

Hampshire County Councillor Update

February 2024

Highways Information: 20mph policy

Last month HCC's Universal Services Select Committee scrutinised the proposals for a 20mph policy.

The new policy confirms two things; firstly, that HCC will continue to consider 20mph zones in areas where they are deemed appropriate and there is a proven safety need for them - outside of schools for example.



More importantly the decision will introduce a policy which allows communities to request the introduction of 20mph zones in their own area. There will be a number of criteria any community led application will need to meet:

Firstly, and most importantly, there must be clear evidence of community support. Too often we have seen the introduction of 20mph zones elsewhere in the country where there has been little support, resulting in conflict and division in communities.

Communities or parishes will need to fund the introduction of the schemes they request themselves. This should be possible through Community Infrastructure Levy or other forms of developer contributions. You will no doubt have seen the posts elsewhere about the financial challenges facing the County Council. There is therefore no possibility of funding to help bring these schemes forward.

Secondly, the introduction of 20mph zones would need to be accompanied by measures to reduce speed. The implementation of Speed Indicator Devices for example, those that show the speed a vehicle is going with a happy or angry face. The police have been clear that they do not have resources to enforce any new zones, so communities will need to find ways by which they can encourage compliance themselves, such as Speed Watch for example.

There has been a vocal campaign by campaigners who want a blanket introduction of 20mph zones across the county, similar to that introduced recently in Wales. Whilst there is sympathy with their argument, which highlights not only the safety benefits of lower speed limits, but also the impact on the environment and health budgets, there remain two issues impeding that consideration. The first is finance, such a move would cost £20 million, that funding would need to come from highway repair budgets, reducing them by almost 50% for a year. The second being public support, it is clear from Wales, from other parts of England, that there is far from universal support for 20mph zones, consequently best that communities decide for themselves whether a zone is right for them. Further details will be published on applying for a 20 mph zone soon.

Reporting Highway Problems

Links to report road issues are here:

Potholes: <https://www.hants.gov.uk/transport/roadmaintenance/roadproblems/potholes>

Tree/hedge problems: <https://www.hants.gov.uk/transport/roadmaintenance/roadproblems/treehedge>

Flooding/drainage issues:

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/transport/roadmaintenance/roadproblems/flooding>

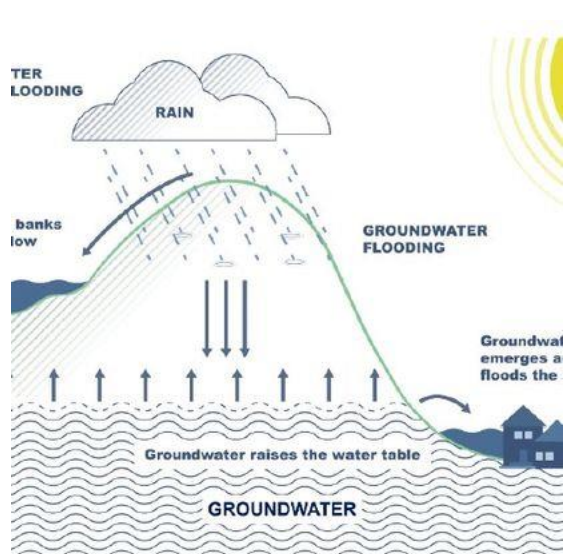
Pavement problems: <https://www.hants.gov.uk/transport/roadmaintenance/roadproblems/paving>

Problems with rights of way:

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/landplanningandenvironment/rightsofway/reportaproblem>

When reporting an issue, you'll be sent an email confirming a reference number for the report. If you would like me to follow this up for you then do please forward that message to me and I will chase for you

Groundwater Flooding Hampshire County Council have provided a helpful update on ground water flooding across the County.



Flooding from groundwater is currently one of the highest risks across Hampshire. A wetter than usual summer and autumn has raised groundwater to significantly higher levels than the seasonal average in many areas.

