

County Councillor Report, December 2013

Councillor Jeremy Birch

Isabel Blackman Centre: The County Council cabinet has voted not to close the Isabel Blackman Centre in the Old Town. There was a substantial local campaign to save the day care centre for older people – I was out with other Labour councillors petitioning in George Street. Its closure would have been a major scandal - 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. So naturally I am very pleased it is to stay open. What the County Council has actually decided is to cease directly running the centre but to offer out its running to tender from outside voluntary or sector organisations. I would have preferred the County Council to continue to directly provide day care at Isabel Blackman continuing to employ their own staff who are working there currently. I am concerned both for the needs of our elderly residents but also about the welfare of staff. Although the county cabinet is exclusively made up of Tory councillors I am allowed to speak as the local councillor in issues in my area. So I spoke at the cabinet seeking some assurances about the future of the staff – after all they are the people the elderly users know and trust. Unfortunately at the same meeting the County cabinet agreed to close Pinehill day care centre on the Ridge which caters for older people with more acute needs, mainly dementia sufferers. Day care provision for them will now be sought elsewhere in commercial or voluntary sector run establishments.

Keeping in touch during wintry weather: Visitors to East Sussex County Council's website this winter will be able to watch the progress of the gritters as they travel the 950 miles of roads in the county that are treated. The information, collected by electronic tracker devices on each of the 24 gritters, is already fed back to the control hub at the Ringmer Depot to enable the highways team to plan and monitor gritting. But thanks to new technology, motorists, cyclists, pedestrians and other road users will be able to watch the gritters' movements in real time. Information about why and when roads are gritted, which roads are prioritised and what residents can do to stay safe during severe weather is available at www.eastsussex.gov.uk/coldsnap

Road works: Utility companies wanting to carry out work on public roads will now have to apply to East Sussex County Council for a permit and pay a fee for permission to work on the busier roads in the county. The South East Permit Scheme, a joint initiative 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 – reducing disruption for drivers. Previously, utility companies only have to give notice that they are carrying out work, leaving East Sussex County Council to liaise with companies to minimise congestion. The new way of working means the council can attach conditions to permits preventing work from being carried out at certain times during the day and stopping several companies working on different parts of a road at the same time. Under the scheme East Sussex County Council will be able to issue fines for overrunning work and work taking place outside the conditions of the permit. Tougher penalties can also be given for inadequate road

repairs by utilities companies, who will face a second charge for a permission to return and repair the road properly. This will encourage first time, good quality reinstatement of trenches. The permit scheme applies on all roads in East Sussex. Fixed penalties of £300 can be imposed for companies starting work earlier and working later than their permit allows, and up to £3,000 a day can be charged for overrunning work.

Concessionary Fares: The County Council cabinet has decided to bring concessionary fares start time in East Sussex into line with the statutory national start time. This will mean that older and disabled residents will not be able to use their bus passes before 9.30am rather than the previous 9.00 start.

Harold Road: Harold Road was finally under two-way temporary traffic signals which will be in place until early January. The delay to the re-opening was due to the need to install some anchors to secure the wall in place and this takes up to ten days to ensure that they are set correctly. The machinery takes up the width of the road so the road needed to remain closed during this time. With the anchors in place rebuild the retaining wall can be completed. I am informed that these works are due to be finished by 12th January 2014.

Crown Lane: There will be a temporary road closure on the whole length of Crown Lane 7-10th January, between 09:30hrs – 16:00hrs each day. UK Power Networks, Southern Gas Networks and Southern Water are carrying out connections to a property. Access for pedestrians will not be affected. Vehicular access to properties will be restricted during the times stated above; however access for emergency vehicles will be maintained. If you require any further information or have a query regarding these works please contact UK Power Networks on 01622 352 339.

Hastings Borough Council news

SUCCESS: This £2 million grant fund for cultural and creative businesses was launched last week. The money came from a successful bid put forward by the council to the Regional Growth Fund and hopefully it will bring SUCCESS to creative businesses across our borough. For more info: <http://www.success-creative-fund.biz/faq/>

Switched-on Hastings: A thousand local people registered an interest in the council's collective energy switching project; all but one of them appeared to be on course to save money if they decide to take up the final offer. There will be further energy auctions like this where again there will be the possibility for residents to save on their ever-rising energy bills.

London councils and Hastings: We are aware of a number of families from London being moved to the borough, several of them in to Central St Leonards. The BBC website carried the following article: *"An East Sussex council says it is concerned about the number of benefit dependent families being moved out of London into Hastings. Hastings Borough Council said it "guesstimated" up to 100 people had been put into private rented accommodation by London boroughs. Leader Jeremy Birch said they would put pressure on children's services, social*

services and public health agencies. Newham council said 23 families had been moved, but no-one had been forced. Labour leader Mr Birch said Hastings worked out its figure of 100 on the basis of the number of households with children. "At the same time as we are trying to regenerate Hastings and reduce benefit dependency we are being sent more families who are in that position," said Mr Birch. "I don't think these people want to come to Hastings but they have ended up 60 miles away from friends and family." They are coming because of the benefit challenges and the housing challenges in London." Last month Hastings Borough Council convened a meeting of other South East coastal councils, London boroughs and civil servants with the aim of everyone understanding the pressures each is under. A small working group was given the job of drafting a protocol that could possibly govern this activity – we'll have to see what happens.

SUCCESS: This £2 million grant fund for cultural and creative businesses was launched in Central St Leonards because there are a number of residents in the area working in these fields. The money came from a successful bid put forward by the council to the Regional Growth Fund and hopefully it will bring SUCCESS to creative businesses across our borough and of course in St Leonards. For more info: <http://www.success-creative-fund.biz/faq/>

Jeremy Birch – 425585

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