

REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL ON 28 FEBRUARY 2013 SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR ALASTAIR WALTERS AS PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY

**Uttlesford's Local Highway Panel leads the way in Essex
A report from Cllr Alastair Walters**

Background

The Local Highway Panel (LHP) is a partnership between Uttlesford and Essex County Council Highways. Although it was formed in the latter part of 2011 it did not become fully operational until June 2012.

It receives funding from ECC which for 2012/2013 is £472K to spend on highway improvement schemes within the district many of which will have been approved at some point by Essex Highways.

The LHP consists of four local County Members (Cllrs Susan Barker, Robert Chambers, Ray Gooding and Simon Walsh), four UDC members (Cllrs Martin Foley, John Freeman, John Salmon and myself), and two representatives of Uttlesford Parish Councils (Cllrs Mel Sullivan and Alan Townsend).

Uttlesford LHP is one of twelve in the County which were formed to consider and prioritise local highway schemes, promote greater working partnership between County and District/Borough Councils, and to ensure there is proper engagement with local town and parish councils, and representative groups.

The LHP also receive funding for the Highway Rangers service.

Scope of LHP

A list of a variety of improvement schemes was provided by Essex Highways to our LHP in June 2012 for members to consider and prioritise, and when agreed, they would then be submitted to the Essex Cabinet Member for Highways, Cllr Derrick Louis for 'signing off' for progression.

The scope of the schemes that have been considered and approved by the Panel is comprehensive, and includes installation of VAS speed limit signs, bus shelters, new footways, various bus stop schemes, PROW (Public Right of Way) improvements, puffin/zebra crossings and other schemes including mini-roundabouts and a blanket 20mph speed limit for Great Chesterford, the first village in Essex to do so.

Implementation

All potential scheme sites are visited at least once, sometimes three or more times by me, the Panel Chairman, with Rissa Long, ECC Highway Liaison Officer assigned to our LHP.

Site meetings will usually include one or more parish representatives so their specific scheme can be fully understood and if possible be further adjusted where required to meet local objectives. Panel members are kept fully informed on the progress of schemes at subsequent LHP meetings, usually supported with visual presentations.

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Progress to date

As there was an initial delay in the list of schemes being issued, it was June 2012 before the LHP could start working on those applicable to Uttlesford. Acting on good advice from Rissa Long, the Panel commenced to prioritise the schemes as soon as possible to ensure they would be among the first to be 'signed off' and on the 'early bird' list for implementation.

To achieve this, the Panel met twice in one week in June 2012, and as a result Uttlesford LHP was top of the list with 85% of funds committed to schemes by end of June compared to a target of 50% set by Essex County Council for the first round of LHP meetings throughout the County.

All prioritised schemes have now been 'signed off' and are well into the program for design, with implementation to follow in the coming months.

Schemes for 2013/2014

Although there is follow up work to see all selected schemes are completed as soon as possible, new schemes for 2013/2014 are now being sought.

An email from Essex CC was sent to all parish councils in Uttlesford on the 25th January 2013, and copied to members, advising of the straightforward process for presenting Highway improvement schemes for consideration by the LHP. For guidance, this was followed by an email with examples of the type of schemes that have been approved.

As always, it is a good idea for parishes to submit applications as soon as possible and I hope members will promote this.

Highway Rangers

This excellent initiative which carries out approved minor small works for the benefit of local communities has been very well received by towns and parishes throughout the District, with several emails/letters complimenting the fine standard of work they have done for the good of the local community.

Since the Rangers became operational in June 2012, requests by parishes/towns for their services up to end December totalled 183, out of which 11 were declined or passed over to Essex Highway maintenance because the type of job was outside the scope of the Rangers, 150 requests have been completed to date. In November 2012, a two page email was sent to all towns and parishes and copied to members, inviting requests for Ranger services for 2013/2014

Achievement

It has been confirmed that out of the 12 LHPs in Essex, Uttlesford LHP is not only in the top quartile in terms of performance, but also at the top of that quartile with all funding now fully allocated. Due to the expeditious allocation of funds it is the only Panel to have a large scheme delivered during the course of this financial year, the Pelican crossing at Newport.