

County Councillor Report November 2013

Councillor Jeremy Birch

Harold Road: I'm afraid the County Council highways department gave us a very optimistic view about the time the major wall reconstruction and consequent road closure would take. I hope the latest information is now accurate. They tell us that the road will now be closed until 23 November. The work will then continue until 10 January under two way traffic lights.

"East Sussex Highways have been employing the services of a state-of-the-art piling rig with a 15m drill to insert reinforced concrete piles into the ground on the west side of Harold Road. The work has been carried out after cracks started to appear in the road and pavement, due to weakening in a 6m retaining wall which holds back tonnes of earth under the road. After scaffolding was installed to support the wall at the beginning of the year, crews began preparatory work, moving power and telephone cables, in August, before engineering work began in earnest. The operation, which is expected to cost around £250,000, will see 38 concrete piles inserted, supported by 12m long steel 'anchors', the west side of the bank faced with concrete and the brick wall on top rebuilt."

Isabel Blackman Centre: The fate of the Isabel Blackman day care centre will be determined at the County Council cabinet meeting on 10th December and closure is one of the options. As the local county councillor I am totally opposed to any idea of closure - it is the only County Council-run day centre in the town, significant money was spent re doing it within the last couple of years and the building is only there thanks to benefactors' generosity. I am also opposed to redundancies for the dedicated staff there. I will be pressing for a solution that maintains this important facility where our older residents can be supported by the staff they know and trust.

County Council budget: It is now widely recognised that under the coalition government's austerity package local government is being hit harder than any other part of the public sector and certainly is having to cut back a lot further than central government itself. East Sussex County Council has to find £70 million worth of savings over the three years 2013-16 (£30m of that will be coming out of the adult social care budget). With George Osborne talking of public spending restraint until 2020 then on current information the County Council is looking at further cuts of a further £50m 2016-18. Discussions about

next year's budget have started and the picture looks grim. The government will offer the equivalent of 1% council tax rise to councils that freeze the tax. But Kent County Council is already saying it will turn this offer down and increase the tax by 1.99% If East Sussex did this it would raise £2m extra to offset some of the planned cuts. If residents have any views then free feel to let me know. An increase of 2% or more would require the council to hold a special referendum as a result of government ruling.

Schools: Dudley Infants has opted for academy status from the beginning of this month under the umbrella of the Hastings Academies Trust. The Trust already has the two local secondary academies under its wing – the Hastings Academy on the Hillcrest site and the St Leonards Academy on the Filsham Valley site. Each school the Trust is responsible for will have its own governing body although there will remain central oversight of finance, the curriculum and attainment. All Saints remains under an Interim Executive Board and we await the conclusion of discussions about the school's future governance. Congratulations go to Castledown primary which has been judged 'good' in its recent Ofsted inspection – previously it was considered 'satisfactory'. Comments in the inspectors' report include: "Pupils overall attainment have risen at a faster rate than found nationally. Pupils enjoy learning and make good progress in a range of subjects, including history and science. "Teachers have high expectations of pupils in terms of both work and behaviour. The school is a happy and harmonious community in which pupils from different backgrounds relate well to each other."

High Street: The consultation on the possible changes to High Street designed to tackle rat-running and to improve pedestrian safety closes this Friday, 15th November. We will then get a picture of the general response and what the way forward may be.

Carlisle Parade: Although outside my county division I thought residents might be keen to know why this part of our seafront above the underground car park is undergoing repairs yet again. Here is the highways department explanation regarding this quite difficult bit of roadway:

"We are really struggling to find a solution to this, in essence there isn't sufficient cover above the roof of the underground car park to accommodate an adequate thickness of tarmac. Thin tarmac surfacing on concrete structures has been an ongoing problem throughout the country and Carlisle Parade is no exception.

In 2012 our structural engineers took the decision to grind out some of the concrete which lies above the roof of the structure to accommodate a thicker 100mm layer of asphalt. We subsequently replaced substantial areas of

surfacing to the middle and west side of the structure, but at the time the surfacing on the east side was holding up well and was left alone.

This autumn the heavy rain has caused the deterioration of the earlier 2004 surfacing in the west bound lane to the east of the structure and within a patch of surfacing in the eastbound lane. Such is the shallowness of the tarmac that our pot hole repairs are failing within a few days, and the condition of the road was considered dangerous that we took the decision to cone off one of the lanes.

We are making arrangements to carry out larger patch repairs within the lane closure during w/c 18th November, and then in the spring we will tackle this problematical eastern area, grind out the concrete and eliminate the thin surfacing.”

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