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27th February 2022

Report to Parish Councils – February 2021

This report is written in late February and is for Parish Councils meeting in March. It is for all 7 parishes in Northern Rother

Community (Matched) Funding Changes – Important Opportunity!

Community matched funding provides up to 50% funding for road safety improvements, the other 50% being provided by parish councils or similar. However, this has resulted in a surplus of unallocated funds from this budget over the years. At a meeting of the Lead Member for Transport and the Environment on 21st February it was agreed to allocate most of the surplus (£750,000) to road safety schemes but crucially *these do not have to have matched funding and have broader criteria.*

They expect to be able to fund 7 to 10 schemes a year, each at a maximum of £40k. Typical schemes might be:

- Centre island £10,000 to £30,000
- Village gateways £2,000 to £5,000 per site
- School safety schemes £10,000 to £50,000, which could include enhanced signing/road markings, a 20mph speed limit, an advisory 20mph speed limit (when lights are flashing) or traffic calming
- New speed limit - £10,000 to £30,000

I understand that the criteria for this can take account of feelings in the community and less simply hard road safety statistics. I attach to the end of this report a screenshot of the scoring criteria which will be used. As you can see this includes things like accident rate but also Community Value. We await full details but **I encourage each parish to identify changes which might fit these criteria and perhaps begin to assemble evidence of community support.**

Storm Eunice

As I write the impact from this continues though at much reduced level with disruption to power supplies and water. At the time my power went off I was actually on an ESCC Emergency Planning briefing remote meeting!

Many of us are very unhappy with some aspects of the way this was handled. The power workers in the field clearly worked very hard in the face of overwhelming number of incidents, far more than we would normally expect but I think some serious questions need to be asked such as:

- Why was the information from UK Power Networks so unreliable? Initially they will not have assessed damage so this is reasonable at first, but days later the information was still changing.
- Why was the UK Power Networks web site so slow/overloaded making it far more difficult to get updates via mobile phones
- The loss of water supplies is very serious and could be catastrophic for some. Should South-East Water not have generators for this eventuality? When bottled water was provided, why was it felt reasonable that people in Beckley, for example, should go do Sedlescombe or Battle?
- ESCC has a Resilience Forum but this seems to have no online presence. I do not think it has resources but is more for strategic preparation, but some sort of online presence should be essential.

Huw Merriman has raised issues nationally and directly with UK Power Networks and South East Water, speaking directly to the senior management in these organisations and making things happen. I have passed him more details of the above issues which he will raise with them.

I know at least some parish councils in response to requests from parishioners are looking at what local resilience measures could be put in place, even discussing generators, emergency food stores etc. But I think we need to be realistic in our expectations. Generators which could help a whole community are massively expensive. The last time we had such a storm was in 1987, a few years before I moved to this area. But there may be practical and affordable steps which could be considered.

I have already raised questions at County and will be collecting feedback from parish councils over the next month which I shall feed back. I hope to have an opportunity, directly or indirectly, to question UKPN and SEW to see what lessons can be learnt for such future occurrences.

Budget Update

The new council tax was confirmed at full council on 8th February and is:

- Core council tax of 1.99%
- Increase of 1.5 % in the adult and social care precept, carried over from last year when ESCC did not apply the full amount permitted by government
- Increase of 1% in the same precept for this year

We still await details of a number of areas of special grants including for supported families, disadvantaged children, highways and SEND capital distributions and the new support for cyber security, all of which will affect our overall budget.

Cases

Each month I will give summaries/updates for a sample of current cases across Northern Rother. I currently have about 12 which are being progressed.

- **Flooding in Northbridge Street, Robertsbridge.** This continues to be a top issue with Huw Merriman's office dealing with National Highways, me dealing with Highways East Sussex and Councillor Sue Prochak dealing with Rother district council. There is some small progress – for example Highways East Sussex have raised a drop kerb which was enabling relatively small amounts of rain to go into some back gardens, but the main response needs to come from National Highways. More interim measures have been taken – for example there are now sandbags down one side of the A21 to help prevent water from land coming across the carriageway, into the layby and then to Northbridge Street. (Footnote – not checked but I believe these may no longer be needed as the blocked ditch has apparently been cleared). Immense pressure is being put on National Highways by Huw's office. One challenge is assessing if measures are working given that flooding does not occur every year and seems to depend on a combination of factors. Recent experience has apparently been good, with no evidence of flooding.
- **Road marking improvements near Robertsbridge Community College.** This predates my time as councillor but an application for matched funding for new road markings and dropped kerbs has been submitted by Salehurst and Robertsbridge PC. I will be speaking in support of this when it comes up for approval. Several other potential matched funding opportunities are in earlier stages of consideration but often the budgets exceed what parish councils can afford, even at the 50% funding level.
- **Drainage on A28 and Horns Cross.** This is a small issue which may have been resolved but it appears that a misunderstanding led to not all blocked drains being cleared. A meeting between a resident and the highways steward has hopefully led to a solution. This should not often be needed as most communications via the highways web site, particularly if accompanied by photos, can pinpoint the issue and are much more efficient, but in this case it appears not to be so.

Scoring Criteria for Community Funding

Crash history (see note 2)	
KSI	6
Slight	2
None	0
Road Class	
A-class urban / rural	4
A-class inter-urban	6
B – class	8
Other	10
Local conditions	
Residential area	4
Shops	4
Schools / elderly / disabled	6
Hospital / clinic	6
Local Impact	
Cycling/ Walking Improvements	6
Improve compliance of existing measures	8
Feasibility	
TRO Required?	-5
Cost £40K or less	8
Low maintenance	4
Deliverable within financial year	10
Deliverability (see note 3)	
Very deliverable	10
Some difficulties	-5
Very difficult	-10
Link to County Schemes	
Current / future scheme	-10
Proposed scheme	-5
No proposals	10
Community Value	
High	10
Medium	8
Low	2