

Hampshire County Councillor Update – September 2024

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Solar Together – HCC’s Group Buy Scheme for Solar Energy

The solar energy group-buying scheme enables residents to invest in solar panels for their homes, fitted by pre-vetted installers, to reduce reliance on the national grid and lower their energy bills, as well as boost local renewable energy generation.

Through Solar Together, over 28,400 solar panels have already been installed in Hampshire – it is estimated that these installations alone will reduce carbon emissions by 59,205 tonnes over 25 years – equivalent to taking over 32,600 cars off the road during the same period.

Those interested need to register online at www.hants.gov.uk/solartogether by 18 October for a free and without obligation quote.

Life’s Better by Bike

To help encourage people to get around on two wheels, the County Council has created a one-stop-shop website with everything you’ve ever wanted to know about cycling in Hampshire.

The new website (www.hants.gov.uk/socialcareandhealth/publichealth/lifesbetterbybike) has lots of useful content for seasoned cyclists as well as anyone new to cycling, with information on:

- journey planning,
- bikeability courses – to help develop your confidence to ride on the road,
- dedicated cycling routes in the countryside,
- access to cycling groups, where you can meet likeminded people,
- inclusive cycling options for people with disabilities, and
- top tips to help new cyclists get started.

Outstanding Rating Continues for Hampshire’s Children’s Services

Children in Hampshire continue to benefit from strong and effective services that make a positive difference to their lives. This is one of the key headline findings from Hampshire County Council’s latest full Ofsted inspection, which has rated its Children’s Services outstanding for the second consecutive time since 2019

In a consistently positive report, Ofsted has described the timely and robust practice of social workers and other practitioners who ensure that children are kept safe and that they and their families receive appropriate and effective support to meet their individual needs. The news comes following a recent outstanding Ofsted rating for Swanwick Lodge, the County Council’s secure children’s home which provides safe and specialist support for the most vulnerable children and young people.

Make attendance top of the ‘back to school’ checklist for 2024/25

Rates of school attendance have continued to improve in Hampshire but as with other local authority areas across the country, they remain below the levels typically seen before the Covid-19 pandemic. Latest figures show that 93.4% of sessions were attended by Hampshire pupils in the 2023/24 school year compared to 95.5% in 2018/19, the last full school year before the Covid-19 pandemic.

Educational specialists advise that attending school every day, unless unwell, is best for children to ensure that the solid foundations for their future education and employment can be laid. It is also one of the best ways of supporting a child's mental and physical health.

Hampshire's Country Parks win prestigious Green Flag Awards once again

Lepe, River Hamble, Royal Victoria, Queen Elizabeth, and Staunton Country Parks have all once again regained Green Flag status for their excellent facilities and amazing outdoor spaces.

The Green Flag Award scheme, managed by environmental charity Keep Britain Tidy under licence from the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, recognises and rewards well-managed parks and green spaces, setting the benchmark standard for the management of green spaces across the United Kingdom and around the world.

Each of Hampshire's five country parks offers something unique:

- Lepe Country Park on the coast of the New Forest offers a café and visitor centre boasting views of the Solent and Isle of Wight, a sensory garden and fantastic coastal and countryside walks.
- Queen Elizabeth Country Park, near Petersfield, is Hampshire's biggest Country Park with more than 2,000 acres of woodland and downland – it has an emphasis on outdoor pursuits, offering a range of attractions for cyclists. The park's visitor centre has been recently transformed to include a bigger restaurant, more welcoming entrance, and outdoor sheltered area.
- Royal Victoria Country Park sits on the shores of Southampton Water, near Netley. The refurbishment of its historic Chapel, the only remaining part of what was once the world's largest military hospital of its time, provides a popular historic attraction for visitors. The park also now also boasts a restaurant serving hand-made pizzas, in an historic restored building.
- River Hamble Country Park, near Bursledon, offers a wide range of walking, cycling and horse-riding routes in the woods and along the banks of the River Hamble. The Barn visitor hub includes a café, outdoor play for all ages and trails for families.
- Staunton Country Park, near Havant, offers the perfect venue for keen walkers, cyclists and anglers. The Country Park has a visitor centre where you can discover all about the history of the Country Park and a tearoom in the Victorian Coachhouse. The Regency landscape has been restored with follies, exotic trees and shrubs, and a beautiful walled garden.

HCC's Latest Figures show 37% Increase in Annual Road Repairs

An unprecedented number of potholes and road defects have been fixed across a 12-month period, according to the latest figures from Hampshire County Council. From April 2023 to April 2024, 180,909 repairs were delivered, marking a 37 per cent increase.

Councillor Lulu Bowerman, the County Council's Cabinet Member for Highways and Waste said: "We understand that potholes remain a significant concern for Hampshire's residents, impacting daily journeys and overall satisfaction whether travelling to work, school, running a business or enjoying all our county has to offer.

