

August Report from County Councillor Jeremy Birch

- **Harold Road:** The requirements of the work to repair the wall outside numbers 75-77 will unfortunately mean some significant disruption to road users including for buses. The existing wall that holds up the footway has failed and needs to be replaced. Initial works will start on Monday 5th August with two-way temporary traffic lights. But from 19th August until the works are completed that section of the road will be closed – that will be for an estimated eight weeks. Diversions will obviously be in operation
- **Isobel Blackman Centre:** I'm visiting the day centre again this week. The county council has changed the contract with Age UK in-year to reflect the move of the day centre downstairs and a much-reduced community hub (which Age UK developed) upstairs. These changes follow the review held last year into the running of the centre. But of course the big worry is the county council's new review into all its day care provision and closure of day centres is one of the options. The final decision on that review and on whether Isobel Blackman might close or be run in a different way will be made in December. I am totally opposed to any idea of closure. It is the only county council day centre left in Hastings to meet the demands of a growing older population. It was closed for refurbishment only a couple of years ago – so to close it permanently would be a criminal waste of money. Locally a number of different ideas are emerging about how its future might be guaranteed. These include handing it over to be run by a voluntary sector organisation, getting charitable trusts to commit money to support its continuation. All of these may be part of a solution. I am demanding that the county council does not just walk away from Isobel Blackman but guarantees sufficient continuing financial support to ensure that day care centre carries on, that other activities for a broader number of local older people can also take place there and that jobs and terms and conditions of existing county council staff are assured. I hope residents in the Old Hastings and Tressell area will want to respond similarly in the review consultation.
- **School Crossing Patrols:** As part of its budgetary activity the county council is to carry out a review of school crossing patrols. There will be consultation on the review should any changes be proposed. I for one will be resisting any reduction in the school crossing patrols in the Old Hastings and Tressell area. For schools like Sacred Heart for example on the busy Old London Road a crossing patrol is an absolute necessity.
- **Highways Permits:** From November utility companies will have to apply for a permit to carry out any work on East Sussex roads and pay a fee for permission to work on the busier roads in the county. The South East Permit Scheme – a joint venture with Surrey County Council – will prevent work starting on the county's busiest roads during rush hour, encourage companies to carry out work at

the same time using the same trenches, and control where workers park their vehicles. The county council will be able to issue fines for overrunning work and work taking place outside the conditions of the permit. It will also mean tougher penalties for inadequate road repairs by utility companies, who face a second charge for a permission to return and repair the road properly. Once a scheme is introduced it is a criminal offence to work without a permit. The maximum fine is £5,000. It is also an offence to not meet a permit condition, for which the maximum fine is £2,500. Of course these companies retain the right to do emergency works as they arise and that would be outside the permit scheme.

- **Roadwork Rage:** The county highways department will be employing a high-tech approach to target motorists who put the lives of roads crews in danger. Road workers in East Sussex have been equipped with helmet-mounted cameras to capture footage of drivers who speed through roadworks, drive in an anti-social manner or abuse staff. Evidence captured by the devices will be passed to Sussex Police as part of Operation Crackdown, a multi-agency scheme which allows the public to report errant drivers. Signs will be displayed at roadworks being carried out for the county council warning that inconsiderate drivers could be reported to the police. Launched in 2007, Operation Crackdown is a joint initiative between Sussex Police, local councils and the fire service, which now receives more than 1,000 reports every month. The public can submit details of incidences of anti-social motoring such as speeding, driving while using a mobile phone and dangerous driving, and of abandoned vehicles. Reports can be submitted online at www.operationcrackdown.org
- **Fracking:** We will all have seen the protests in Balcombe, West Sussex against Cuadrilla and the worries about fracking and some local residents have asked about the prospects in our area. I have responded to say that I am not aware of any interest being shown by businesses in fracking in our area - it may be that the geological make-up of this part of East Sussex is not appropriate. The issue of fracking was discussed at the County last year and councillors unanimously expressed their concerns about the process.

If you would prefer not to receive the county council report please let me know; otherwise feel free to copy it on to others.