

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL
Wednesday 11 October 2023

1. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR CONNETT
Re: Engagement of DCC with Barclays Bank

How many times in the past 12 months, and the preceding 4 years, has the Council or its relevant Cabinet Member engaged with Barclays Bank on ethical investment matters?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR TWISS

Council officers have review meetings with Barclays on a 6 monthly basis to consider the bank's performance in relation to the bank's contract to provide banking services. Generally, these meetings focus on the Council's banking requirements, not on the wider corporate strategy of Barclays.

Over the past 12 months there has been one conversation with the Bank's relationship manager around the bank's approach to funding fossil fuel exploration. I am not aware of any other conversations during the previous four years.

In its capacity as the administering authority for the Devon Pension Fund, the Council is a shareholder in the Brunel Pension Partnership, who manage the majority of the Devon Pension Fund's investments. Brunel engage widely with companies on behalf of the Pension Fund. This includes engagement with Barclays at a senior management level which is likely to be more effective than engagement with the local area manager.

In 2020, Brunel co-filed a shareholder resolution at Barclays's AGM, calling on the company to set and disclose targets to phase out its financing of fossil fuel companies.

<https://www.brunelpensionpartnership.org/2020/04/29/from-ambition-to-action-lpgs-investors-ask-barclays-to-firm-up-commitments-on-climate/>

While Barclays have made some changes in response to investor engagement, they clearly have some way to go in responding to concerns around financing of fossil fuel companies.

We will look to engage further with Barclays on this issue during the remaining period of the current contract.

2. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR BRADFORD
Re: Queen Street, Newton Abbot and Lessons from Totnes

In the light of the County Council's failure in the courts on the Totnes High Street traffic scheme, and the £200k legal fees liability to the taxpayers of Devon, together with the government's directive to 'stop the assault on motorists'.

And at no point in the various consultations for Queen Street between 2020 and 2023 can it be demonstrated that there is any consistent, or majority of support for these measures, amongst both residents of Newton Abbot and the business traders of Queen Street. Notably the traders have consistently presented an overwhelming majority to oppose these actions and have warned that if implemented, will put many of them out of business (one trader of 25 years handed their notice in last week based on the traffic orders).

So, specifically can the Council explain the rationale of granting orders 6019 and 6020 and justify why they have proceeded to grant traffic orders to remove 55% of the parking on Queen Street and prohibit general motor vehicle access with these traffic orders?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

A recommendation was made to the Teignbridge Highways and Traffic Orders Committee (HATOC) in July 2023 to approve the Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) for the Queen Street, Newton Abbot Pedestrian Enhancement Scheme. The recommendation was based on Devon County Council receiving a low number of objections to the TROs, taking into consideration the scale and transformative nature of the scheme and the effects of the proposals on people living and working in Newton Abbot. Following the statutory consultation, Officers engaged with businesses and other key stakeholders and the TROs were subsequently amended to address local concerns about insufficient loading provision. The recommendation also recognised the outcome of the June 2022 Public Consultation, which demonstrated support for pedestrian enhancements and the provision of new greening and seating. The reasons for the HATOC resolution of the recommendation are set out in the meeting's minutes, which are available to view online.

3. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR BRADFORD
Re: Examples of Similar Traffic Orders

Can the council give other examples of similar traffic orders having been granted in Devon town centres, in the face of similar levels of dissatisfaction from the respondents to consultations?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

Similar traffic orders restricting access to general traffic are in place in major town centres across Devon including Highweek Way and Bank Street in Newton Abbot, Fore Street in Tiverton, The Strand in Barnstaple and Exeter High Street. I do not have details on the levels of dissatisfaction recorded at the time of approval of these schemes; however, given their transformational nature, I would expect there to have been stakeholder opposition with representations considered in line with our democratic and legal processes as per the Queen Street scheme.

4. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR BRADFORD Re: Government Directives (Future High Streets Fund Projects)

Can the Council also confirm it understands the directives recently issued by the Government, to extend the delivery of Future High Streets Fund projects by 18 months?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

Yes

5. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR BRADFORD Re: Risk to Funding Award

Can the Council also acknowledge that this concession now removes the concern, that seeking any alternative to the scheme, would now no longer implement a delay that would risk the funding award?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

The scheme is also part funded by the Government's Active Travel Fund (£500,000), which requires funds to be committed by the end of March 2024 and for the scheme to be delivered by the end of March 2025.

6. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR BAILEY Re: Peer Review of Highways

Please can the portfolio holder for highways provide a copy of the most recent independent evaluation (peer review or equivalent) of the highways department of Devon County Council.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

In 2021 the Highways and Traffic Management Service commissioned a value for money assessment from the Future Highways Research group who are a research organisation that is focused on innovation and good practice across the highway maintenance sector. I will share a copy of the report via email.

7. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR BAILEY
Re: Customer Satisfaction Survey – Highways

Please can the portfolio holder for highways provide a copy of the most recent customer satisfaction survey with the highways in Devon (a) completed by Devon County Councillors (b) completed by members of the public.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

The National Highway and Transport Public Satisfaction survey is carried out annually and collects the public's view on different aspects of Highways and Transport. I will share a copy of the most recent survey which is from 2022 via email. Unfortunately, as the responses are anonymous, I am not aware if any Councillors were asked, or responded to the survey.