



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

Thursday 29 April 2021

**1. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR BALL
Re: Okehampton Parkway Station**

Firstly, I thank the Cabinet Member for her support in the restoration of the Okehampton to Exeter passenger service, recently announced, which is to be known as The Dartmoor Line.

I would like to ask the Cabinet Member if she could clarify, in detail, what is being done to bring forward the much needed Okehampton Parkway station.

As I am sure she is aware, the location will provide a much better access for those who live on the eastern side of the town, and because of it's proximity to the A30 - for those who are travelling from out of area.

I am aware that a lot of work needs to be done such as identifying funding, clarifying access and commencing the planning process. Any detail that can be shared on the progress in these areas would be appreciated.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR DAVIS

During 2020 the County Council commissioned Network Rail to build upon the initial feasibility report for Okehampton Parkway and develop a recommended platform option. As the Okehampton to Exeter line reopening involves relaying almost 18km of track and replacing 24,000 concrete sleepers, we wanted to ensure that the track was laid in the optimum position to facilitate the most cost effective delivery of the Parkway Station. This work will continue in 2021/22 as the next stage is to develop the station outline design through to GRIP Stage 3: Single Option Selection. This will be funded out of the remaining Invest in Devon monies. The County Council has also commissioned work to produce a Strategic Outline Business Case for the Parkway Station, which will be completed during Spring 2021 as this will be necessary to make a compelling case for future grant funding opportunities.

2. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR GREENSLADE
Re: Bridleway and Footpath safety concerns

In light of easing of the Covid restrictions what additional safety steps are being employed to keep the county bridleways and footpaths and open spaces in the control of DCC as safe as possible from the effects of the pandemic?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR SANDERS

We recognise that public rights of way, country parks and the walking and cycling trails in Devon have provided an opportunity for people to take exercise and get some fresh air in these difficult times. The increased regular usage of this network and green spaces during the last year has been notable.

Throughout the pandemic and now during its easing the management and maintenance of public rights of way and country parks has been informed by the most current government advice. Please see link to [DCC web page](#) .

Advice for users of these paths and reminding the public of their personal responsibilities, assisting landowners in the management of their land as well as keeping the network cut back as much as is practical is key.

We are pleased that this resource of paths, trails and country parks has played a key role in helping the residents of Devon maintain and improve their health and wellbeing and that it will continue to do so.

3. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR GREENSLADE
Re: Civic Centre Barnstaple

As the local member for the area can I get an update on the situation of the former Civic Centre in Barnstaple?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HART

Devon County Council exchanged contracts with Churchill Retirement Living in October 2020 for the sale of the former Civic Centre in Barnstaple. Completion of the sale is subject to satisfactory planning permission being obtained and Churchill Retirement Living are working with North Devon Council as the planning authority to secure planning permission for the re-development of the site.

4. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR GREENSLADE
Re: Works to Abbey Road

Following a visit from an officer from the safer journeys to school team who met me on site to look at safety concerns in Abbey Rd and at the junction at Pilton Bridge in Barnstaple, areas which have a significant pedestrian flows due the schools in the area, I am delighted that a scheme for safety improvements at

Pilton Bridge has been approved. I have heard nothing about how traffic in Abbey Rd Will be made safer for pedestrians.

Can I have an update on what work has been planned for Abbey Road?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

The typical situation outside schools at drop off and pick up times is that there are considerable numbers of parents parking, intermittent congestion and potential safety concerns. In the last five years there has only been one slight injury incident recorded on Abbey Road. This was to a passenger in a stationary vehicle outside the primary school, where the vehicle was hit by a passing vehicle.

To help to alleviate and regularise the conflicts work has now been completed on the Pathfield School site to allow for additional space to unload and load children off Abbey Road. Taxis and smaller vehicles now access via a new entrance further down Abbey Road and pick up at the front of the school. Minibuses access via the side lane and rear of the school. Officers from our Transport Coordination Service continue to work with the school to ensure a smooth change to these new arrangements. They are also reminding transport providers not to arrive at the school early in the afternoon before they can access the school site.

5. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR G HOOK Re: South Devon Highway claims

Can the Leader give an update regarding the compensation claims made by residents impacted by the construction of the South Devon Highway?
Undertakings made have not been met and residents would like to know if County ever intend to settle, if so when might they realistically expect to hear?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HART

Offers have been made to a number of claimants, those offers accepted and payments either made or in progress. Many more offers are in process and negotiations with agents continue with a view to making further offers. As the number of offers increase we expect the pace of agreed claims and payments to increase.

6. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR WAY Re: Okehampton to Exeter Rail Services

More than ten years ago £250,000 was allocated from the Invest in Devon (IID) to help progress the introduction of the Okehampton to Exeter train service. Originally it was intended that this money would be used to reinstate the second platform at Yeoford station to allow passengers to use the new service. When it was decided this work would not take place the funds were set aside, and I understand have been used to progress the work to open a new Okehampton Parkway station.

Yeoford is a rural community with a very limited bus service. The village's station is well used by local passengers using the Exeter / Barnstaple service. Whilst the recent news the Okehampton service, including more trains for Crediton will go ahead is very welcome, it is a great disappointment the current plans do not include trains stopping at Yeoford. Passengers from Okehampton will also be unable to use their nearest Tarka Line station to join the Exeter to Barnstaple service.

Whilst it has to be accepted this is the current situation can the portfolio holder reassure us, working with the rail authorities the council will look afresh at this issue and support extending this service to Yeoford? Further to this can the portfolio holder please report on how the liD money from the sale of Exeter Airport is now being used.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR DAVIS

The £40m investment from Government in reopening the Exeter to Okehampton rail line is a significant boost for communities in the west of the County. This is the first part of a strategy for the Dartmoor Line, which will see a 2 hourly service running between Okehampton, Crediton and Exeter by the end of 2021. The second stage of the strategy will see an hourly service introduced during 2022.

Working with the rail industry and local stakeholders, the County Council has prioritised using Invest in Devon monies to progress the Okehampton Parkway station. All Invest in Devon funds for this project have either been spent or committed in developing the case for the Okehampton Parkway station in order to cement the success of the reopened line.

Looking forward, the Dartmoor Line can provide other benefits including a higher frequency service to Crediton and potential for improved services to other areas of Central Devon and we can work with the emerging Local Plan to look at issues such as improvements to Yeoford.

7. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HODGSON Re: Residential Parking Schemes

In light of the rising demand for residential parking schemes, some of which has been caused or exacerbated by changes in behaviour and lifestyle in response to COVID, such that residents find themselves living in roads that have become obstructed and or impossible to park in, due to having become a free car park for people wishing to park and use a nearby leisure area (complete with boats etc), shop in the nearby town, park and go on vacation from the local station, or work close by:

A. What steps are being taken to help respond to residents' requests for parking schemes as soon as possible, to help avoid the stress of delays?

- B. What is the reason for there not being the option for temporary parking schemes, to support residents experiencing extreme parking problems, that are causing severe local disruption and stress?
- C. Can the portfolio holder ensure that officers prioritise a review and update of the criteria for resident's parking schemes is carried out as a matter of urgency, to take enable a quicker response to be triggered that could help resolve residential parking issues within a more reasonable timeframe and certainly be investigated within three months of requests supported by Divisional Members and incorporate responses to the further matters raised that follow?
- D. What steps are being taken to work strategically with local District Councils (and other public bodies such as the HOSW – LEP), to ensure that:
- I. Increases in local car park charges do not lead to increased non-residential parking in nearby residential areas?
 - II. Adequate parking spaces are available for the paid for both off-street and on-street parking permits that are issued?
 - III. Local public transport services and park and ride facilities are being sought to reduce the pressure of parking needs in town centre?
 - IV. Consider increased investment to enable purchase (compulsory or otherwise) of land to accommodate parking, public bus access, overnight stays for increase in public amenity use due to the considerable rise due to Staycation use in local leisure and scenic areas, such as riverbanks, beaches, public footpaths?
 - V. Apply increased pressure and financial 106 contributions being sought from developers to ensure they cover the real costs of accommodating vehicles from their new housing schemes, and require increased funds to support measures such as new public transport services and active travel routes to reduce the need for car use and parking?
- E. Does the Portfolio holder accept that on-going, excessive non-residential parking and obstruction in residential areas can a cause of stress for residents and should be dealt with as expediently as possible?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

