of its statutory duty, it is not possible for us to prioritise HCC works over others as there is a requirement to demonstrate parity between all promoters of works.

The map below illustrates the current volume of ongoing and planned works that are being coordinated by the HCC Streetworks team. These maps change on an hourly basis as new permits come in, works complete, or as contractors make changes to their dates/method of works. The map includes only works submitted under a permit and do not include planned events or incidents that also require coordination.

As you can see there are significant numbers of works planned and ongoing, finding the 'space' on the road to enable repairs is sometimes challenging, not least as that section of road might have utility works or, more likely, be used as a diversion route for works elsewhere.



HCC is currently considering ways to reduce the problems caused by utility companies, including charging them for road space.

3. Vegetation and Ditch clearance: model letters for Parishes

HCC has circulated two standard template letters for Parish and Town Councils to send to homeowners and landowners where appropriate. The first letter requests that they clear vegetation and the second asks them to clear their ditches to enable water flow.

These are two frequently recurring highway issues which understandably cause frustration for residents as they can lead to flooding and encroachment onto the public highway.

I think these letters represent a very worthwhile initiative for two reasons. Firstly, I think landowners are arguably more likely to comply with a request on headed notepaper from their local Parish Council than with a letter from HCC. Most people do not want to fall out with their neighbours. Secondly, I believe that written Parish communications in this area can be combined with other local actions (such as newsletters and posters) to create a local culture in which people are automatically attentive to their pruning and riparian responsibilities. That would be a very good outcome.

I therefore hope that Parish Councils will commence the sending of letters on a routine basis. I hope all Clerks have saved the letters to their headed notepaper. If you have not received them please let me know and I will forward them. I want to acknowledge that formally these matters will continue to fall under HCC's jurisdiction and we will continue to work with Parishes where local action has proved ineffective.

4. Smoking and Vaping: HCC welcomes new Government plans

Hampshire County Council has welcomed the Government's recent announcement to create a 'smokefree generation' by 2040. The proposed new law would prevent children born from 2009 onwards, from ever legally being sold cigarettes in England – effectively raising the smoking age by a year, each year until it applies to the whole population.

Hampshire has nearly 120,000 smokers and almost every hour of every day, someone is admitted to hospital in our county because of smoking. While the number of adults smoking in Hampshire has fallen over time, according to the public health charity Action on Smoking and Health (ASH), smoking is estimated to cost Hampshire and the county's local economy over £348million last year, £98million of which was on health and social care costs and £246million on productivity.

The County Council is working with a wide range of partners to tackle the harmful impact of smoking. First and foremost is the commissioning of Solutions4Health to provide a free and confidential local stop smoking service via Smokefree Hampshire – since 2019, more than 10,000 Hampshire smokers have been helped to quit. The service offers a variety of methods for quitting, including free nicotine replacement therapy and vaping vouchers.

Hampshire residents can self-refer to Smokefree Hampshire by calling the Quitline on 01264 563039, by texting Quit to 66777 or via the website at www.smokefreehampshire.co.uk

In addition, the Local Authority's Trading Standards officers regularly visit businesses to check measures are in place to prevent underage sales of cigarettes and vapes and to provide information and guidance. If necessary, test purchases are carried out that can lead to prosecution. We have recently seized over £50,000 of illegal vapes.

While vapes can be a good aid for adults who want to quit smoking, vapes should not be used by children and young people – as the full impact on young bodies is not yet fully understood. The County Council is actively working with Hampshire's schools and colleges to ensure students, parents and carers have all the information to help tackle underage vaping. A suite of resources, including lesson plans, leaflets and posters explain the health risks to children and young people, the law regarding the use of vapes, as well as the environmental impact - especially of disposable vapes.

As part of the Government's proposals, it is anticipated that the County Council will receive £1.5m per year in additional support until 2028/29, the majority of which is expected to be spent on expanding the Hampshire Stop Smoking Service, but could also be allocated to awareness raising, workforce training, and youth prevention activities.

5. SDNPA signs groundbreaking agreement in Ilford

The SDNPA has done something which I believe is noteworthy and commendable. They have created a brokerage service, officially called "ReNature Credits", which will connect landowners and developers to create areas of land for nature recovery.

Thirty-one hectares of land at Iford Estate, in East Sussex, have been signed over for nature recovery. The large swathe of downland is the first to appear on the National Park Authority's register of land that is formally dedicated for "Biodiversity Net Gain" (BNG) provision. The SDNPA intends to add more land to this register as other landowners come forward.

Developers can now get in touch with the National Park Authority to purchase biodiversity units. From January next year developers in England will be required to deliver 10% "Biodiversity Net Gain" when building new housing, industrial or commercial developments. This means by law they must deliver a net positive for the local environment, for example by creating new habitats and green spaces. The nature restoration can happen on-site or off-site at locations such as the Iford Estate, or other potential areas that could be earmarked in the National Park in the future.

The ambition is to set aside 33% of the National Park for nature recovery. Landowners participating in this scheme will be able to get substantial financial sums in addition to their subsidies. So it is a win-win. We get more biodiversity to help reverse the decline of species and farmers get more support to protect the landscape and the environment. I hope landowners on this side of the park will look into participating in this scheme. And I would encourage Parish Councils to spread the word about this.

To acquire credits or to get in touch with the National Park's team delivering ReNature Credits, visit www.southdowns.gov.uk/renature-credits/

To see a detailed FAQ explaining the scheme, visit www.southdowns.gov.uk/renature-credits/faqs/

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