Groundwater flooding occurs when the natural water level under the ground (the water table) rises to the surface. Flooding can be devastating and can cause damage to homes and other property, as well as roads and frequently overwhelms drainage and sewer networks. Underground rooms, such as cellars and basements, are particularly at risk. This type of flooding is more likely where there is chalk under the ground - it can also happen in places with sand and gravel, such as river valleys.

There are currently 10 Flood Warnings and 30 Flood Alerts in place across Hampshire (including Hursley) covering both groundwater and river flood risks (correct as at 15.01.24).

This information is regularly updated at:

<https://check-for-flooding.service.gov.uk/alerts-and-...>

Finding the latest information:

You and your communities can sign up to receive Flood Alerts here:

Sign up for flood warnings - <https://www.gov.uk/sign-up-for-flood-warnings>

Alternatively, sign up by calling Floodline; Telephone: 0345 988 1188 Textphone: 0345 602 6340 This is a 24-hour service with alerts sent by email, text or phone.

Reporting a flood: The Environment Agency is responsible for managing the risk of flooding from main rivers and the sea. Incidents can be reported to their hotline on 0800 80 70 90.

The County Council is responsible for managing the risk from surface water, groundwater and ordinary watercourses. Further information and how to report this type of flooding is available here:

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/.../flooding/reportingflooding>

It is always advisable for residents to take photos of any flood water affecting them in order to evidence the impacts for insurance and investigation purposes.

It is also important for flooding to be reported to the relevant body as swiftly as possible so that this information can be used to identify properties at risk, initiate investigations and also for evidence to identify and claim potential funding for future flood resilience or alleviation schemes. If we are not aware of the scale or impact of flooding, then it significantly reduces any likelihood of actions being taken.

Sandbags: The County Council does not provide sandbags to properties impacted by flooding, unless the water is coming directly from the public highway.

Further information on the availability of sandbags, can be found here:

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/.../environment/flooding/sandbags>

Protecting property from flooding It is the responsibility of homeowners to protect their property. While it is not always possible to completely protect a home or business against flooding, positive action can be taken to reduce the damage and the amount of water that gets in, and also the cost and time of cleaning up. Further information is available at:

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/.../env.../flooding/floodprevention>

Also refer to the further guidance below:

- Protecting your property – <https://nationalfloodforum.org.uk/.../protecting-your-.../>
- Protecting property from flooding - <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/.../protecting-your-property...>
- Prepare for flooding: <https://www.gov.uk/prepare-for.../protect-your-property>
- Adapting your home or business to the risk of flooding - <https://www.gov.uk/.../adapting-your-home-or-business-to...>

Finance: This Year's Budget (2024-2025)

Spending proposals totaling £2.6 billion to cover local services to Hampshire's 1.4 million residents will be considered by the County Council's Cabinet and Council this month. Extra funding was recently announced by Government for local councils for this coming financial year which will help towards delivering vital services for the most vulnerable people in our communities. Our local MPs have continued to lobby Government and highlighting the immense financial pressures all councils are under.

From 1 April 2024, a council tax increase of 4.99% is being put forward, of which 2% would go specifically towards adult social care and supporting the county's higher numbers of older people and adults with complex needs and disabilities. This recommended increase would generate an extra £39m towards our overall service delivery costs. If approved, this would work out as around an extra £1.40 for households to pay per week.

The recommended increase, which is below the current rate of retail price inflation, would still mean that Hampshire has one of the lowest council tax rates of any county in England.

Capital expenditure of £880.6m over 3 years is proposed for building and infrastructure projects across the county. The programme includes:

- £173m for the Older Adult care estate
- £192m investment in new and extended school for a further 5,312 school places and giving a total of 19,989 new school places by September 2027
- £163m for structural maintenance and improvement of roads and bridges
- £73m of Integrated Transport Plan schemes including £43m of schemes focused around walking and/or cycling improvements
- £76m to address condition-based enhancements to schools

A final decision on the County Council's budget for 2024/25 will be made by the full County Council on 22 February 2024.

