Bus Service Improvement Plan: Tranche 1 Capital Schemes Report of the Director of Climate Change, Environment and Transport

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Cabinet (and confirmation under the provisions of the Council's Constitution) before taking effect.

1) Recommendation

That the Cabinet be asked to:

- (a) Approve the advertising of the traffic regulation orders necessary for the schemes in this report and to make and seal the orders subject to the requirements of the legislation and the council's procedures;
- (b) Subject to the resolution of the traffic regulation orders, approve the construction of the bus lane scheme in Roundswell, as shown in Appendix 1, at an estimated cost of £525,000;
- (c) Subject to the resolution of the traffic regulation orders, approve the construction of the New North Road Bus Gate in Exeter City Centre, as shown in Appendix 2, at an estimated cost of £400,000;
- (d) Give delegated authority to the Director of Climate Change, Environment and Transport in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Highway Management, the Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment and Transport and the relevant Local Members to approve minor changes to the schemes.

2) Background

In 2021 the UK Government published its National Bus Strategy, which provided a pathway to help bus services improve following the COVID19 pandemic. The National Bus Strategy required local transport authorities to form Enhanced Partnerships with bus operating companies, and to publish a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). Devon County Council's BSIP was developed and subsequently approved by Cabinet on 13 October 2021, and an Enhanced Partnership was formed.

The main aims of the BSIP were to:

- Grow patronage
- Facilitate a positive step change in bus provision across the area
- Create a bus network that meets the needs of all potential users
- Create a framework to regularly consult bus users, and use this information to influence bus service provision in the future
- Ensure information regarding bus service is of the highest quality and accessible to all
- Ensure the bus is considered equally alongside other modes of transport

 With aspects of this being achieved by identifying and implementing a significant increase in bus priority, making the bus an attractive alternative to the car.

In 2022, Devon County Council was allocated £14.1 million BSIP funding by the Department for Transport, which is split into capital (£8.8 million) and revenue (£5.3 million). This funding is for a three-year period from 2022/23 to 2024/25 with all schemes subject to final approval from the Department for Transport.

The revenue funding awarded was significantly less than DCC had requested, and so a second revision of the BSIP was developed, with the plan split into two sections: Individual Scheme Delivery of what is deliverable now with current funding, and future aspirations for bus services in Devon, should additional funding become available.

3) Proposal

This report seeks approval to construct two of the capital schemes listed under the Individual Scheme Delivery section of the revised BSIP, both of which are bus priority measures, with the aim of achieving better bus journey times. These are the Bideford/Barnstaple Western Bus Corridor, and the Exeter Northern Corridor: New North Road to City Centre Bus Gate.

Bideford/Barnstaple Western Bus Corridor: Roundswell Bus Lane

The Bideford/Barnstaple Western Bus Corridor scheme improves bus priority on the 3.4km bus corridor between Bickington and Roundswell on the western edge of the town, and the bus station in the town centre. This would include the construction of a new bus lane, which will reduce bus journey times, and the construction of a footway. The scheme will achieve approximately a 1 minute journey time saving, which represents a 6% reduction along this corridor.

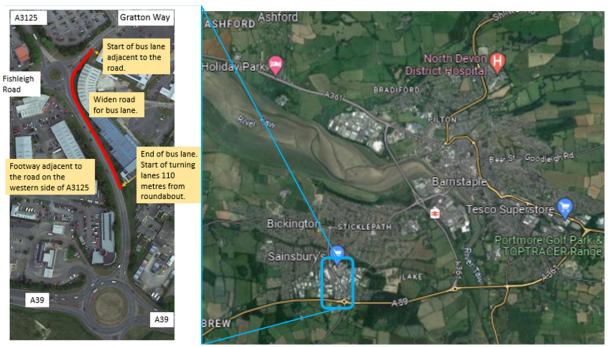


Figure 1: Roundswell Scheme Location

There are currently 126 buses per week (services: 15C, 315H, 71, 72, 85, 319, 322, 372) that would benefit from the bus lane as they travel along Old Torrington Road towards the A39; an average of 21 buses per day from Monday to Saturday. The bus lane will serve new growth areas, such as Larkbear, and complement Gratton Way bus gate and planned improvements at Cedars roundabout.

