

Report to Well Hill Residents Association April 2014

AGM

Firstly, I was very sorry to miss last Wednesday's AGM. As you may be aware, there was a serious – regrettably, fatal – accident on the M26, with the consequence that the road was closed and the M20 became heavily congested. Like many others, I was stuck on the M20 for two and a half hours and so only reached the Mission Church after everyone had gone home. Please find below the main points of the report that I would have given, which inevitably has some overlap with my recent article for the WHRA newsletter. It nonetheless aims to set out what I have been working on in Well Hill in the last year.

Rock Hill

The works carried out last summer in Rock Hill involved the installation of a French drain at the top of the hill. However, what became clear in the course of the works was that, while the water is now taken into the drainage system at the top of the hill, there was no drainage infrastructure further down than a so-called bubble gully that takes the water under the junction with Well Hill. Beyond this point, the water discharges back into the road. The original intention had been to cleanse any drains that were in this lower part of the hill. A further site meeting to reexamine the issue has been scheduled for early May.

Other drainage issues

Works were carried out in the dip in the road in Well Hill between the junctions with Firmingers Road and Parkgate Road last spring and the drainage appears to work somewhat better than in the past. The issue is clearly not fully resolved, though much of the outstanding problem may relate to water gathered in potholes.

As I mentioned in the newsletter, Kent Highways have developed a regular gully cleansing schedule, with flood sensitive areas cleansed every six months and other areas on a cycle ranging from one to two years. I have examined the schedule and the major drainage routes in Well Hill – Rock Hill, Firmingers Road, Well Hill – are inspected every twelve months and cleansed as required. There is clearly a case for arguing that some sites should be considered flood sensitive and therefore should be on a six month schedule, though the causes of the problem may be different from drains blocked by inadequate cleansing (potholes, runoff from fields, structural problems in the drains). I would be interested in residents' and RA views on this.

Potholes

In previous years, Kent Highways has made available sums of money for 'find and fix' operations on potholes in the spring. At the time of this year's budget (in February), £2.5 million was set aside for earlier works. More money is being committed, including an £8 million grant from government. In Sevenoaks District, some 50 to 60 potholes are being fixed each day, though the winter did of course leave a huge backlog. A significant package of works in Well Hill is set for May. Residents may find the mapping system on the KCC website

(www.kent.gov.uk) helpful, enabling tracking of individual potholes and other highway problems, though some of the terminology applied is not as clear as it might be.

BT lines and broadband

On my and KCC officers' prompting, BT examined the problems affecting phone lines in Pump Lane and Well Hill last summer. They were unable to identify the problem. I have now asked one of our most determined and effective officers working in this area to take the matter on and he will be once more raising it with BT.

The County-wide superfast broadband initiative, involving an agreement between KCC, BT and government agency BDUK is being rolled out in Sevenoaks District between now and September. It is unlikely to have much impact on Well Hill because broadband speeds were raised by the Crockenhill/Well Hill community broadband initiative of a couple of years ago. However, Kent is now also set to benefit from a further government initiative, the Superfast Extension Programme Fund, which will raise superfast broadband coverage further by 2017, and a Well Hill is likely to be a beneficiary of this.

Firmingers Road site

I attended and contributed to the informal hearing on the traveller application in Firmingers Road.

Council tax

KCC has recently set its budget under conditions of continuing austerity, as government grants reduce and the need for services such as social care increases. KCC has had to deliver savings of £269 million over the last three years, i.e. around £90 million per year on an annual net budget of a little over £900 million. We will need to make savings on a similar scale over the next few years. This year, most of the gap will be closed by savings on expenditure, but after three years of a council tax freeze there will be an increase of 1.99%.