County Council Budget consultation

You will no doubt have seen the publicity about Councils 'going bust' in the last few months. The latest was Nottingham City Council, closer to home Southampton City Council is close to declaring it cannot deliver a balanced budget this year and Somerset Council is asking the Government to allow them to increase Council Tax by 10% to avoid the same situation.

Hampshire County Council is NOT in that position, yet. Unusually for many councils we project our finances ahead by a number of years, we can therefore see when, and why, we anticipate there will be challenges in balancing the budget and continuing to deliver the services we are, by law, required to provide.

The County Council has a legal responsibility to carry out certain functions. We cannot say 'no' if someone asks for support and in many cases, we cannot means test or ask for a contribution toward the cost of providing a service. Examples of this are social care costs for older people, support for those with disabilities, the care of vulnerable children and young people and school transport for those who meet the necessary criteria. It's entirely right that we provide these services free of charge for those who need them. The consequence though is a cost that is only limited by the number of people requiring support.

Our projections show that while we will be able to balance our budget for the next two years, by 2026 there will be an anticipated shortfall of £132 million.

HCC therefore has to consider now ways by which we can balance our budget before then. We very much hope that comes in the way assistance from the Government, either by way of additional funding or more usefully allowing us to charge economic rates for some services and means test others. But it may not, so consequently we must now begin to consult on how we might change our discretionary services to meet that budget shortfall.

The feedback from last year's consultation told us that Hampshire's residents were supportive of service change, but notably opposed to service reduction. We have taken that on board and have prioritised those changes as part of our proposals upon which the County Council will now consult. This will include further internal reorganisation, increased charging for services and the sale of assets.

When a Council can no longer meet its costs, the Government send in Commissioners to run the Council and oversee its return to financial stability. This is what has happened to Nottingham, Birmingham and many others. The Commissioner will look at every non statutory obligation and want to understand why the Council might still be operating in that way. Their view will be that the Council should only do that which it is legally obliged, and any other services should be cut.

You can read more about the consultation here:

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/aboutthecouncil/haveyoursay/consultations/future-services-consultation>

County Council Budget consultation - HWRCs

One of the areas we need to consider for change and potential reduction is our network of Household Waste and Recycling Centres (HWRCs). Hampshire is the best served county in terms of its waste and recycling centres, we have more per square mile, per head of population and open them longer than any other area. Are there better ways of delivering this service?

As a Waste Disposal Authority, we're obligated to arrange for the deposit of household and garden waste at no charge under the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

In 2022/23, you made 2.1 million bookings, depositing nearly 120,000 tonnes of waste across our 24 HWRCs, costing over £10 million a year to operate. However, due to ongoing budget pressures, we are looking to reduce spending by a minimum of £1.2 million annually.

Proposed Changes Include:

1. **Charging for Discretionary Services**

- Premium booking slots
- Additional services by site staff
- Chargeable items like gloves and sacks

2. **Alternative Delivery Models**

- Handing over management to charities or community organizations
- Districts and boroughs managing some sites

3. ****Changes to Types of Waste Accepted****

- Evaluating efficiency by restricting certain waste types at specific sites

4. ****Reducing Opening Days/Hours****

- Potential reductions to opening hours and days to achieve savings

5. ****Reducing Number of Existing Sites****

HCC have split the sites into 4 tiers, based upon their size, usage and the cost of running them:

Tier 1

Newer, larger sites, fit for purpose.

Andover, Basingstoke, Eastleigh, Gosport, Segensworth, Waterlooville, **Winchester**

Tier 2

Strategic locations, some investment may be needed.

Alton, Efford, Farnborough, Havant, Netley

Tier 3

Smaller sites, operationally challenging, investment required.

