



QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC
Friday 14th February 2020

1. QUESTION FROM JAMES RISEBERO (NOT IN ATTENDANCE)

Re: Littlehempston and Incorporation into Council's Cycle and Multi Use Trail Strategy

The combined population of the villages north of Totnes is upwards of 10,000 people and, contrary to the general perception, the terrain between Newton Abbot and Totnes via Littlehempston is unusually gentle by Devon standards and is highly useable as a cycle route. I know this because I cycle it regularly and have also undertaken detailed terrain analysis using mapping software which I would be happy to share with Devon County Council. The route via Staverton and Huxhams cross adds approximately an additional 100m of elevation gain onto the overall journey, involves a dangerous crossing on a hill at the junction with the A384 and takes potential users off in a loop of several miles which we believe would be enough to dissuade most people from using it. Given that there is a strong desire for safer cycling routes in our area, backed up by over 3,400 signatures on the South Devon Cycle Link petition, is it not time that Devon County Council incorporates the direct route via Littlehempston into its Cycle and Multi Use Trail Strategy, at least as a means of signalling its 'in principle' support for a greener and safer transport network in South Devon?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

I recognise there is a strong desire for the Totnes to Newton Abbot cycle route. However, there is a similar desire for safe multi-use trails that are accessible to all for a number of other routes across the County. Our current programme is heavily oversubscribed, so we are focused on completing our core network before we add any further schemes to the programme.

2. QUESTION FROM KRIS PRATT (NOT IN ATTENDANCE)

Re: Bulliver Bridge Crossing

I was there when the bridge was opened and it was hailed as public access to the north side of the river Dart for both walkers and cyclists. It was also expected that cycle tracks would be extended to surrounding villages and Newton Abbot avoiding the main A381, in a similar way to the cycle path that was being constructed to the then Dartington Ciderpress Centre at the time.

I would like to know why 50% of public funds were used to build the bridge and the bridge is then subsequently closed to the public? Does the Cabinet feel this appropriate? if so why?

Taking the above into consideration, I would have thought that South Devon Railway would have been only too glad to have worked with the local community in this matter, this appears not to be the case.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

The funding and agreements for the bridge were reached several decades ago with multiple bodies involved. Bulliver Bridge is entirely owned by South Devon Railway and they are solely responsible for its upkeep. I cannot comment on what was envisaged at the time.

3. QUESTION FROM MARTIN BJERREGAARD (IN ATTENDANCE)
Re: Zero Carbon Target's and Cycle Path from Totnes

As a business owner in Littlehempston where we have embodied ISO14001 and the Government's zero carbon target. On average our business and family use at least 8 car trips a day to/from Totnes! Surely a cycle path using an existing bridge that does not impact on the railways would be a big step forward towards mitigating the climate emergency. How is Devon County Council supporting small businesses as ours with these climate focussed targets at the same time as using infrastructure that is already in place?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

Devon County Council has committed to addressing the Climate Emergency. We are working with a group of public, private and voluntary organisation partners across the County. In May 2019, the Devon Climate Emergency Response Group was formed. The first element is to undertake a Citizens Charter which will in turn lead to a programme of actions encompassed in the production of a Devon Carbon Plan.

4. QUESTION FROM BRIDGET WEST (NOT IN ATTENDANCE)
Re: Bridge and Use by Local Community

At the bridge's opening ceremony, the West Country Tourist Board Chairman, Michael McGabey made a welcome speech to the then Tourism Minister, Ian Sproat. In this speech he made the following reference that

"The new bridge ... is an excellent example of the type of tourist development which encourages walking, cycling, and the use of public transport."

With that in mind do you not think that Devon County Council and South Devon Railway have an obligation to at least consider in detail how this bridge might fulfil its intended purpose and be shared with, and used by, the local community?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

South Devon Railway have been in existence for 50 years, demonstrating its sustainability as a local tourist attraction. The Bulliver Bridge was opened in 1993 to provide pedestrian access to the South Devon Railway and subsequently Totnes Rare Breeds Farm. I cannot comment on what was envisaged at the time.