The bus lane would be built within highway land largely outside of the current carriageway without taking away any lanes from general traffic use. The existing two lanes into Roundswell roundabout extend for 40 metres, and, following the public consultation, this will be extended to 110 metres for all traffic to improve congestion for general traffic and to allow the bus to weave to the right-hand lane.

In addition, a new footway is also proposed along the west side of the A3125 from the Roundswell service station to Gratton Way roundabout. It will connect to the existing crossing across Fishleigh Road. It is a desire line for pedestrians and the footway will allow them to carry out their journey in a safer and more comfortable environment, without having to walk/wheel on the verge or in the busy carriageway. The footway works are proposed to be carried out at the same time as the bus lane changes.

Exeter Northern Corridor: New North Road to City Centre Bus Gate

The Exeter Northern Corridor: New North Road to city centre bus gate scheme seeks to provide a more direct route to the city centre for countywide bus services approaching on the northern corridor between Cowley Bridge roundabout and the Bus Station. The bus gate would provide a more direct route to the city centre, and subsequently the bus station, whilst enabling stops closer to the city centre. It is estimated that this intervention would achieve a time saving of approximately 2.5 minutes per bus, which represents a 17% reduction in bus journey times along this corridor.



Figure 2: Exeter Scheme Location

There are approximately 199 buses a day across 14 services that travel along New North Road towards Exeter City Centre and Bus Station. At present buses are routed towards the bus station via New North Road, Longbrook Street, York Road and Sidwell Street / Bampfylde Street. Allowing buses to travel from New North Road directly onto Sidwell Street would create a shorter (approximately 500 metres shorter) and more direct route to the city centre, providing journey time savings and greater passenger satisfaction.

The new bus route facilitated by the scheme also creates the potential for buses to stop on Sidwell Street, creating further benefits for passengers heading to Exeter High Street as this would be closer than stopping on Cheeke Street or the Bus Station.

Furthermore, diverting buses off Longbrook Street and York Road will avoid narrow junctions not suited to buses, such as the turning from Longbrook Street onto York Road, which can cause localised congestion and these delays for all traffic. In addition, the proposals reduce the number of services passing residential properties and community sites such as Exeter Mosque and St Sidwell's Primary School, thus reducing the negative impacts of large vehicles including air and noise pollution, ground vibration, and congestion.

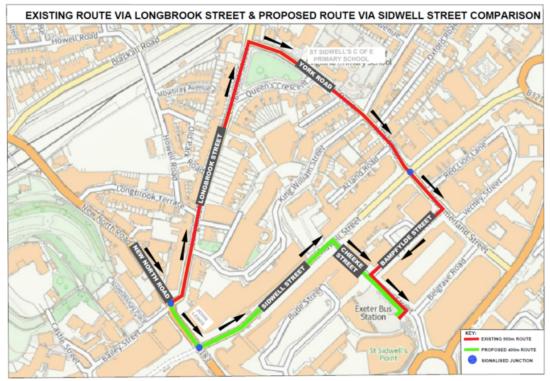


Figure 3: New North Road Route Diversion

The New North Road Bus Gate scheme proposes the implementation of a new contraflow bus lane on New North Road between Waterstones and John Lewis in Exeter City Centre with a bus gate at the northwest end of the lane. The lane will be facilitated by widening the existing contraflow cycle lane to 3 metres, by narrowing the existing vehicular traffic lane to 3 metres. The existing northbound one-way lane will retain access to all vehicles travelling northwest towards New North Road.

The proposed bus gate at the junction with Longbrook Street and Bailey Street will ensure road users are aware the bus lane is to be used by buses and cycles only. The lane will be further differentiated from the opposing traffic lane by resurfacing the asphalt with block effect imprinting.

The scheme will use existing road space only, the footway widths on either side will be retained and the distance for pedestrians to cross the road will remain the same. To accommodate the height of double decker buses, the trees on the eastern footway will be pruned to raise the tree canopies.

4) Options

Do Nothing

Maintaining the existing situation in both Exeter and Barnstaple will continue to provide bus services with unnecessarily long journey times and indirect routes. Maintaining this current service will do nothing to improve patronage, and therefore fail to meet the aims of the BSIP. Furthermore, moving BSIP funding from these schemes onto other schemes would need approval from the Department for Transport, presenting the risk of the money being required to be returned to Government.

