

Questions asked during the A29 Public Meeting 27 February 2023

Operational Questions

Landslips are identified as a risk to the West Sussex Highway Network in the West Sussex County Council's Asset Management Strategy why isn't there an emergency plan to deal with them?

Any land slip that occurs is considered on a case-by-case basis. There will always be an initial decision around whether the road is safe to remain open with the addition of temporary traffic management or needs to be closed to keep highway users safe. The next steps very much vary depending on fundamental factors, e.g., whether the land in the control of the County Council or it is privately owned, what type of road is affected by the land slip, who is at risk. The factors surrounding the location determine the response, plan of how to deal with it and associated time scales.

Why wasn't this landslip on a major trunk road treated as an emergency?

We received reports on the 28/12/2022 of a landslip and the carriageway being blocked by a tree. We responded to this as an emergency, as set out in our Highway Inspection Manual, which requires our contractor to get to the site within 2 hours of a works instruction being raised. This response resulted in the closure of Church Hill and due to concerns around further slips and highway safety, it was decided that the road would remain closed.

Why did it take West Sussex Highways so long to contact owners to organise access to the site?

We were in contact with the landowners within a matter of days of the incident occurring. The incident took place over the Christmas period, as such there was limited staff and consultant engineers available until they returned to work in the early days of January. Initially there was no knowledge of how serious the issues were and how long the closure would be in place for. We also needed to seek specialist consultant engineering advice to understand the risks and the next steps. The consultant engineer visited the site on the 03/01/2023.

Why did West Sussex Highways take so long to get diversion signage up, why is it still so poor and why isn't the diversion being publicised on all daily traffic updates?

Diversion signage was placed out the day after the original emergency closure was implemented, with a local route initially selected as it was hoped the road would be reopened soon after the incident. When it was understood that the closure would be needed for a longer period, the signage was changed on the 5th January 2023 and the current diversion route was set out.

Why was the original road closure so poor that a car approaching the barriers ended up hitting a gas main, causing a major local emergency with evacuation of residents in the area? Why did it take so long to get concrete barriers in place?

As confirmed above, the original closure was implemented to ensure the area couldn't be accessed and a short-term diversion route put in place. When it was determined that the closure would be needed for a longer period, the route was amended and signage increased to support the current diversion route. Concrete barriers are not a standard approach to a road closure, unfortunately, we had no option but to install these due to motorists ignoring multiple signs on the routes into Pulborough and in one instance moving the barriers to allow them to travel through the closure.

Why hasn't a one-way system been put in to manage the dangerous traffic situation on New Place, Link Lane, Spinney, Moat and Rectory Lane?

This proposal has been considered on multiple occasions at the request of a number of different parties. It is felt that introducing an alternative system at this location impacts other residents and causes issues on other local roads. For example, the section of Link Lane that runs east to west would need parking suspended and would likely see damage to the green at this location, along with other issues associated with antisocial driver behaviour.

Why did it take so long to stop parking on New Place?

It was felt that existing on-street parking was acting as natural traffic calming at this location and having monitored the site on a number of occasions at the busiest part of the days, there were no highway safety issues observed at this location. That said, based on local consensus, it was decided that it would be worthwhile trialling the introduction of 'No Parking' cones to understand what impact it had. It is important to note that we still had concerns raised from other parties by the implementation of this restriction, so this is not a universally popular option.

Why isn't there any enforcement of the width and weight restrictions on village roads being used as rat runs?

The current width and weight restrictions fall to Sussex Police to enforce. Sussex Police have been made aware of local concerns and the issues on local roads but equally, they must prioritise their resource across the County.

Why is work still being scheduled on roads being used as diversions at the same time (Gay Street/Broomer's Hill, Storrington High Street, Glebelands/Spinney)?

We have a statutory duty to keep the highway safe and certain time scales to deliver works within to ensure we meet this statutory duty. Although we understand the frustration with works being undertaken on local roads, we are expected to continue to deliver safety works to ensure the highway remains safe for all users. The works includes pothole repairs and drainage works respectively.