Whilst a number of measures have been put into place that assist health care workers (and volunteers) and residents in existing schemes to park, there has been no notable increase in requests for new residents parking schemes. It is accepted where people are working at home there will most likely be greater numbers of vehicles parked during the day, and in some of our key coastal and visitor area (such as Dartmoor) there have been increased visitor numbers with more people choosing to holiday in the area during the pandemic.

Legislation does not permit a Highway Authority to introduce a temporary residents parking scheme. We have issued temporary permits to assist those needing to park to provide care and support to the vulnerable, or where an additional vehicle is needed to park for a household in an existing scheme.

We have recently reviewed our criteria for new residents parking schemes and approved a new Policy at our 9th December Cabinet meeting (<https://democracy.devon.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=133&MId=3836&Ver=4>). There is no current intention to revisit that policy.

Currently new requests made for residents parking schemes are reviewed by officers in liaison with the local County Councillor. Where it is considered a scheme is needed, aligned with our Policy and supported by the local community, this will be added to our programme of work. These schemes require substantial consultation to ensure they meet the needs of the community and require significant investment in both time and finance.

Officers are mindful of the impact of District car parking charges but we have little influence over those considerations, although we do meet with parking managers of the Districts on a regular basis. Typically car parks are in the central areas of our communities where parking is already managed with limited waiting, pay & display and often residents parking will already be in place in surrounding residential streets. We do consider the District Council car parking charges when setting our own pay and display tariffs, to try and ensure that people park off-street when making longer visits wherever possible by ensuring on-street is at a higher rate.

It is worth noting that with any residents parking scheme whilst we do consider the available parking stock on-street (and in some instances reduce provision to a single permit per household) there can be no guarantee of a parking space. The intention of the scheme is to reduce demand for the available parking by removing commuter and shopper parking, to assist residents in parking.

As an Authority we will always seek to invest in Park and Ride facilities where appropriate and to use the S106 process where it allows in the most effective way to mitigate potential increases in traffic around developments.

It is accepted that parking near your home can be one of the stresses of life, trying to manage these areas if possible remains one of the many priorities for local Highway Authorities.

8. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HODGSON

Re: Life on the Verge

- a) What assistance is being offered to parish & town councils, community groups and individuals in local areas who wish to support the DCC Life on the Vege initiative?
- b) Can groups be provided with:
 - i. Advice on how to register roadside verges they wish to nominate for fewer cuts?
 - ii. Information &/or webinars to support understanding and encourage public involvement?
 - iii. Grants or supplies of appropriate wild flower seeds to scatter and support new growth for biodiversity?

- iv. Road safety advice and assistance such as offers of advice on training, high visibility jackets etc?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

The operation of the DCC Life on the Verge Initiative is described in detail via the dedicated web pages which are found at: [Life on the Verge in Devon - Environment](#). Through this scheme, community groups are encouraged to get involved in the management of roadside verges for wildlife where it is safe to do so. Detailed guidance is provided along with other supporting resources; these indicate the procedure which must be followed where verges are being considered for adoption through this scheme.

