

WRITTEN QUESTIONS PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 44

1) Questions from Councillor Hilton to the Lead Member for Transport and Environment

a) What are the plans for the funding awarded by Active Travel England (ATE) to East Sussex CC? Will the Lead Member for Transport and Environment confirm if any of this funding will be committed to the cycle route to the Conquest Hospital in Hastings which has been identified as a priority route in the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIP)?

Response from the Lead Member for Transport and Environment

The County Council has recently been awarded dedicated Active Travel Funding from Active Travel England. This comprises:

- **£326,741 for 2024/25 Active Travel Fund (ATF) 5 capital funding** - This funding will be focussed on the development and delivery of existing school street projects and the development of a local active travel scheme development for an existing scheme in the Peacehaven and Telscombe area. In addition, a proportion of the funding is allocated to the maintenance of existing active travel measures across the county.
- **£1,110,557 from the 2025/26 Consolidated Active Travel Fund** – officers are currently reviewing potential projects that this can be allocated to during 2025/26 but it is likely to go on schemes which are already being developed and/or close to construction as identified in the council's capital programme of local transport improvements to enable the funding to be allocated and spent within the timescale of the grant conditions set by Active Travel England.

Whilst a cycle route to the Conquest Hospital in Hastings is identified as a priority scheme in the East Sussex Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan adopted in September 2021, previous feasibility work undertaken on this scheme highlighted several constraints impacting on its deliverability and potential acceptability by local stakeholders. In addition, any route to and from the hospital would stand in isolation and would not connect into a wider cycle network. Therefore, because there are no current designs for any such scheme, its lack of connectivity into other routes and the timing constraints for spending the funding, none of the 2025/26 Consolidated Active Travel Fund funding will be allocated to introducing a cycle route to and from Conquest Hospital.

Following the adoption of the East Sussex Local Transport Plan in October 2024, officers have recently commenced a review and update of the East Sussex LCWIP. As part of this review process, the County Council will engage with the Borough Council on identifying affordable and deliverable network of routes for the town that, subject to future funding being available, can be developed and delivered. The LCWIP review process which will be completed by the end of the calendar year.

b) The Local Government Association (LGA) has recently published a councillor guide to best practice for streetworks. Given the chaos that has been created in Hastings over the past six months from many streetworks projects over running and with seemingly little coordination, can Cllr Dowling give a clear commitment that ESCC will follow the best practice guidelines outlined in this report? This includes.

- **Clarity on responsibility.** The legislation is clear that authorities are responsible for coordination and should take a lead in improving coordination.
- **Voluntary policies to share works.** A 'dig once' policy is a voluntary arrangement to plan works together, with the aim of accessing one road for all services at the same time. This rests on good communication, and utilities firms seeing a financial benefit from reduced costs. 'Trench sharing' is similar but using the exact same trench. This requires a clear agreement on liability and responsibility for restitution. In some places, 'dig once' policies have been agreed across multiple authorities - such as 6 councils across Berkshire [coming together](#) to make a trench-sharing guarantee on digital infrastructure works.
- **Early finish alerts.** It costs utilities little to let authorities know if work finishes early. If authorities reassure them that there will be no negative consequence for doing so - for example any changes to permits approved - utilities can be encouraged to keep authorities up-to-date.
- **Promote 'optimum times' not just 'maximum times'.** Many places only put maximum times on permits. But they can also add detail on when the best times are - encouraging the least-disruptive times and allowing different stages of work to be planned in more detail. Surrey County Council, for example, sets out the ideal time for works to take place in its permits - giving a clear steer on when it would like work to happen.
- **Advance work windows.** Local authorities can lead by example and give other organisations details on when they expect to undertake works. This means that other organisations have a clear window in which to complete works,
- **Bus briefings' and 'bus champions'.** A single point of contact or a single meeting with bus operators. This lets them know about planned works, and allows any major concerns to be communicated to streetworks.
- **Accessibility considerations.** Streetworks can be extremely disruptive for walking, wheeling, and people with limited mobility. The best councils go beyond the bare minimum required, and actively think about how drop-kerbs, diversions and pavement surfaces will affect people on bikes, scooters or wheelchairs avoiding returning to the same road again.