Communications Questions

Why hasn't WSH been communicating with residents, media or businesses about what is happening on Church Hill/A29?

We regularly have representatives present in the local area, either working with the relevant parties to get a solution agreed and implemented, monitoring the temporary measures that have been put in place (e.g. diversion signage), or complete repairs required as a result of the increased traffic through local roads. We have:

- The traffic management company visiting site every 2/3 days to check on the traffic management in place.
- Set up a dedicated webpage on 18/1/23 (www.westsussex.gov.uk/a29-pulborough) which is regularly updated when new information is available
- Issued 4 press releases (9/1, 19/1, 23/1 and 3/3) to the local media outlets when significant updates need communicating with supporting social media posts across County Council profiles
- Set up a dedicated email inbox (a29landslip@westsussex.gov.uk) for enquiries relating to the closure – 133 emails received since setup
- Sent 5 Key Stakeholder Updates to a group which includes the MP, County Councillor, District Councillors and District Council, Parish Council and Councillors, Emergency services, Businesses and various WSCC colleagues – 6/1, 13/1, 20/1, 27/1 and 3/2
- Had representatives from WSCC personally meet with residents upon receipt of emails to discuss their concerns and answer any questions
- Responded to 12 media enquiries asking for information and updates

Why did it take a month to set up a crisis website and why isn't it providing daily updates?

The website was launched on January 18 2023 and has been updated regularly since as and when we have information that needs sharing. We do not update on a daily basis as there isn't the need or the information to do so.

Planning Questions

Landslips have regularly occurred in Pulborough in the Church Hill area and the area's geology has long been recognized as unstable – so why was the A29, which is not wide enough at Swan Corner or Church Hill for two lorries to pass each other, made part of the Major Road network/West Sussex Lorry Route Network with no weight or width restrictions? Was the plan to just hope there wouldn't be another landslide?

The A29 is listed as part of the Lorry Route Network (LRN), which has been the case for a number of years, please see the following link for more information. <https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/traffic-management/lorry-route-network/>. The decision to include the A29 as part of the Major Road Network (MRN), was taken in 2018 by the Transport for the South East (TSE). This process took a holistic approach to the Strategic and Major Road Network in the South East of England. This decision essentially formalised the LRN for this section of the A29 which is a vital north-south corridor in the County and the constraints of the A29, including the section of Church Hill, were considered as part of this process by WSCC Officers. The designation of MRN does not affect how sat-navs are used or encourage more HGV's to use the A29 and is principally used as part of the planning process, when considering future development opportunities.

Recovery Questions

Ancient walls in our conservation areas on Church Hill and Rectory Lane have been damaged by heavy vehicles – what provision is West Sussex Highways making to pay for the expensive repairs needed to these walls, some of which will need to be entirely rebuilt

We are naturally disappointed that incidents have occurred with a third party striking and damaging a private feature. However, this is considered to be a third-party matter to resolve.

What provision is West Sussex Highways making to repair the kerbs and verges that have been severely damaged by heavy vehicles using roads never meant for this traffic?

In the short term, the County Council is undertaking regular inspections of the local roads affected and raising any safety works for repair in line with our Highway Inspection Manual. Once the road is re-opened, we would review the condition of the local roads and establish what level of work is required and how this can be best delivered.

What provision is West Sussex Highways making to fully repair Link Lane, Rectory Lane, Broomers Hill Lane and other roads which have been so badly damaged by heavy vehicles using them?

As above, and in the short term, the County Council is undertaking regular inspections of the local roads affected and raising any safety works for repair in line with our Highway Inspection Manual. Once the A29 is re-opened, we will review all of the local roads affected and establish what level of work is required and how this can be best delivered.

What compensation will WSCC be providing for Pulborough businesses which are suffering as a result of the prolonged road closure?

The County Council has great sympathy with the effect that the road closure is having on local businesses. That said the issues that have occurred, and the safety concerns we have with the private embankments, is not something we could not have foreseen or intercepted.