Bideford/Barnstaple Western Bus Corridor: Roundswell Bus Lane Increase highway capacity: The Transport Infrastructure Plan (TIP) proposes road widening to increase capacity onto A39. The proposed scheme is in line with the TIP policy as the bus lane would be built on land largely outside of the current carriageway. The new bus lane would improve bus journey time therefore improving existing patronage experience and encouraging the further use of public transport services. The existing two lanes into Roundswell roundabout would be extended to 110 metres for all traffic to improve congestion for general traffic and to allow the bus to weave to the right-hand lane.

Exeter Northern Bus Corridor: New North Road to City Centre Bus Gate
Retain cycle contraflow and separate bus lane: An alternative option that was explored proposed maintaining the existing contraflow cycle lane, and instead widening the northwest bound traffic lane into the western footway to facilitate an 8 metre width for a 3 metre northwest bound traffic lane, a 3 metre southeast bound bus lane and a 2 metre cycle lane southeast bound cycle lane. This option was rejected due to producing a longer crossing distance of 8 metres compared to 6 metres and the requirement to narrow the western footway. Furthermore, heavy goods vehicles would not be able to turn left off New North Road onto Bailey Street in this scenario without moving the pedestrian crossing and signals further west along Bailey Street and off the pedestrian desire line. This alternative option is also more expensive compared to the preferred option and there are additional complications with the widening due to the underground tunnels in the area.

5) Consultations

A public consultation for each of the scheme proposals has been undertaken.

Bideford/Barnstaple Western Bus Corridor

A public consultation was held between 26 May and 23 June 2023. A survey was hosted online on Devon County Council's 'Have Your Say' pages, with email and telephone contacts provided as alternative methods to submit responses. The full consultation report is available to view here -

https://www.devon.gov.uk/haveyoursay/consultations/bus-services-improvement-plan-bsip-in-north-devon/

The consultation was promoted via:

- A local press release
- Devon County Council's Facebook account
- A consultation leaflet, delivered to businesses in the Roundswell area.

136 responses to the online questionnaire were received, with an additional 5 via email. No responses were received by phone. A small number of additional emails were also received for clarifications.

Headline Results

- Overall, 105 (77%) respondents are strongly against the scheme, 10 (7%) are against it, 2 (2%) are neutral, 3 (3%) support the proposals and 15 (11%) strongly support the proposals.
- 67 respondents believe that the scheme will not improve current conditions, with too few buses using the route.
- 46 respondents have concerns that the scheme will make existing queuing worse, and 36 respondents believe that the current levels of congestion are the major issue which needs to be addressed.
- 33 respondents propose that instead of a bus lane, extend the 2 turning lanes at Roundswell roundabout for all vehicles to improve congestion.
- Comments received in support of the proposals highlight the benefit the scheme will have in encouraging people out of their cars through improved bus journey times and reliability.
- Comments in support of the proposed footpath adjacent to the A3125 on the western side were received.

The final design was amended in response to the comments about congestion. The proposed bus lane will be slightly shorter to allow 110 metres (instead of the currently existing 40 metres) for vehicles to weave to the correct turning lane increasing capacity.

It should be noted that the council is required to carry out a further consultation on the traffic regulation order for the proposed bus lane. Any comments submitted will be considered before a final decision can be made. Exeter Northern Bus Corridor: New North Road to City Centre Bus Gate
A public consultation was held between 17 July 2023 and 14 August 2023. A survey was hosted online via Devon County Council's 'Have Your Say' page, feedback could also be submitted via email, post, or telephone. The full consultation report will be linked to the have your say page (https://devon.cc/NNR) once published.

The consultation was promoted via:

- Press release.
- Posts on Devon County Council social media pages,
- Posters on buses.
- Paid Facebook advertisement,
- A letter drop to residents, businesses, and organisations in the local area including St Sidwell's Primary School, Exeter Mosque,
- Emails to key stakeholders including bus operators, Living Options Devon and the Exeter and St David's Taxi Association.

The questionnaire received 371 responses. A number of emails and letters were also received expressing feedback, asking for more information, requesting paper copies of materials, and submitting paper questionnaires. The headlines of the consultation are summarised below.

