



**QUESTIONS TO THE
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL, CABINET MEMBERS
AND/OR
CHAIRMEN OF COMMITTEES**

Thursday 7 December

**1. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HOOK
Re: Newton Abbot Railway Line**

The local media have recently had reports saying that Network Rail are considering investing in the Heathfield/Newton Abbot railway line, to bring it back to a standard fit for passenger traffic. Does the Cabinet Member know anything about such plans? Are the Council involved in any way with Network Rail or any public group in advancing such a scheme? Would they, like me, welcome such a development and will they make a statement committing this authority to supporting any such move as one way of relieving traffic congestion and therefore improving air quality in and around Newton Abbot?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR DAVIS

We are aware of the various discussions between the local group and Network Rail. The Council has not been directly involved in these although officers have been contacted by the local group.

Whilst we will follow the discussions with interest it is highly unlikely that Network Rail would itself invest in a scheme such as this given other existing priorities that are already in the programme. To get in the programme there would need to be several feasibility studies linked to future development plans to formulate a robust business case. A regular rail service between Heathfield and Newton Abbot or beyond would require very significant investment and on-going patronage/subsidy to achieve a frequency that has any kind of significant impact on traffic. It is very difficult to see how a suitable business case could be made given the existing locations of the stations relative to population and traffic generators. There are other potential options such as a privately owned/leased or community run line which would have to be set up by a competent rail operating body.

The County Council is however fully committed to investing in local rail journeys with partners through the Devon Metro strategy. December 2018 will see a significant improvement in local services to and from Newton Abbot with the establishment of a half hourly frequency between Exeter and Paignton throughout the day, thereby improving local connections from stations such as Dawlish and Teignmouth. This will be supported by refurbished trains with many more seats.

**2. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HOOK
Re: Traffic Flow and Support Officers**

How many Traffic Support Officers are there currently in Devon and Cornwall and the IOS compared to 5 years ago? Traffic flow figures for the South Devon Highway are now available. How many vehicles leave and enter Torbay between 7 - 9am and between 4 - 6pm?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

Devon County Council does not employ Traffic Support Officers.
The South Devon Highway Average Traffic Flows for September 2017 are as follows:

Direction	7am to 9am		4pm to 6pm	
	Weekday Average	7 day Average	Weekday Average	7 day Average
Northbound toward Newton Abbot	4,651	3,797	3,588	3,257
Southbound toward Torbay	3,155	2,534	4,473	4,039

3. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HOOK

Re: Neonicotinoids

In the light of increasing evidence that more and more people (e.g. Michael Gove) and leading suppliers (e.g. Homebase) are now questioning the safety and continued use of neonicotinoids, will the administration here at County Hall reverse its decision of last year and now prohibit the use of this poison on its land?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

This issue relating to the use neonicotinoids was considered by Cabinet at its meeting of 13 July 2016 in the light of advice provided by the Farms Estate Committee. Through this process it was recognised that prohibiting the use of neonicotinoids on land under the direct control of the County Council would be unnecessary and irrelevant given there is no routine use of such insecticides. However, to guard against any unintentional or incidental use of such products, relevant information about avoiding these has been provided for staff via the 'Inside Devon' web pages.

In relation to the County Farms Estate, a survey of DCC tenants found very limited current usage of any neonicotinoid products. The Farms Estate Committee also highlighted the legal constraint to any ban on their use by existing tenants, unless done by mutual agreement. Instead, a series of actions to further reduce the use of neonicotinoids by County Farms Estate tenants, along with other positive measures in support of pollinators, was agreed through the Council's Pollinators Action Plan.

This approach remains appropriate, pending any potential change in government policy. A recent press article by the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Michael Gove, has signalled that he may reverse the UK government's previous opposition to a ban on neonicotinoids, which had been proposed by the European Union. It is possible that this issue may be addressed through the long-anticipated Defra 25 Year Environment Plan.

4. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR DEWHIRST

Re: Intelligence Speed Assistance technology

From the beginning of 2018 Transport for London will require all new buses to have Intelligent Speed Assistance (ISA) technology fitted. This technology prevents buses from accelerating over and above the speed limit. During trials it was found to be particularly effective in 20 mph zones and brought down the speed of traffic around them and resulted in fewer and less serious casualties.

Can the Cabinet Member for Highway Management say if Devon County Council will be implementing this sensible solution to improving safety of Devon's road network and mitigate speeding by other traffic?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

The Council does not have powers to lay down specifications for bus manufacture. These would need to be the subject of either regulations under existing legislation or new legislation.

The requirement by Transport for London is possible through its franchising process - London having a fully regulated system not subject to the commercial freedom enabled by the Transport Act 1985. The cost of compliance will inevitably be passed on to Transport for London through its franchise arrangements.

Outside London, 80% of bus services are operated commercially, that is outside the formal control of local authorities. The other 20% - the non-commercial services - are operated under local authority contract. Future contracts could include a clause requiring Intelligent Speed Technology to be fitted. However, the cost of equipping individual vehicles, especially for smaller companies, is likely to be a deterrent to bidding for contracts, a situation this Council cannot afford.

