

## Destination Exmouth Levelling Up Fund: Exmouth Gateway

### Report of the Director of Climate Change, Environment and Transport

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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.

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## 1) Recommendation

That the Cabinet be asked to:

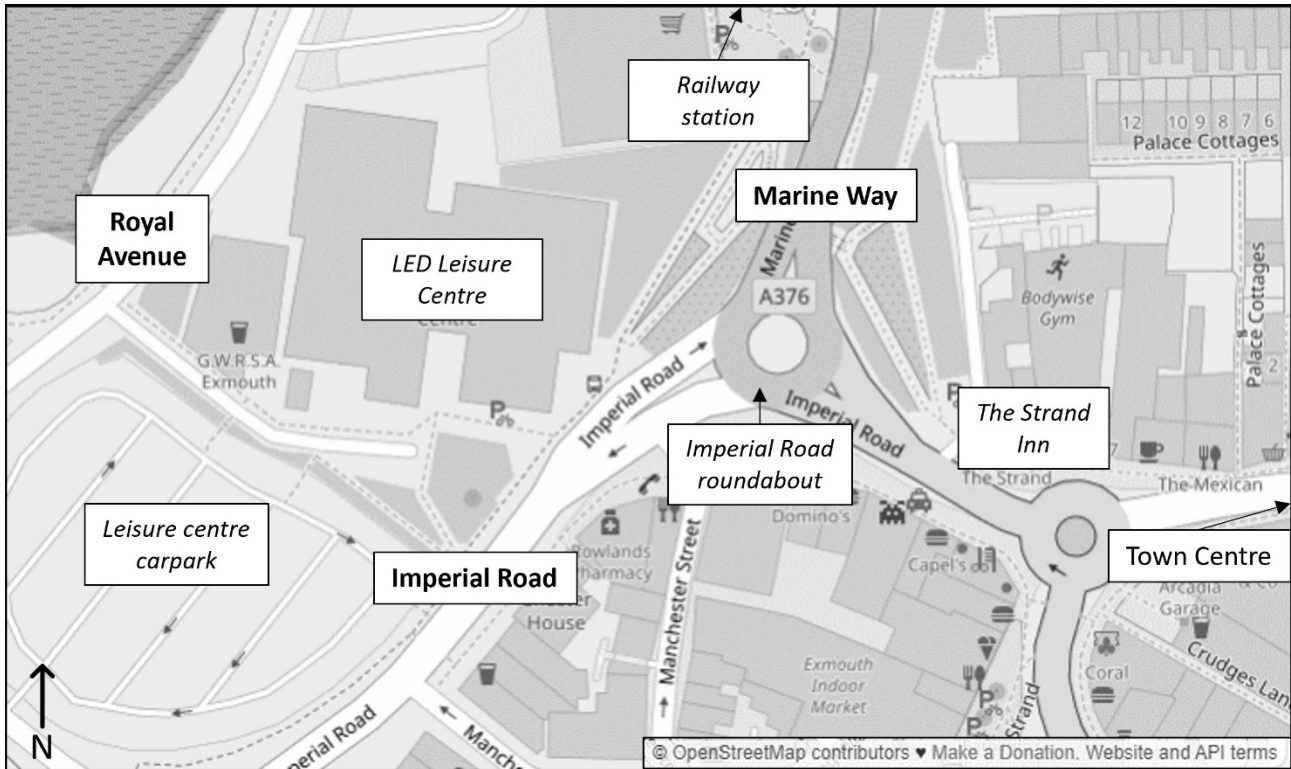
- (a) note the results of the Consultation Report included in Appendix 1;
- (b) approve the removal of the Exmouth Gateway proposals from the Destination Exmouth Levelling Up Fund (LUF) package.

## 2) Introduction

In Summer 2022, Devon County Council submitted a bid to the Levelling Up Fund (LUF) Round 2 for the Destination Exmouth package. This consisted of two schemes; Dinan Way Extension and Exmouth Gateway. Dinan Way Extension proposes to connect Dinan Way to the A376 and move traffic away from residential roads in the area. This would be complemented by proposals at Exmouth Gateway, consisting of a collection of active travel and public realm improvements to the area around Exmouth railway station. These schemes complement each other to transform the transport system in Exmouth and provide a range of benefits, including:

- Improving connectivity across the whole town for all modes
- Modal shift through an improved transport interchange
- Potential to optimise bus routes to cut bus journey times
- Increasing footfall
- Improving safety, particularly for non-motorised users
- Reduced severance
- Better access to business parks and employment areas
- Relocation of HGVs and other traffic from inappropriate local residential roads
- Improving journey times and congestion
- Providing a catalyst for wider regeneration.

As a whole, Destination Exmouth builds on aspirations laid out in the Exmouth Neighbourhood Plan and intends to reduce the amount of traffic in the town centre and to create an improved experience for people arriving in Exmouth, particularly for pedestrians and cyclists using the Exe Estuary or those arriving in the town by rail. The extent of the Exmouth Gateway element of the scheme can be seen in Figure 1.