Headline Results

- Of the questionnaire respondents, 282 (76%) supported the proposals (235 strongly supported, 47 somewhat supported). 83 (23%) respondents opposed the scheme (14 somewhat opposed, 69 strongly opposed), and a further 6 (2%) of respondents were neutral on their position.
- 97 respondents raised their appreciation for the benefits the scheme would bring to Longbrook Street and York Road by reducing traffic, increasing safety around the school and improving local air quality.
- 83 respondents cited their appreciation for the benefits to buses facilitated by the scheme including shorter journey times, a more direct bus route, and the potential to stop on Sidwell Street.
- 40 comments were submitted to the questionnaire that objected to the restriction of traffic in the city centre, however, the New North Road Bus Gate proposals do not restrict through movement or limit access to private cars. Other unsupportive comments included the need to improve bus service frequency and quality first, the proposals were not needed, and the benefits did not warrant the financial cost.
- A number of comments were received concerned with the impact on pedestrians and cyclists within the city centre as there would be more buses travelling on Sidwell Street and cyclists would have to share the lane with buses. Two responses were received from key stakeholders who shared these concerns but overall supported the scheme due to the benefits mentioned above.
- Other comments include concerns over enforcement, the need to improve signage in the area, the need to review signal timings to remove conflicts between cyclists and pedestrians, and the potential to allow taxis and/or HGVs through the bus gate.

It should be noted that the council is required to carry out a further consultation on the traffic regulation order for the proposed bus gate. Any comments submitted will be considered before a final decision can be made.

6) Strategic Plan

The BSIP schemes are well aligned with a range of the Strategic Plan priorities by improving the efficiency and attractiveness of bus travel, encouraging increased patronage and therefore more sustainable lifestyles. The table below summarises how each of the proposals would impact the relevant Strategic Plan actions according to a seven-point scale, whereby -3 represents a large negative impact and +3 represents a large positive impact.

Strategic Plan Priority	Strategic Plan Action	Comment	Alignment
	Support a green recovery from COVID- 19	Reducing journey distance and time for a more efficient bus route in Exeter, and reducing journey time in Barnstaple	+3 (Large positive)
Respond to the Climate Emergency	Prioritise sustainable travel and transport	Increasing the attractiveness of public transport on one of the busiest bus routes	+3 (Large positive)
	Encourage sustainable lifestyles	Increasing the attractiveness of public transport	+2 (Moderate positive)
	Support transition to low emission vehicles	Improving public transport to help make it a real alternative to private car usage	+2 (Moderate positive)

Investing in Devon's	Secure investment in transport infrastructure	Utilising funds secured through the Bus Service Improvement Plan	+3 (Large positive)
economic recovery	Maintain and, where necessary, improve our highway network and improve sustainable transport options	Improving the efficiency and convenience of public transport	+2 (Moderate positive)
Helping communities to be safe, connected and resilient	Enable a range of transport options, including public transport	In Exeter, reducing the number of buses passing residential properties and community hubs. In Barnstaple, offering alternative modes of reliable transport to reduce social exclusion and connect communities	+3 (Large positive)

7) Financial Considerations

The BSIP funding is ringfenced for schemes identified within the BSIP. Changes to the allocated funds must be approved by the Department for Transport and cannot be used for alternative transport schemes. If the BSIP funding is unspent within a certain timeframe, it will need to be returned to the Department for Transport.

The current estimate for the Roundswell scheme is £525,000. The government has allocated £380,000 for the Roundswell scheme. The remainder of funding will come from Section 106 developer contributions already secured from local developments. A breakdown of the funding sources for the Roundswell scheme is shown in the table below.

Funding Source	Total
BSIP Funding	£380,000
Developer Contributions (S106 funding)	£145,000
Total	£525,000

The estimated cost includes £47,000 of contingency. If the scheme costs less than estimated, the developer contributions will be used on other schemes within the legal requirements attached to them.

The footway works aspect of the scheme is proposed to be carried out at the same time as the bus lane works. Combining these schemes for construction, will save at least £20,000 compared with carrying out these schemes separately, and result in less disruption to the travelling public through reduced roadworks.

The overall cost of the New North Road to City Centre Bus Gate scheme is estimated to be £400,000. The BSIP grant allocates £300,000 for this scheme, with the remainder of funding coming from LTP grant as a local match contribution. A breakdown of the funding sources is shown in the table below.

Funding Source	Total
BSIP Funding	£300,000
Local Transport Plan grant	£100,000
Total	£400,000

The amounts above are already included in the capital programme.