"One year ago, we allocated an additional £22.5 million to tackle this issue and make our roads stronger. This two-year investment is enabling us to deploy more resources dedicated to promptly fixing potholes, addressing the damage caused by cycles of wet and freezing winter weather. Our latest figures show that repairs have increased by 37 per cent, compared to the previous 12 months*, demonstrating that this investment is paying dividends.

“With unprecedented volumes of potholes being reported to us, Hampshire isn’t alone in facing the challenge of keeping local roads in a good condition. The impact of colder, wetter winters takes a heavy toll on the roads, and higher costs due to inflation means that every year we must make our budget stretch further – for example, it now costs the taxpayer around 44% more to repair a pothole.

“Over the summer months, our highways teams will continue to make the most of the money we have available, and the generally drier, warmer days to support our priority focus on fixing large numbers of potholes, applying surface treatments to smooth our highways, and undertaking road maintenance on larger stretches of road across the county.”

Road defects and potholes can be reported to the County Council’s highways team [online](#) or by using the OurHants app, downloadable from a mobile phone's app store.

Funding for Completion of Botley Bypass Agreed

In July, Hampshire County Council’s Cabinet agreed to increase the scheme budget by more than £16 million. The [additional funding](#) is needed to meet the significant rise in construction and materials costs due to inflation as well as to allow for further adjustments to be made to the final scheme design to address challenging ground conditions that were discovered during the preparation stage

The final phase creates a new road from Winchester Street (eastwards), crossing the River Hamble to a new roundabout at the A334/A3051 junction. New and improved footways and cycleways will be provided as part of the project. Construction is expected to begin in spring 2025 and be completed in 2027.

Next Step for Hampshire Minerals and Waste Plan

At its meeting on 18 July the full County Council approved the submission of Hampshire’s Minerals and Waste Plan’s Partial Update to the Government Planning Inspectorate for scrutiny.

Examination of the Plan is the final stage of the plan making process. The Planning Inspectorate’s examination will include public hearings to discuss the issues raised, through representations. This can involve people participating through written representation or appearing at the hearing(s).

Why a Minerals and Waste Plan is needed for Hampshire

Having an up-to-date Plan in place is the best way to ensure that minerals and waste operations fully consider the character and special qualities of Hampshire and will not adversely impact communities or the local environment. Not having an up-to-date Plan in place would make Hampshire vulnerable to having sites imposed by Government planning inspectors, losing the opportunity to ensure locally relevant matters are considered when sites come forward for minerals or waste development.

The Hampshire Minerals and Waste Plan is evidence-based and is in line with national planning policy. The local policies contained within the Plan guide the decisions that each of the five minerals and waste planning authorities make when determining planning applications for minerals extraction or waste infrastructure and operations.

Identified sites are subject to local planning permission scrutiny

Any site identified in the final Plan still requires operators to apply for permission in the usual way, taking account of all the environmental considerations and assessing the impact on the local community and area, including undertaking consultation with stakeholders. Land identified

would be released only if it is needed, and the planning application fully satisfies the stringent criteria and other tests set out in the Hampshire Minerals and Waste Plan.

Grant Opportunities

Several grant opportunities have just re-opened:

- [Leader's Community Grants](#)
 - The purpose of the scheme is to fund one-off, time limited projects which provide community benefit and help local communities thrive; and help local organisations become financially self-supporting and not reliant on public sector funding.
 - Applications can be made for over £1,000 up to a maximum of £25,000 and may be for activity costs, a specific project and/or capital costs.
 - Scheme is NOT open to parish/town councils or commercial organisations
- [Rural Communities Fund](#)
 - The Fund provides support under the following four areas:
 - Climate Change Resilience (to include Flood Alleviation)
 - Countryside
 - Rural Economy and Business (to include Rural Retailers)
 - Other – we are keen to support other projects or initiatives that will help build community resilience and/or encourage self-help in rural areas
 - Typically fund up to a maximum of £5,000 as part of a match-funded scheme
- [Parish and Town Council Investment Fund](#)
 - The priority of this fund is to support partnerships between local communities and the County Council. It will provide pump priming investments to pilot new schemes which respond to local needs and the growing pressure on County Council Services.
 - There are three primary areas available for investments:
 - Capital Funding: £1,000 to £30,000 for schemes which enhance existing or provide new infrastructure and equipment to support a local community, including energy efficiency grants
 - Meeting local needs: Usually for investments of £1,000 to £30,000 in schemes that enable local communities to be more resilient. For example, schemes which encourage 'neighbourliness' in tackling social isolation or in the management of community assets.
 - Training: Investments up to £10,000 provide appropriate training in the local community.
- [County Councillor Grants](#)
 - Groups and organisations can apply for funding for both revenue (one-off) and minor capital projects. Revenue grants should generally be used to support short term project related costs.
 - It is expected that the grants will benefit a wide range of groups/activities: for example, vulnerable children or adults, young people, facilities for older people, community facilities, parish councils (but only for specific projects), schools' minor traffic or safety works, local environment projects, and community safety.
 - The 2023/24 County Councillor grant scheme is open until 29 February 2024.

More details about each of these grants is available on the County Council website.