Aldershot, Bordon, Casbrook (Romsey), Hedge End, Marchwood, Petersfield, Somerley

Tier 4

Smallest sites, poorest performing, most expensive to run

Alresford, Bishops Waltham, Fair Oak, Hartley Wintney, Hayling Island

Using the above criteria and tiered system, the options for site closures include:

- No closures
- Closure of Tier 4 sites only
- Closure of Tier 3 and Tier 4 sites

It is NOT the case that each of these proposals will be taken forward. We do though need to consider how we can find the savings we need from the HWRC system to contribute toward the cost of the statutory services we provide for the most vulnerable.

Many people have asked why we can't charge a small amount for services at HWRCs. The law prohibits this – we have been lobbying Government for the power to do this since 2015.

The Government's decision to ban charging for DIY waste (the charge for which only covered our processing costs) has resulted in an additional annual cost to the County Council of £2million.

You can read more about the HWRC consultation here: <https://www.hants.gov.uk/.../household-waste-recycling...>

You can have your say on our proposals for change here:

<https://hampshirecc.welcomesyourfeedback.net/s/FSC>

Once you have gone through the first couple of pages, then tick the box marker 'Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) to be taken to the consultation on HWRC proposals.

Hampshire Hospitals 'Hampshire Together' (new hospital) consultation.

You may have seen publicity about the proposals being put forward by Hampshire Hospitals Foundation Trust (the hospital trust covering Winchester, Basingstoke and Andover hospitals) for a new critical treatment hospital at North Waltham, near Basingstoke.

There have been various plans for the reorganisation of hospital services across north and mid Hampshire for many years.

The proposals would see Winchester hospital's A&E department and maternity services change. The A&E department would no longer deal with acute admissions and the maternity department would be midwife led, meaning that maternity situations where consultant input was required, and serious injury emergencies would need to go to North Waltham or Basingstoke site.

The construction of a new hospital in this location needs really serious consideration. Adding a third hospital location (fourth if you include Andover) already stretches the HHFT clinical model.

More importantly, more thought needs to be given to the population south of Winchester, who might at this point choose to go to Winchester should they need emergency or maternity care, but who are more likely as a result of the re-configuration of services to head towards Southampton.

The views of University Hospitals Southampton and Portsmouth NHS Trust are also vital in this conversation.

You can read more about the plan and respond to the consultation here:

<https://www.hampshiretogether.nhs.uk>

Hampshire Forest Partnership update

The Hampshire Forest Partnership is having a busy planting season. They have planted 24,300 trees and hedges and have an ambition to plant one million trees by 2050. There are two exciting opportunities for parishes or community groups to work with the Hampshire Forest Partnership:

- **Free Elm Trees available!** We have purchased 700 disease-resistant elms and we are still looking for homes for about 600 of them. Please help us by coming forward with a request for up to 20 Elm trees in your patch! The English countryside was once dominated by elms, but since the 1960s these trees have been ravaged by Dutch elm disease, accidentally introduced to Europe in the early 20th century. The Hampshire Forest Partnership with support from The Tree Council are funding disease resistant hybrid elm trees to help local nature recovery. Selective breeding of elms now means that we can bring these back to Hampshire; trials have shown that these hybrids show resistance to the disease and also support our native wildlife. We are particularly interested to plant the trees within hedges, in community spaces and as specimens in areas that have lost trees from ash dieback.

- **Shoots along the Routes** scheme seeks more projects. This scheme aims to improve landscape connectivity outside woodland areas. We'll be providing free trees to landowners and land managers to create over 630km of new green networks across the county. These networks will follow the routes of several A and B-roads across Hampshire. The scheme will also support eligible tree planting schemes within a 2km wide corridor along the routes to boost nature recovery.

If you are interested in proposing a location for either of the above, please email treeplanting@hants.gov.uk. We have funding for both so we can provide trees, stakes, guards and even information panels.

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