8) Legal Considerations

When introducing new traffic schemes, it is the County Council's responsibility to ensure that all relevant legislation is complied with. This includes Section 122 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, which states that it is the duty of the local authority, so far as is practicable, to secure the expeditious, convenient, and safe movement of traffic and provision of parking.

Traffic regulation orders for the proposed bus lane and bus gate will be advertised in accordance with The Local Authorities' Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996 and any comments submitted will be considered in line with the legislation and council's procedures before any final decision is made. Following public advertisement of the TROs the relevant HATOC will, if required, consider the representations made and if it has concerns refer it to the Cabinet for final determination.

With reference to the above regulation, the schemes presented in this report enable the expeditious, convenient, and safe movement of buses in Exeter City Centre and Barnstaple. As the proposals make no changes to the existing highway for other road traffic, neither scheme will impact the expeditious, convenient, and safe movement of other road traffic.

9) Environmental Impact Considerations (Including Climate Change, Sustainability and Socio-economic)

The delivery of public transport interventions is an essential part of driving down transport emissions. Transport contributes approximately 27% of Devon's greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) and is the sector with the largest GHG emissions across the county. Reducing transport GHG will be essential to meet both national and local climate commitments.

In support of the Devon Strategic Plan 2021-25, the Devon Carbon Plan identifies that reducing the need to travel and shifting to sustainable transport options are the most important ways to tackle transport emissions. The BSIP schemes in this report increase the attractiveness of bus travel in Exeter and Barnstaple, encouraging a modal shift away from the car towards more sustainable bus travel, and therefore reducing overall emissions.

10) Equality Considerations

Where relevant, in coming to a decision the Equality Act 2010 Public Sector Equality Duty requires decision makers to give due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct;
- advance equality by encouraging participation, removing disadvantage, taking account of disabilities and meeting people's needs; and
- foster good relations between people by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding

in relation to the protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership (for employment), pregnancy and maternity, race/ethnicity, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation).

A decision maker may also consider other relevant factors such as caring responsibilities, rural isolation or socio-economic disadvantage.

In progressing these particular schemes / proposals, Impact Assessments have been prepared which has been circulated separately to Cabinet Members and are also available on the Council's website at

https://www.devon.gov.uk/impact/published

Bus Services Improvement Plan Scheme Roundswell Bus Lane - Impact Assessment (devon.gov.uk)

<u>Bus Service Improvement Scheme - New North Road Exeter - Impact Assessment</u> (devon.gov.uk)

Members will need to consider the Impact Assessments for the purposes of this item / meeting.

It is noted in the Impact Assessment for the BSIP that greater proportions of trips are made by bus for those identifying as 'Black' or mixed ethnicities than the general population. This indicated the potential to advance equality of opportunities for these groups by enabling faster, and more direct travel to employment, services, and leisure facilities. Additionally, it is noted that greater proportions of trips made by young people (aged 17-20), elderly people (ages 75+), people with reduced mobility and females are made by bus than the general population, all of which would see an advancement in equality of opportunities as a result of these schemes.

11) Risk Management Considerations

These proposals have been assessed and all necessary safeguards or action have been taken to safeguard the Council's position. As part of the delivery of the schemes, project risk registers have been maintained.

The New North Road Bus Gate Stage 1 Road Safety Audit (RSA) highlighted an articulated vehicle turning left onto Bailey Street from New North Road could overrun the existing advance cycle stop line and adjacent stop line on the Bailey Street approach to the junction. Due to very low traffic volumes Baily Street, likely very low speeds of vehicles wishing to turn and that there is no evidence of safety issues, it is considered that the current arrangement is working acceptably.

It was also highlighted that when turning from New North Road onto Sidwell Street, a bus could overrun the footway on the south-east corner of the junction. Following a further review of the signal staging, traffic released from Paris Street and the buses in New North Road will be separated within the staging. This will mean buses will be able to utilise more of the junction area and can therefore much more easily avoid encroachment towards the footway areas.

Further changes to the designs will be subject to a stage 2 RSA and could be agreed through delegated powers.