Response from the Lead Member for Transport and Environment

The Councillor's Guide to Better Streetworks was published on 4 June 2025 by the Local Government Association. The term 'Streetworks' includes installing and repairing equipment, under and above street level for utilities such as gas, water, electricity, broadband, telecommunication networks and so on.

Streetworks are governed by the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991, Traffic Management Act 2004, and Highways Act 1980 which combine to set out who is responsible for streetworks and how they are managed. In line with legislation, East Sussex County Council has the responsibility for coordinating streetworks.

The demand for road space occupation has nationally increased by approximately 30% and a similar growth in demand has been experienced in East Sussex, more acutely in our larger towns. The Traffic Manager, located within East Sussex Highways, has the responsibility to work with, encourage, and coordinate access to the road network in the county, including Hastings. The Traffic Manager coordinates quarterly with Public Utilities and others to ensure the road space is managed effectively in line with the best practice guidelines. These are undertaken through quarterly planning meetings and follow the DfT Coordination Code of Practice 2023 (currently being updated) and the HAUC England guidance document for Operation of Permit Schemes (and Permit Condition text).

Additionally, the Traffic Manager also coordinates with Passenger Transport colleagues and bus operators to discuss individual works and projects.

The County Council already follows existing best practice guidelines and will review the recently published Councillor's Guide to Better Streetworks to ensure every opportunity is maximised to secure compliance and continuous improvement.

c) Road licensing – I welcome the introduction of this scheme but note with dismay that it allows the digging up of the pavement with no charge. What monitoring is ESCC doing to check that utility companies are not simply moving all their street works where possible to the pavement which will result in increased disruption for pedestrians? Are there plans to extend the road licence scheme so it covers pavements and highways so not discriminating again pedestrians who are already having to struggle with uneven and badly maintained pavements?

Response by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment

According to Streetworks data, there are very few new works (except when renewing customer connections, broadband works or repairing leaks or faults) undertaken or installed in the pavement. This is likely due to the congestion of existing Public Utility infrastructure contained in most pavements and due to the depth of excavation required for new utility infrastructure to be installed.

The Network Coordinators (and Inspectors if inspecting the site) will ensure all stakeholders are carefully considered and will ensure permit conditions are applied accordingly. Minimising inconvenience (especially for those with a disability) is a primary objective under the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 section 59 and an objective the County Council strives to achieve with every set of works undertaken on the public highway. Currently legislation only permits the County Council to charge for works that affect traffic flows on the carriageway.

d) I understand the maximum charge is £2500 a day. Are you charging Balfour Beatty £2500 a day for their extended roadworks on the QGR?

Response by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment

No. The works at QGR had a provisional advanced authorisation (PAA) submitted prior to the 1st April 2025 and are therefore in compliance with the terms of the “Transitional Period” within the document and therefore are not subject to charges.

2) Question from Councillor Lambert to the Lead Member for Transport and Environment

There are roads across the county which are tarmac skim over a concrete base. Inevitably, the tarmac skim wears off quickly, but these roads in most cases do not meet the criteria for pothole repairs, leaving them in a condition that is potentially dangerous, not just for car users but for cyclists and those with mobility vehicles, particularly at night.

I have finally been successful in getting one of the worst roads in Seaford, which is also a bus route, onto the concrete road maintenance programme although this is far from satisfactory as it appears only one road in the estate will be repaired leaving the rest of the estate in its present appalling condition to the dismay of residents.

I was alarmed therefore to receive the following email from the Contracts Maintenance Team:

“We are not currently running a concrete road maintenance programme; however, if and when appropriate resources become available, the site will be reviewed for inclusion as we are aware of the maintenance needs of this road”.

When I queried this further, I received the following response from the Highways Department:

“As you know, the Council manage its roads through a structured asset management approach that prioritises work based on safety, serviceability and long-term value for money. With regard to concrete roads - we recognise that whilst

surface issues such as discolouration, minor cracking, joint wear or delamination of the asphalt overlay may develop over time, these rarely pose safety risks or indicate structural problems. The underlying integrity of concrete roads typically remains sound for an extended period”.

