

WRITTEN QUESTIONS PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 44

1. Question by Councillor Tutt to the Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability

Please can you provide details of the total amount of fines charged to parents in East Sussex for withdrawing their children from school for term time holidays?

Could you also say whether ESCC is planning to return this money in light of the High Court ruling in May that such fines are unlawful?

Answer by the Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability

The amount recouped in fines over the last three academic years is set out in the table below:

Academic Year	PNs Issued	Value Paid
2015/16*	1291	£ 59,880
2014/15	2264	£ 115,200
2013/14	1772	£ 88,320

* To date

The court has not ruled that fines are unlawful per se; it has stated that they should not be issued where a child otherwise has 'regular attendance' – something which is not defined in law. In the case in question, the child maintained an attendance rate of 93% which the court deemed as 'otherwise regular'. It is unclear, however, how the court would have reacted if the child's attendance was below 90% as they would have been classed as a persistent absentee. This is not, therefore, a blanket ruling that all fines are unlawful. The Department for Education has stated that it will be looking to change to law to clarify the definition of 'regular attendance' in line with their view that "*children's attendance is non-negotiable*"; we are still awaiting further details on this.

The ruling does not apply retrospectively and, therefore, the council is under no obligation to return money already paid in fines.

2. Question by Councillor Earl to the Lead Member for Economy

In view of the great news of the opening of the Bexhill to Hastings Link Road and the statements made about how it would contribute to the economic regeneration of Bexhill and East Sussex while providing many new homes, could I ask when we can expect to hear of any likely new businesses moving to the area. Have any sites been reserved, if so how many?

Answer by the Lead Member for Economy

In line with the Rother Local Plan, development could not be occupied at North East Bexhill until the Bexhill Hastings Link Road (BHLR) was completed and thereafter the road linking Wrestwood Road and the BHLR, the North East Bexhill Gateway Road (NEBGR) (now called Mount View Street) had also been completed. Initial plans were that it would be two years after completion of the BHLR before the first sites would be serviced and the first buildings commenced.

Growing Places Fund and Local Growth Fund investment in the area through the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SE LEP) has accelerated development meaning that the NEBGR and Glover's House were delivered by Sea Change Sussex (SCS) in parallel with the final phases of construction of the BHLR and opened ahead of schedule in 2015. Glover's House was fully let upon opening and will act as a catalyst to further private investment in North East Bexhill. Outline planning permission has been granted for an initial 22,000m² metres of business space at Bexhill Enterprise Park with construction due to commence in 2017.

There has been strong interest in commercial space in the area and enquiries have been received by SCS and Locate East Sussex (LES) for investment and relocation to the area. The immediate enquiries through SCS for Bexhill Enterprise Park are specifically for completed buildings and of a scale and nature which require the next phase of development. There are larger enquiries but these are medium to long term due to the decision making timescales of the interested parties. LES are currently working with five organisations looking to establish themselves or relocate within the vicinity of the BHLR to take advantage of the economic opportunities presented.

To have the Bexhill Enterprise Park sites connected to the strategic road network by the North East Bexhill Gateway Road; 22000m² of employment space consented; the first phase of the Bexhill Enterprise Park, Glovers House, built and wholly let upon the opening of the BHLR is a major achievement and a sound basis upon which to encourage the current and future levels of interest and take up of business space in the coming years.

3. Question by Councillor Earl to the Lead Member for Transport and Environment

In light of the possible delay in starting the development alongside the Bexhill to Hastings Link road (phase one) will the new north Bexhill access road be delayed?

Answer by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment

The North Bexhill Access Road is a 2.4km single carriageway road link between the A269 Ninfield Road and the Bexhill-Hastings Link Road (BHLR).

The road being promoted by Sea Change Sussex and will unlock 38,000sqm of employment floor space in North Bexhill as identified in the 2006 and 2014 Rother District Local Plans. The Access Road also provides the road infrastructure to unlock the proposed urban extension in North East Bexhill with potential to directly unlock land for up to 780 new homes.

The business case for the scheme was approved by the South East Sussex Local Enterprise Partnership's Accountability Board in November 2015 thereby unlocking the £16.6m of Local Growth Fund monies for the scheme.

Planning permission was granted by Rother District Council in 11 February 2016 following which Sea Change Sussex has acquired land for the scheme and undertaken site clearance, archaeological and other pre-commencement works ahead of construction starting this summer. The completion of the scheme is programmed for late 2017/18 financial year.

There is no delay in delivering the North Bexhill Access Road. In taking the scheme forward, Sea Change Sussex has actually accelerated the delivery programme of the scheme; enabled early spend of Local Growth Fund monies on the project which demonstrates East Sussex's ability to deliver infrastructure that supports growth to the LEP and Government, and once the scheme is completed it will support the early delivery of the housing and employment sites in the North Bexhill area as identified in the adopted Rother Local Plan.

4. Question by Councillor Lambert to the Lead Member for Transport and Environment

The bridge over the Cuckmere River at Exceat just outside Seaford is a notorious bottleneck. In addition, access to the internationally acclaimed meanders and walk down to the sea a few yards away is highly risky. Visitors who come to the area in large numbers have to literally take their lives in their hands to cross the busy main road – often running to avoid the heavy traffic. The businesses around the entrance to Friston Forest are disadvantaged by this lack of access.

Now, more than ever, we need to support our local economy by providing a safe crossing for visitors and to keep traffic flowing freely, including the buses between Brighton and Eastbourne on which many people rely.

Will the Lead Member therefore investigate the possibility of providing:

1. traffic lights over the bridge to assist the flow of traffic; and
2. a safe crossing for pedestrians visiting the area

Answer by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment

The majority of traffic using this section of the A259 has local origins and destinations. Whilst the A259 remains important, both as a tourist route and to carry local traffic, our policy has been not to encourage any more strategic traffic onto that route which should, as far as possible, be channelled onto the A27. Any scheme that might encourage strategic traffic to divert from the A27 could have a potential detrimental impact on the towns and villages along the A259.

Having said that, any concerns in relation to the transfer of strategic traffic onto the A259 corridor would be eased if significant improvements were made to the A27. Whilst £75m has been allocated towards smaller scale improvements on the A27 between Lewes and Polegate, the MPs, local authority leaders and the Local Enterprise Partnership's are lobbying Government for additional funding to deliver a more comprehensive solution to address the existing and future issues with the A27.

Officers have considered in detail the option to introduce traffic signals at the bridge on a permanent basis, which has been requested in a petition received by the County Council in March and which will be considered at my decision making meeting on 18 July 2016.