An arboricultural report was undertaken for the New North Road, Exeter scheme in June 2023. This showed that to facilitate the statutory 5.2 metres of highway clearance the crowns of the three trees on the eastern footway will have to be pruned on their southwestern aspect. Over the following growing seasons the remaining crowns will need rebalancing, by crown lifting the lower north-eastern aspect of the trees. This should be done through a phased approach over a number of years to minimise the physiological and aesthetical impact on the trees. An Arboricultural Method Statement (AMS) and a Tree Protection Plan (TPP) will be required to ensure the protection of the trees during the construction phase of the project.

A combined Stage 1 and 2 Road Safety Audit has been requested for the Roundswell Bus Lane scheme and it is currently under review. Further changes to the design will be subject to the outcome and could be agreed through delegated powers.

Multiple environmental surveys were carried out for the Roundswell Bus Lane scheme, including assessment of wildlife, coastal and water environment, flood risk, historic environment and trees and hedges. It was noted that the site contains a small/low hedge line of shrubs which is to have 17 metres of it removed and cut back along the length of the scheme.

A key risk for both schemes is that the Traffic Regulation Orders will need to be advertised and consulted upon and the response may result in the Orders not being approved. Without TROs in place, these schemes cannot be delivered.

12) Summary

Approval of the recommendations in this report will enable the construction of an initial tranche of BSIP capital schemes, creating improved bus priority measures along busy corridors in Exeter and Barnstaple. These bus priority measures will enable faster and more reliable journey times, ensuring bus travel into both Barnstaple town centre and Exeter city centre become more attractive alternatives to private car use, encouraging a modal shift, which will help to lower transport carbon emissions in the county.

Delivery of these schemes supports the Devon County Council Bus Service Improvement Plan and is well aligned with the Strategic Plan and Climate Emergency declaration. Further BSIP schemes will be brought to relevant committees for approval and delivery later in the programme.

Meg Booth

Director of Climate Change, Environment and Transport

Electoral Divisions: Chumleigh and Landkey, St Davids and Haven Banks and St Sidwells and St James, All in Exeter

Cabinet Member for Highways Management: Councillor Stuart Hughes

Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment and Transport: Councillor Andrea Davis

Local Government Act 1972: List of background papers

Nil

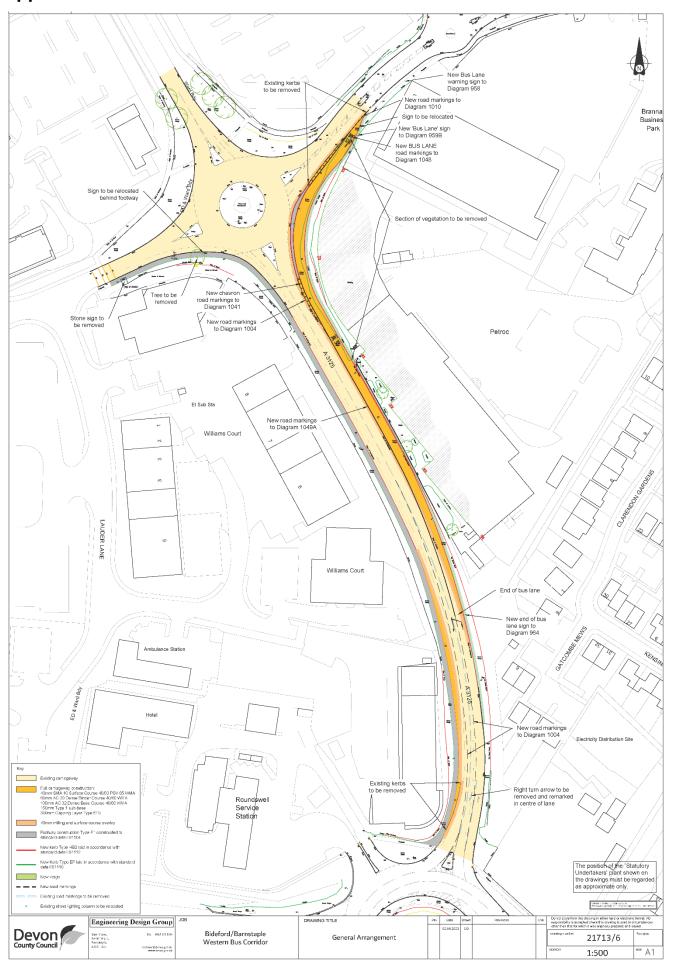
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Bus Service Improvement Plan Tranche 1 Capital Schemes - Final

Appendix 1 to CET/23/68



Appendix 2 to CET/23/68