Unfortunately, this is not the experience of either myself or of residents. The Highway Steward does indeed carry out regular checks but just as regularly reports that no action is possible as the road surface does not meet the criteria for pothole repair.

a) Will the Lead Member explain what evidence officers are using to come to the conclusion that tarmac skimmed concrete roads "rarely pose safety risks or indicate structural problems" both in the short, medium or long term?

Response by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment

Thank you for the question. The conclusion that tarmac skimmed concrete roads "rarely pose safety risks or indicate structural problems" is supported by a combination of national guidance, local engineering evidence, ongoing technical inspections, and regular highway steward observations. Specifically:

- **Historical Evidence & Technical Inspections:** The council conducts routine technical inspections—including visual condition surveys and skid resistance measurements. These consistently show that tarmac overlays on concrete roads maintain their structural integrity and do not present elevated safety risks or significant structural problems in the short, medium, or long term. Any surface deterioration observed tends to be superficial rather than indicative of deeper issues.
- **Highway Steward Inspections:** Our highway stewards carry out regular site visits and inspections across the network. Their reports typically identify defects such as surface wear, minor delamination, or cosmetic deterioration on tarmac skimmed concrete roads. Importantly, these defects are usually categorised as non-safety related and do not require urgent intervention. This ongoing monitoring helps ensure that any emerging safety risks are identified and addressed promptly.
- **National Guidance (ADEPT & DfT, 2019):** Guidance from ADEPT and the Department for Transport's Pothole Repair Guide notes that bitumen-based overlays (typically 10–40mm thick) were commonly applied to concrete roads to reduce noise. While these overlays can degrade visually through delamination, the guide confirms that such defects are highly unlikely to pose safety hazards. However, care is taken where narrow rutting could affect cyclists or motorcyclists.
- **Risk-Based Approach:** In line with the Well-Maintained Highways Code of Practice, our assessment of defects considers not only their depth but also

their surface area, location and risk to road users. The commonly used intervention level across local authorities in Great Britain is around 40mm depth, which aligns with our current approach. Lowering this threshold specifically for concrete roads to 30mm or below would significantly increase defect numbers and costs, without clear safety benefits.

- **Cost and Feasibility:** Experience from authorities such as West Berkshire Council indicates that reducing defect intervention criteria from 40mm to 30mm can incur substantial additional costs—estimated at over half a million pounds in the first year for our larger network, plus ongoing annual costs. Complete removal of asphalt overlays would also raise road noise, disrupt kerb and drainage levels, and involve further significant expense.

In summary, the available evidence and national best practice do not support the view that tarmac skimmed concrete roads pose systemic safety or structural problems. We continue to monitor and maintain these roads using a risk-based, evidence-led approach, supported by regular highway steward inspections, to ensure safety and durability.

b) Can the Lead Member further provide specific information about the extent of concrete roads across East Sussex and the current state of these roads.

Response by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment

There are approximately 705km of concrete road in the county which is approximately 20% of our road network. This is broken down as follows:

A roads – 148km

B roads – 82km

C roads – 331km

Unclassified roads - 144km

The Scrutiny Review of March 2019 highlighted that concrete roads make up a small proportion (9%) of the unclassified network and highlighted issues such as surface cracking, overlays wearing away and damage to stick-on kerbs. That review heard that concrete roads are treated no differently to other roads in that our Highway Stewards apply the same policies and intervention criteria in determining safety defects.

3) Question from Councillor MacCleary to the Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability.

A primary school in my area has been told by its catering provider, Chartwells, that it must pay an additional £2,600 this year to cover the company's rising National Insurance contributions – costs now being passed directly to schools. This is in addition to the nearly £30,000 shortfall the school already faces due to the Government underfunding the Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM) programme. The school currently serves around 180 free school meals per day.

This is far from an isolated case. I am aware of many other schools facing similar or even more severe deficits. This is simply one example of a wider issue that is causing deep concern across the county. Schools are telling me the situation is unsustainable – what are they telling you? If schools are raising these issues with me, I cannot believe ESCC is not hearing the same concerns.