5. QUESTION FROM NICK OLDRIDGE (IN ATTENDANCE)
Re: Discussions with South West Water and Bulliver Bridge

Our cycle path campaign group has been in discussions with South West Water, the principle landowner involved in this potential project. South West Water have recently completed a detailed security assessment and providing these needs can be satisfied, have now stated they have no objection to our proposals. With a climate emergency declared and Totnes experiencing a growing congestion problem together with air quality issues, is it not time to conduct a similar assessment of the security issues relating to sharing Bulliver Bridge?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

There have been a series of meetings at various levels with the owners of Bulliver Bridge. Their assessment is that the opening of the bridge to the public is a safety and security concern.

6. QUESTION FROM DAVID HENDY (NOT IN ATTENDANCE)

Re: Funding for Cycle Paths in the South Hams.

In the last 10 years it appears no funding has been provided for new cycle paths in the South Hams (Fol Requests 9651381, 1308048).

In the absence of year-round access to Bulliver Bridge, which would have provided safe cycle access opportunity from Totnes to both Staverton and Littlehempston, has there been any reported intention to provide new cycle paths in the South Hams?

If so, would DCC be able to supply a copy of a report detailing

- the intention
- the budget,
- fund ring-fencing, and
- work locations?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

There are number of rural multi use trails, which the Council has been delivering in recent years including the Plym Valley (partly in South Hams) Exe Estuary Trail, the Wray Valley Trail and the Drake's Trail. These have a good spread across the County but take several years to develop and deliver due to limited dedicated funds for cycle and multi use trail infrastructure. In the South Hams, we have also supported schemes where there is scope for funding from new development to assist with delivery of local cycle links. Examples of this are Kingsbridge Hill to Old Toll House and Ashburton Road A385 from Puddavine to Dartington Lane which to link new sites which is already a good link from Dartington to Totnes Town Centre next to the river and past the industrial estates and Morrisons etc.

7. QUESTION FROM JONATHAN MORRIS (NOT IN ATTENDANCE)

Re: Reliance on Cars, Bulliver Bridge and Car Free Transport

As a Parish Council, we are striving to reduce our parishioners' reliance on cars and are encouraging more journeys by foot and bicycle; with all the obvious health, environmental and economic benefits these provide. Bulliver Bridge is the only physical connection between Littlehempston and Totnes and represents the only car-free option between the two communities. In light of this, can we please ask: what is the Cabinet's Plan B for offering safe and car-free transport between Littlehempston and Totnes, if this bridge scheme is not supported?"

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

For parishioners who are able to walk there is a regular bus service on the A381 (service 7 & 177).

For school children there is a school bus to Totnes (secondary) and Berry Pomeroy (primary).

**8. QUESTION FROM STUART DORMAN (NOT IN ATTENDANCE)
Re: Bulliver Bridge Support and Addressing Security Concerns.**

I live in Littlehempston and have to make numerous trips into Totnes every day to take and collect children from school, youth clubs and other activities and well as my wife travelling to her office in Totnes, myself travelling to Totnes station several times a week and regular shopping trips etc. There are many other families in the surrounding villages in the same situation. The alternative cycle routes (via Staverton or the A381) are simply not viable and are highly dangerous for children.

Over the years the campaign to share the Bulliver bridge has received personal support from Sarah Wollaston, Ben Bradshaw, Norman Baker (as Minister for Transport) and Malcolm Shephard (as Chief Executive of Sustrans). It has also received support from all the local parish councils, all the local schools, the Totnes leisure centre, the Doctors surgery, a host of local businesses and thousands of local residents. With South West Water now coming on board, does the council not agree it is time for some discussion around the whether the security concerns of the South Devon Railway can be appropriately and sensitively dealt with?

It seems crazy that with the current climate emergency we are all forced to drive our cars into our local town several times a day when a direct route (less than a mile) is available with a little cooperation from the railway. How can something that will benefit so many people be blocked by so few?

I hope that you are able to represent the many people in this community that will benefit from this.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

Whilst it is recognised that there is a strong desire for the Totnes to Littlehempston cycle route, there is a similar desire for safe multi-use trails covering a number of other routes across the County that are not in our current programme. Despite this, there have been a series of meetings at various levels with South Devon Railway, who are the owners of Bulliver Bridge. Their assessment is that the opening of the bridge to the public is a safety and security concern.