

Paul Gadd County Councillor Update

Saffron Walden Town Council – Planning and Transport Committee

10/11/22

[Note, items in italics are repeats from last month, still unresolved]

1. Flooding and drainage issues:

- a. I haven't had any enquiries of major flooding following the recent heavy rains, so hopefully the drains are holding up. The one issue is with the High St fish and chip shop because of tree roots directing rain into the shop, which I'm trying to address through the High St works;
- b. Essex Highways have programmed in the South Road blocked drain for major investigative work in early January 2023;
- c. *[That leaves Bridge Street as the other long-standing issue. My drains contact is going to talk to his infrastructure team and I'll then meet him on site hopefully in a couple of months;]* I'm still waiting to hear back;

2. Highways matters affecting the parish:

- a. *[Rissa's permanent replacement has now arrived – Sarah Tomlin – and I've passed her details to Lisa and Georgia. I am meeting her on 6 October to go through all the outstanding issues;]* I had a good meeting with Sarah, and a number of subsequent conversations and she seems very pro-active;
- b. The latest LHP meeting was held on 24/10. All of the schemes which had been approved are in theory on schedule, but that isn't very many of all the ones we put forward. In particular:
 - i. the bollards outside Lankesters should be going in soon – a design has been produced which the resident is happy with;
 - ii. the TPOs for the market square regularisation and pedestrianisation should be being completed; on the pedestrianisation though, it's now emerged that the scheme put forward to the LHP is just for design and not implementation – which is hard to believe – and that they are expecting me to go back next year for a separate request to get it implemented! I'm trying to get round this and get the scheme both designed and delivered this financial year;
 - iii. all the dropped kerbs should be going in;
 - iv. I'm still chasing on the various zebra crossing requests and whether we can use the Linden Homes money for some of them and am still waiting for answers;
 - v. Most schemes which hadn't been validated still haven't been. Essex Highways have in theory recruited someone just to do validation to clear the backlog
- c. *[I've had a request from a couple of members of public for a zebra crossing on Cromwell Rd to ease children going to school from the Winstanley Rd side – what do people think?]* My fault – we agreed that Trilby and I would have a walk around and I haven't found time to do it;
- d. High Street pavements – Georgia and I are chasing to see if we can get the scheme resurrected. Note however that Essex Highways seem now to have a policy of not doing anything to footpaths unless there is a major safety issue;

- e. Debden Road / Borough Lane junction: I've been contacted by a resident concerned about recent accidents at this junction and the potential dangers particularly to SWCHS students; ECC are going to do a feasibility study;
 - f. *[Under the "Member Led Pothole Repair Scheme": it seems now that clusters aren't treated as one so I've quickly got through my first allocation of 18, but with another 18 to come. In Saffron Walden they should be doing the Thaxted Rd / Peaslands Rd mini-roundabout, London Road (done), Castle St and the right hand turning lane on the B1383 coming from the station to Wendens Road. Peaslands Rd / Mt Pleasant Rd has too many to do (!) so I've asked for it to be resurfaced – response outstanding!]. On Peaslands Rd I've had a holding response – will keep chasing to try to get it into the 2023/24 Capital Programme. On the potholes, London Rd and the B1383 are done but I'm still waiting for the others. I now have my next allocation of 18 – please let me have suggestions]* Castle St is programmed for 6 nights from 21 November;
 - g. Road closures generally – there seem to be a large number of road closures affecting Saffron Walden at the moment coming shortly, including the route to Thaxted, Sparrows End Hill and the High Street, and possibly the road through Debden. I've asked for information on how these are being co-ordinated but still waiting to hear;
 - h. Plenty of other issues re potholes, requests for speed bumps etc.
3. Cycling and other sustainable transport:
- a. I'm still waiting to hear on the LHP schemes and where they have got to;
 - b. UDC have been delayed in commissioning the LCWIP because of the Local Plan issues but should now be doing it. I'm very disappointed that Essex Highways didn't ask for any cycling infrastructure in connection with the Rosconn development, and everyone who was present for the Kier presentation will have heard that they aren't proposing to offer anything. I've therefore been in contact with UDC and Essex Highways to try to get the position changed and try to persuade Essex Highways that sustainable transport connections should be a requirement of any new housing scheme, particularly as Policy SW12 of the SWNP now requires it. We had a meeting on 7/11 and I'm hopeful of progress;
4. Lack of ECC requests for Education Contributions:
- a. *I wrote to the Cabinet Member for Education at ECC on 25 July to ask why ECC are making no requests for secondary education contributions from new housing developments in Great Chesterford and Saffron Walden. I chased again on 25 August, and finally got a response on 16 September saying that no contributions are being requested because they aren't needed! I went back to challenge this and have had a follow up request essentially saying that the ECC Education projections (latest version 2022-2031) show no need for any expansion at either SWCHS or Joyce Frankland). I'll liaise with UDC and see if the ECC forecasts do reflect the local rate of development.]* I've had a number of conversations with the Cabinet Member for Education, and he has confirmed that ECC are not asking for contributions, on the basis that the pupils from the new developments will displace pupils from outside the primary catchment area and therefore no new capacity is needed at SWCHS or Joyce Frankland; it seems crazy to me but that is the ECC position
5. Essex County Council generally:

- a. We had a Full Council meeting on 11/10/22, which included a 6-monthly financial update. Without explicitly saying it, the clear implication is that ECC is in a fairly precarious financial position – as far as I can see, they have had a history of under-budgeting and hoping for “cost-savings”, which has led to the current poor services, and the combination of ongoing reduced Government support and current inflation levels are going to make this much worse. I fear that next year’s budget is going to make very ugly reading;
- b. As an example, I’m on a Place Services Scrutiny Committee, which scrutinises the condition of the roads amongst other things. The papers for their last meeting, on 20/10, have highlighted a massive budget shortfall for highway maintenance. I’ve cut and pasted below the contents of the relevant slide:
- “HIGHWAYS MAINTENANCE BUDGET INFORMATION*
- Even at current levels we are investing less than half the annual amount required just to ‘stay still’, exacerbated even more by inflationary pressures.*
- o Carriageways. comprising 5,100 miles across 3 main classifications: PR1, PR2 and Local Roads. The current proposed levels of investment in the MTRS will see decline across all 3 classifications, with significant decline possible over the next 10 years.*
- o The value of annual deterioration is modelled at £77.7m/annum across Essex. When compared to ECC’s investment of £36.675m/annum it is clear the asset is in managed decline.*
- o ‘Other assets’ (Footways, PRoW, street lighting etc). The annual deterioration of our Other Assets is now around £52m (as calculated for highway network asset valuation, using CIPFA guidance and tools), the budget is only around 50% of this. The condition of Footways, Structures, Vehicle Restraints and School Crossing Flashing Warning Signs has been of concern for a significant period, and the current indicative investment levels will only worsen the situation.*
- We have more structures that need strengthening this year compared to last, insurance claims on our footways are rising, and these are areas of particular concern.*
 - We no longer have a revenue budget for potholes and are totally reliant on capital maintenance allocation and the DfT pothole fund”*
- c. We spent some while at the meeting challenging this and what the plan was – the only answer really was that new technology and improvements in working practices will magically solve the issue!