I understand that ESCC centrally procures a catering contract that schools can opt into, regardless of whether they are maintained or academies. Chartwells is the current provider under this arrangement, which runs until July 2026. While the contract may perform well on paper, schools are being left to pick up the pieces of a broken funding model, all while also being charged an additional management fee by the council for administering the contract.

Will the Lead Member explain:

1. What oversight ESCC has over the behaviour of providers such as Chartwells when they pass on new costs to schools, and whether this practice is permitted under the terms of the current contract?
2. Whether ESCC has assessed how widespread this problem is and what direct feedback you've received from schools currently using the contract?
3. What practical support ESCC is offering to schools who find themselves unable to meet the rising costs of providing free school meals?
4. What assessment has been made of the impact of the management fee charged by ESCC, especially at a time when schools are already running at a deficit?
5. What representations ESCC has made to central government about the chronic underfunding of UIFSM and the need for the funding rate to match the real cost of meals?
6. As part of the 2026 contract re-procurement process, will ESCC commit to stronger safeguards to prevent unfair cost-shifting onto schools and ensure that their feedback meaningfully shapes the new contract?

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

1. ESCC work with Chartwells to ensure contract key performance indicators are met and that contractual service level agreements are adhered. Following the announcement of the National Insurance increases ESCC worked with all our key contractors to understand and discuss the impact of this on their costs. It was decided not include this increase to meal prices in this academic year prices, to fairly represent the changes affecting each individual school and to avoid an in-year meal price increase. However, prices are being increased for the start of the new academic year. ESCC are aware that schools have queried this increase, and a few have asked us if this is permitted as part of the school meals contract. The change is covered in the contract terms for school catering between ESCC and Chartwells.
2. Some schools have asked additional questions relating to this increase and responses have been provided to individual schools. The increase in National Insurance was also addressed at the recent BURSARS forum via a face-to-face presentation to schools in attendance.
3. For local authority-maintained schools, the ESCC schools finance team works closely with schools to help them manage budget challenges, this includes bespoke support for schools in financial difficulty.
4. Management fees are assessed on an annual basis, and prior to the management fee increase of 2025, there was a slight increase to management fees in 2024, the school catering contract had no significant increase in management fees over recent years. The management fee allows for the contractual delivery and management of this service to 136 schools and academies.
5. ESCC continues to lobby central government on funding for Councils, including for schools but has not yet made representations specifically on this issue.
6. As part of the new school meals contract procurement, engagement session has been held with school, academies and food partnership groups to ensure that the procurement can focus on the requirements of schools, whilst remaining competitively priced and adhering to government regulations on menu and nutrition. As the National Insurance increase was introduced during the current contract period the new contract will take this into account and the increase will form part of the new contract cost.

Key points for consideration in future procurement outcomes:

- a) ESCC will continue to deliver good contract management which focusses on efficiency, environmental impact, value for money and good service levels.
- b) An ESCC contract tracker has been put into place to ensure additional control and monitoring of contract and KPIs and outline what has worked well and note areas which have needed improvement (and done) or those that are outstanding.
- c) The successful bidder will be expected to provide a robust sustainability report and roadmap to reach Carbon Net Zero as well as focusing on value for money, choice and nutritional outcomes

4) Question from Councillor Wright to the Lead Member for Transport and Environment

Transport for London released the following press release on road safety on 21 May 2025:

<https://tfl-newsroom.prgloo.com/news/powerful-new-long-term-tfl-research-shows-20mph-speed-limits-save-lives-on-londons-roads>

The press release states the following:

Transport for London undertook analysis of more than 150, 20mph schemes implemented between 1989 and 2013, to better understand the impact of the schemes over a longer time period. The report shows that people killed or seriously injured on borough roads reduced by 34 per cent following implementation of 20mph speed limits. The evidence in this new report will be instrumental in TfL's work toward achieving the Mayor's Vision Zero goal to eliminate death and serious injury from London's transport network and to enable more walking and cycling in the capital.

Questions:

- a) How many lives could be saved and serious injuries prevented over the next 3 years in East Sussex if ESCC were able to reduce KSI's by 34% as in the London example?

Response by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment.

