

Jeremy Birch, Councilor, East Sussex County Council Report April 2011

Old Town 20mph

Along with my borough council colleague Cllr Hodges I spoke at the Traffic Management Committee in support of the Old Town 20mph zone against which a single objection had been lodged – and that not from an Old Town resident. The proposal was unanimously endorsed. Also approved were making with the very top of High Street (as far as Torfield Close) two-way and the ending of the anomalous 60mph at the top of Barley Lane – it will now be a more normal 30. Work should begin by early June to introduce the 20mph zone.

Parking Management

The County Council has now started its tendering process for the management of parking in Hastings. As the highway authority it has the power to do this but ever since on-street pay parking was introduced into the town it has been managed by the borough council in a partnership arrangement with the County. This will now change. In Eastbourne and Lewes parking is already managed by NSL (part of the major private company National Car Parks). All the statistics indicate that in Hastings the borough council delivers a higher quality service than in the other two towns – much fewer penalty charge notices are cancelled in Hastings for not having been issued appropriately for example. And of course the service is more local and closer to the difficulties local communities or businesses might encounter. But the County Council wants to save money and so the service is being put out to competitive tender.

Health and Social Care Bill

I spoke at the County Council questioning the principles behind the coalition government's current health bill which in my opinion opens up the NHS much more to alternative (private) providers and potentially makes the whole system less accountable. The government has currently declared a 'pause' for reflection on the changes although we will have to see how substantial any amendments might be. I urged the County to call for more powers for the Health and Wellbeing Boards that County Councils are required to establish (East Sussex will be establishing a shadow board by September). I would like them to be able to ensure collaboration between different health organisations and also that their strategies drawn up with proper consultation should be binding. And there should be adequate representation by elected councillors on these boards. The County Council was generally supportive of my comments and altered their response to the government consultation accordingly.

County Council Changes

A number of changes are anticipated in the composition of the County Council's cabinet – which comprises only councillors from the majority Conservative Group. A number of the current cabinet members are not seeking re-election as councillors in two years time; this includes the leader of the council, Cllr Jones.