In response to the four specific points:

- i. Under current road verge management policies, routine grass cutting is only undertaken by DCC contractors where essential to maintain visibility for highway safety reasons. On this basis, there is very limited scope to consider locations where less cutting might be undertaken. Ironically, the more significant issue for the majority of roadside verges is the lack of regular maintenance, which allows the emergence of coarse vegetation and, eventually, scrub and woody cover, and a corresponding reduction in wild flower rich grassland.
- ii. As noted above, information and associated resources are already made available to community groups via the relevant DCC web pages. It would be impractical to provide bespoke site based advice and guidance through DCC staff. However, a list is provided of local naturalists who are able to provide such input, particularly in relation to wild flower identification. The Council is also developing a new initiative through the Devon Local Nature Partnership to encourage wider community engagement in practical projects to benefit wildlife, which links well with the Life on the Verge scheme. This will encourage networking (i.e. sharing of information and experience between groups) and may well include training opportunities and sign-posting to other forms of support. Details of this initiative will be launched in the coming few months.
- iii. Whilst the Council is unable to supply wild flower seeds, the new initiative referenced above will include sign-posting to any available grant opportunities. Local Members may, of course, consider the possible use of their Locality Budget to support worthwhile projects. It should be noted that established best practice in managing roadside verges for wildlife focusses, in the first instance, on maintaining and enhancing the naturally occurring flora, only using artificially spread wild flower seed or, indeed, the planting of wild flower 'plugs' where essential to enhance and diversify the grassland community.
- iv. The Life on the Verge scheme sets out a specific and mandatory approach to the consideration of and training in highway safety, supported by an e-learning training module. Managing road verges for wildlife is also

recognised as one of the types of work that can be arranged through the Council's Road Warden Scheme, which offers potential benefits in terms of provision via DCC of third party insurance, free training on County Council arranged courses, priority status for the small grants offered through the Council's Highways Maintenance Community Enhancement.

9. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HODGSON

Re: Investment in Air Quality Management Action Plans

- a) What is the reason that Devon County Council fails to prioritise adequate financial support and Investment in improvements identified to address problems on public highways where Local Air Quality Management Action Plans (AQMAP) have been agreed between DCC and the Local Authority?
- b) In this instance I make reference to The Totnes Air Quality Management Action Plan regarding traffic pollutants on the A385, where none of the measures identified have been resourced to make improvements to air quality that could in part be achieved by behaviour change towards less car use and more 'Active Travel'. Why has there not even been some of the measures, such as identified pedestrian crossings for routes to school, that could make a real difference implemented?
- c) As an arterial route that passes through one of the most popular and congested towns in the County, can a moratorium be placed on all new major developments along this route until the Totnes AQMAP has been fully addressed and pollution levels been brought down to non-hazardous levels?
- d) Does the Leader accept that the recent court case that found a child of nine years old tragically died through asthma caused by exposure to an excess of polluting traffic fumes, must be avoided at all costs, and that any cases of asthma possibly associated with public highways in Devon will be fully investigated and responded to responsibly?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

District Councils have a responsibility under Local Air Quality Management (LAQM) legislation to review air quality and this Council has worked with South Hams District Council on the production of their Clean Air Strategy for 'South Hams and West Devon' (2018). An example of where we have jointly prioritised work is to address the air quality in Ivybridge.

The Totnes Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) (2019) recognises that there are no easy solutions for the problems faced in Totnes. However, the County Council has made progress with measures in the AQAP including; undertaking a feasibility study of pedestrian crossing points, installation of Electric Vehicle Charging Points within Council Car Parks, promotion of sustainable travel through green travel vouchers at new developments and installation of permanent and temporary cycle racks in the town centre.

The District Council, as local planning authority, should be asked to comment on whether a moratorium should be placed on all new developments as there are a number of factors to take into account. In our transportation role, we will continue to seek contributions via S106 agreements to mitigate air quality impacts from new developments.

The County Council take air quality seriously recognising the public health consequences and will continue to deliver interventions aimed at improving it. While it is the District Council's responsibility to regularly review and assess air quality, the County Council will continue to support the District, as described above.

10. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HODGSON
Re: Devon Investment and Pension Fund

- A) In line with the recent public statement issued by the Devon Investment and Pension Board regarding the following commitment, what steps that are being taken to expediate the change:
- b) The Devon Pension Fund has pledged that its portfolio of investments will be net-zero by 2050 at the latest. This was agreed at the meeting of the Investment and Pension Fund Committee on Friday 26 February 2021, where the committee members signed up to a commitment drawn up by the Institutional Investors Group on Climate Change.
- c) Will the Leader commit to putting pressure on Devon Investment and Pension to review and align its policies in line with DCC's Declaration of a Climate emergency and the associated Ecological Emergency and its recently published Interim Carbon Plan. This includes an urgent review of its investments and Pension Funds to ensure the utmost expediency in divestment from fossil fuels, as this investment is undermining the DCC Carbon Plan and the opportunity to address and mitigate carbon emissions, and putting DCC investments and pension funds at substantial risk?
- d) For information: DCC pension fund currently has the 14th highest investment in fossil fuels out of 98 council funds. £157.5m, which is almost 4% of their fund, this is the current reality of the DCC Investment & Pension fund investment and portfolio as follows: (source: <https://www.divest.org.uk/councils>)

Devon CC Pension fund top holdings

Rank	Fossil Fuel Company	Amount (GBP)
1	ROYAL DUTCH SHELL	36,671,000
2	BP	21,057,000
3	BHP	12,828,000
4	EXXONMOBIL	7,063,000
5	ANGLO AMERICAN	6,140,000
6	MITSUBISHI	5,992,000
7	LG	5,899,000

8	CHEVRON	5,827,000
9	MITSUI	4,544,000
10	VALE	4,210,000

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR BLOXHAM

We work collaboratively with Brunel Pension Partnership who are leaders in the field of responsible investing.

We have completed a piece of work to measure the carbon footprint of the fund taking account not only our investments but also the supply chain and consumer elements. That work informed a benchmark in 2019 and we set a target of an annual reduction of 7% which would bring us into line with the Paris agreement on climate change. In the first year we achieved 21.5% and are just completing the measures for year two which are likely to show a similar reduction.

Personally I believe that the fund is making a significant contribution towards the climate change agenda and is wholly aligned to the wider aspirations of the Council. Disinvestment is not our preferred approach and I firmly believe that disinvestment does not help to respond to climate change one iota.

Disinvestment from the companies listed would not stop those companies from operating but simply remove any influence we have as an influential investor. And we are having an influence.

In addition, if we take as example the top two companies listed, Shell are engaged in research into alternative fuels and BP are very much involved in renewables. Disinvestment would withdraw from that diversification.

Our policy of engagement over disinvestment is all about change and we have to be involved if we are to have any influence.

As global moves towards electric vehicles and other sustainable developments grow we will see companies like Shell and BP move with this and I believe it is the right thing to support that.

The question quotes investment data from [divest.org](https://www.divest.org). I am not going to spend time on the detail of that but can confirm that it is out of date and not completely accurate.

The Committee is continually reviewing its investment strategy and at its most recent meeting moved £60million pounds into private markets including 50% of that in renewables. We are building up our infrastructure investment to 10% of the total fund and expect renewable energy infrastructure to be around half of that investment.

As public sector pensions deliver the pooling agenda Devon has now transferred around 80% of its investments to Brunel and as Brunel are leaders in the field of sustainable investments the future for Devon is in the best place it can be in how it contributes to the climate change agenda.

As well as focussing on its contribution to the climate change agenda the committee has a responsibility to our members and contributors to maintain a strong and stable pension fund. In common with all funds the pandemic had a significant impact on our investments and reduced the fund from £4.5 billion to around £4 billion in March / April 2020. Since then the fund has rallied and now stands at just over £5 billion.