The TfL study referred to is an analysis of 157 20mph schemes that were introduced in London between 1989 and 2013 and were a combination of schemes with traffic calming and signed only schemes. It is also important to highlight that over this period of 24 years, TFL and London Borough Councils have not used the implementation of 20mph as their primary strategy to reduce KSIs, but as part of a package of measures that aligns with Safer Systems approach which have required

significant funding. For example, TFL invested £54 million over five years (2019 to 2023) to improve the safety of 73 junctions across London. ESCC along with the other SSRP partners are committed to a safer systems approach across Sussex.

Across these 157 schemes, whilst KSI incidents fell by 34% in total, the outcomes were varied. In the majority of these schemes (54%), there was either no reduction in KSIs, or KSI's increased.

The latest full year figures we hold is for 2024 when there were 409 KSI casualties in East Sussex. A 34% reduction would see 270 KSIs. Considering the figures for residential areas, there were 166 KSI casualties in 30mph speed limits in East Sussex, a 34% reduction in KSIs would see 110 KSIs.

b) Based on the long-term London experience and example of councils such as Oxfordshire, Cornwall, Surrey, and Buckinghamshire and the Welsh Government, plus others, all prioritising the roll out of 20mph speed limits. The evidence for the efficacy of 20mph speed limits and the increasing number of Highways Authorities that are now using 20 mph speed limits as their primary strategy, at what point, will ESCC relinquish their intransigence on this matter?

Response by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment

East Sussex County Council (ESCC) supports 20mph speed limits where appropriate. Adopted Policy PS05/02 allows for the implementation of 20mph zones or speed limits to be considered where they are likely to be self-enforcing. The policy aligns to DfT guidance on setting local speed limits.

When considering how ESCC assesses and prioritises road safety concerns including requests for lower speed limits, it is important to consider not only the Local Speed Limit Policy PS05/02 but also the wider policy and operational context. This includes ESCC's Local Transport Plan, and the processes and criteria followed when setting the annual Capital Programme for Local Transport Improvements, and the annual Casualty Reduction, Community Focused Road Safety and Speed Management Programmes. The Council has a finite amount of funding to develop local transport improvements, and we need to ensure that we target our resources towards those schemes which will be of greatest benefit to our local communities.

During 2024 the Scrutiny Speed limit Review Board considered examples of the approach taken to 20mph speed limits by Oxfordshire, Cornwall, Surrey, and Buckinghamshire councils and the Welsh Government. The Board noted that those that have prioritised the roll out of 20mph speed limits and zones have allocated significant additional funding to enable this. For example, Cornwall have invested £4million and Oxfordshire £8million. In Wales, £34m was allocated to implement the default signed only 20mph policy, with a further £5m allocated last year to reverse

some of the 20mph limits. In London, it cost over £6m to design and implement 20 mph speed limits across 65km of London's roads that were implemented from 2023.

Within East Sussex, requests for lower speed limits or traffic calming schemes are funded from the Capital Programme of local transport Improvements, which has an annual budget of £3m. Schemes funded from this budget historically have been assessed against their contribution towards delivering the Local Transport Plan (LTP3).

With the adoption of LTP4 by the Council in October 2024, and the emphasis on vision led planning for people and places in the Strategy, officers are developing a revised scheme assessment and prioritisation process to reflect the objectives and priorities set out in our new Local Transport Plan.

In addition, with national figures showing 9 out of 10 collisions are caused by driver behaviour, we have been working for a number of years with The Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) and partners from the SSRP, to deliver an innovative programme using data science to understand the causes of serious collisions and test interventions among priority groups that could potentially help to reduce the number of people being killed or seriously injured on East Sussex roads.

Nationally, KSI statistics are considered over a 3 year period rather than 1 year, due to annual fluctuations. An analysis of works undertaken as part of the Casualty Reduction Programme in 2020/21 has recently concluded. The Casualty Reduction Programme identifies locations where there have been 4 or more crashes in a 25 metre radius in urban areas, or 4 or more crashes in a 50 metres radius in rural areas over a 12 month period and implements road safety measures designed to improve the safety at these locations.

The 3-year data for the casualty reduction schemes completed in 2020/21 show that collisions in these hotspot areas fell by 53% and KSIs fell by 35%. This demonstrates that a targeted approach to road safety is highly effective at reducing KSIs.