In the meantime, a potentially helpful alternative exists. Stagecoach vehicles are equipped with the Green Road system, which monitors driver performance with respect to braking, acceleration and speed and drivers are guided and trained to achieve best practice. Also, virtually all bus companies in Devon now have vehicle tracking systems which are capable of locating vehicles and thereby speeds travelled between any given points. Any observations - dates and times - of speed limits being broken are best noted and reported to the bus company concerned and/or to the police.

5. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HOOK

Re: Plans for Social and Economic Consequences of Leaving the EU

Devon, along with the rest of the UK, looks more than likely to be leaving the EU in March 2019, for better or worse, a little over 15 months away. This will impact on every Devon resident. Has the Authority given any serious consideration to the social and economic consequences of this event? Does the Leader agree with me that a report on the likely implications for our County would be beneficial and that it should form the basis of an informed debate, so that Members and officers can do all in their power to mitigate the negative and accentuate the positive consequences? What plans has the authority put in place to prepare for March 2019?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HART

Brexit should create opportunities for Devon, but it might also entail some potentially significant challenges. However, there is currently considerable uncertainty about the arrangements that will be in place on key issues such as trade and migration after the United Kingdom leaves the European Union (EU) in March 2019. The Council is monitoring national developments closely and stands ready to support local businesses and residents to seize the opportunities that arise.

In particular, the Council is working in partnership with local authorities across the Heart of the South West and the LEP to develop a Productivity Strategy that will act as the region's long-term economic plan. This work is supported by the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership's "Brexit Resilience and Opportunities Group", which is providing analysis of the potential impacts of Brexit. Separately, the Council is aware of the risk that the withdrawal of EU funding might pose and is intending to lobby the Government to ensure that its replacement for EU funding - the UK Shared Prosperity Fund - reflects the needs of areas such as Devon.

6. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR WRIGHT

Re: Planting and Maintenance of Street Trees

What are current DCC policy and practical procedures for the planting and maintenance of street trees through its own highway infrastructure schemes and the adoption of public roads?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

In line with national and local planning policy and guidance, tree or shrub planting is often incorporated as an essential requirement for many DCC infrastructure schemes in order to mitigate their unavoidable landscape or wildlife impacts or, on occasions, to provide environmental benefits (e.g. reducing surface water run-off or filtering air pollution). Their initial establishment will, usually, be an integral element of the scheme contract, with the required works undertaken by the main contractor or a specialist sub-contractor. These works would normally be subject to a formal aftercare period, during which any failed planting will be replaced. The required aftercare period is specified by planning condition; national best practice advocates a five year period for tree establishment.

Beyond this aftercare period, the only routine maintenance activities are those provided for by the DCC Tree Safety Policy. This is implemented through the specified approach to planned and ad hoc tree inspections and the related framework agreement for the implementation of the recommended tree works.

For new development where highways are subject to adoption, streets trees may, in isolated cases, be taken on by the Council with a commuted maintenance sum. However, the Council's preference is for trees to be planted in tree pits that may be located in, but are specifically excluded from, the area to be adopted highway. Their ongoing maintenance or replacement is then taken on by either the town or parish council (e.g. Cranbrook) or the maintenance company or trust taking on any public open space or play areas.

7. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HANNAFORD Re: Future Care Home Capacity

Almost nine in 10 council areas across England could see a shortfall in care home places emerging by 2022 unless urgent action is taken, according to new research by consumer champion Which?.

Which? project that by 2022 demand for beds in Devon care homes will outstrip supply by almost 2,000 beds – is this the case?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR LEADBETTER

The Council has not seen the detail of the Which? Report and so is unclear about the assumptions that underpin its assessment. Current forecasts do not identify a shortfall of capacity of 2000 beds.

Devon has been very successful in supporting people who want to live in their own homes (including Extra Care Housing, Supported Living etc) and, as a result, the number of people requiring residential or nursing care placements and the rate of new admissions is at a lower rate than demographic growth. This has reduced the demand for care home placements.

The current assessment of sufficiency shows that there are sufficient places to meet demand overall but that there is pressure in some areas of the county. Our assessment of medium term market conditions suggests that some action will be needed in the next few years to ensure that the profile of provision (especially for nursing care) is strengthened.

The Council is currently bringing forward proposals to stimulate the care home with nursing sector to develop new purpose built care homes across the county.

8. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HANNAFORD Re: Future Care Home Demand and Provision

Devon County Council believes demand for care home beds is dropping, whilst Which? projects demand will increase by 26% over the next 5 years. So as a result the County Council has made no provision or plan for this extra demand?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR LEADBETTER

As explained in Question 7, the Council has not yet seen the basis for the conclusions of the Which? Report. Demand has dropped significantly over recent years and, although the number of care home beds has also dropped, this has not led to a shortfall in overall supply. This is monitored very carefully. The Council and NHS are currently updating the Market Position Statement, which is where we address issues of market supply. The Council will review the Which? Report as part of its assessment.

9. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR ACKLAND Re: Care Home Charges

An official review by the Competition and Market Authority has found that care homes have been applying unfair charges and over-the-top fees for self-funders. Could you clarify please the situation in Devon Care Homes? Are residents of Devon who are self-funders subsidising the residents funded by Devon County Council?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR LEADBETTER

The Council pays the eligible costs of care for people for whom it is responsible and has a fee model that does this. It is about to start consultation with providers on a new model for the 18/19 financial year.

Privately owned and operated Care homes have a variety of business models and projected levels of occupancy which will impact on the fees they require to meet their operating costs and business objectives. The fees a provider charges to people who pay privately may include additional services or premium facilities not included in the DCC fee model.

Whilst the Devon fee model ensures the council pays the eligible costs of care, most care home providers would say that fees from self-funders are higher than paid by DCC and that cross-subsidy takes place. This is subject to ongoing discussions with providers and is always an issue when we consult on the annual care home rates.

10. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HANNAFORD Re: Care Home Budget Allocation

What additional central government funding is required in the new financial year for social care to ensure that Devon County Council meets its statutory responsibilities?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR LEADBETTER

The Council' budget is currently being prepared for 2018/19 and as part of this process we are risk assessing to ensure the budget is adequate to meet our statutory responsibilities. I suggest this question is considered via the Scrutiny process as part of the budget setting arrangements.

11. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR AVES Re: CAMHS

How long, on average, in Devon does a young person with mental health problems have to wait to have an appointment with CAMHS?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR MCINNES

September contract monitoring data provided by Virgin Care indicates that for CAMHS the median wait time for treatment is currently 15 weeks (the median is the mid-point between those who wait the longest and those who wait the shortest).

12. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR ATKINSON
Re: Parliamentary Elections

In 2018 we celebrate 100 years since some women won the right to vote in Parliamentary elections.

The campaign started with a petition to Parliament in 1866 and on 6th February 1918 the Representation of the People's Act 1918 received Royal Assent enfranchising all men, as well as all women over the age of 30 who met minimum property qualifications.

Women only got the right to vote on the same terms as men in 1928. Millicent Fawcett who campaigned from 1866 is to be acknowledged next year by being the first woman to have her statue in Parliament Square

How does DCC intend to celebrate 100 years of women's suffrage in 2018 and will the Council support events here at County Hall and across the County. In particular will the Council help celebrate the life of Juanita Maxwell Phillips the first woman County Councillor who was also the Mayor of Honiton many times by hanging her portrait in the rogues gallery outside the council chamber?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HART

I suggest a small group is established to plan how DCC can celebrate this and feature Juanita Maxwell Phillips. The Corporate Equality Officer will support this group.

13. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR ATKINSON
Re: Council Assets

It is noted that the Council has already sold redundant assets in Exeter and realised up to £40m capital receipts. What other assets does it intend to sell in Exeter? Will the assets sold in Exeter be ring-fenced to promote productivity growth here? What has the capital receipts from past asset sales in Exeter been used for in the last 3 years?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CLATWORTHY

There are currently 9 sites (land and buildings) across Exeter which have been identified as surplus to the Council's requirements which are in the process of being sold.

The Council's capital programme (funded through Capital Receipts) is based on priorities (including those for which the authority has a statutory responsibility) across the communities of Devon and not ring fenced to the area where the asset was sold. In Exeter, in the last 3 financial years 20 projects were funded through the Council's capital programme totalling £3.7m (with £7m generated through the sale of Council property assets in Exeter in the same period).

14. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR ATKINSON
Re: Science Technology and Engineering Investment

How will the Council bring investment into the Science Technology and engineering sectors in Exeter and across Devon? What steps does it intend to take to access a £31 billion productivity fund including £1.2 billion for research and development for Exeter and Devon?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR BARKER

The Industrial Strategy sets out a range of new future funding including:

- a new competitive £115m Strength in Places R&D Fund, to support the development of local research strengths; and
- the Higher Education Innovation Fund, which incentivises business and University collaboration, to be increased to £250m p.a. by 2020-21;

- £50m innovation loans pilot; and
- As a first step, government will increase public spending on R&D by £2.3bn in 2021-22

The Council is working with local authority partners across the Heart of the South West and the LEP, to complete a Productivity Strategy which will set out a series of opportunities to grow the economy, including two identified global strengths – digital innovation and advanced engineering, identified in the South West Science and Innovation Audit. Devon and Exeter has clear strengths and opportunities within these themes.

In addition, the Council, on behalf of the LEP is leading on co-ordinating a bid to Government for an Institute of Technology. Working with a range of partners from across the South West, including Exeter University and Exeter College, the bid seeks to secure a nationally recognised centre of excellence for engineering and digital skills training within the area. Building upon the strength of our existing college network, the Institute will provide new routes into technical and higher skilled work across the County, creating additional opportunities for engineering and science based careers for young people and those in work alike. This is a competitive process and requires good collaboration across the whole area and between Higher and Further Education, Employers and the Local Enterprise Partnership.