**FIGURE 1: EXTENT OF EXMOUTH GATEWAY SCHEME**

The Exmouth Gateway scheme proposed the following aspects:

#### **Area outside the railway station**

- Improved signage outside Exmouth railway station;
- Widening of the pedestrian / cycle footway to reduce conflict between the high volume of users;
- Converting the zebra crossing to a signalised crossing;
- Closure of the subway to provide an enhanced footprint for other interventions and supporting the above public realm improvements.

#### **Imperial Road roundabout**

- Modified with narrower lane widths to encourage lower speeds and improve walking and cycling facilities;
- A parallel crossing to replace the current zebra crossing with a raised table;
- Relocation of the bus stop outside the leisure centre 20m to the south;
- A new zebra crossing introduced outside The Strand Inn and a raised table across the access road to the pub;
- Cycle parking in the area updated;
- The existing on-street parking opposite The Strand Inn moved slightly east and the existing parking layby reduced in width with taxi parking removed.

### Leisure Centre car park

- A raised table introduced at the top of the road;
- Footpath widened and a passing place introduced for vehicles using the car park;
- An uncontrolled pedestrian crossing introduced on The Royal Avenue.

These proposals were intended to encourage more active travel, particularly for shorter journeys, reduce congestion and improve connectivity across the town. A plan showing these proposals is shown in Appendix 2. These proposals were approved by East Devon District Council and Exmouth Town Council prior to the LUF bid being submitted.

## 3) Proposal and Consultation

Before the Levelling Up Fund bid was submitted, a workshop was held with stakeholders to identify the scope of the project. Once the LUF bid was successful, initial plans were drawn up and were subject to a five-week public engagement period between 19 July 2023 and 21 August 2023. The objectives of this were to raise awareness of the scheme and its potential benefits and to encourage stakeholders and the local community to share their ideas on travel issues and opportunities in the areas to help inform more detailed design development. The engagement period included:

- Stakeholder briefing sessions
- An online survey and project webpage
- A public event at Exmouth Leisure Centre
- Letter and poster distribution in the area around the scheme
- Social media and a press release.

A total of 864 respondents completed the survey and two responses were submitted by email. 41% of respondents supported the proposals and 49% opposed the proposals. The full public engagement report is available online: [Corporate websites - Exmouth Active Travel Improvement Engagement Summary.pdf \(sharepoint.com\)](#). Following this engagement, several stakeholder engagement sessions were held with East Devon District Council, Exmouth Town Council and Exmouth in Bloom to collaboratively develop detailed plans for Exmouth Gateway.

A key finding in the engagement was that 60% of respondents did not support the closure of the subway. The project team undertook further work to confirm the importance of the subway closure to the scheme and as a result this element was retained in the proposals due to:

- **Space:** Removal of the subway access ramps would create space to widen existing paths at Exmouth Gateway. Without this, it would not be possible to provide many of the proposed improvements as areas of conflict could not be addressed within the existing footprint.
- **Usage:** A count carried out in September 2023 to compare the number of people using the subway to the zebra crossing showed that 82% (2520 of a total of 3079) of pedestrians and cyclists use the zebra crossing. This is consistent with past survey results, and confirms usage of the subway is minimal.
- **Safety and convenience:** Replacing the existing zebra crossing with a signalised crossing on Marine Way would make it safer and more convenient for people walking and cycling between the station and town centre, particularly for anyone with a

disability. Pedestrian subways are widely associated with anti-social behaviour and this perceived danger can prevent people from using the subway, particularly vulnerable users at night.

- **Cost:** The subway periodically floods, which is an ongoing revenue cost to the Council so savings would be expected in the long term. The cost of closing and infilling the subway with a suitable material would be approximately £220,000, which if approved would be funded out of the capital grant funding for the scheme.

Whilst the proposal to close the subway remained a critical element in delivering the full benefits of the overall scheme, other changes were made following the summer engagement period. This included a shared path being preferred over a segregated path keeping cyclists and pedestrians separated; upgrading the zebra crossing outside the railway station to a signalised crossing, and retaining the flowerbed and part of the wall near the leisure centre. These detailed designs were taken to public consultation between 14 November 2023 and 5 January 2024.

This consultation was advertised by posters, social media and via a letter delivered to approximately 4,500 addresses in the scheme area. As well as a website which displayed all scheme information, two public drop-in events were held:

- Wednesday 6 December 2023, 11:30 – 14:30 at Exmouth Leisure Centre. 96 attendees.
- Thursday 7 December 2023, 16:30 – 19:30 at Brixington Community Church. 50 attendees.

An online survey was the main method of gathering public views on the proposals, which could also be requested in paper form. Participants were also able to contact the project team via email, at the events or by phoning DCC customer services. A total of 829 surveys were completed (824 online and 5 hard copies) and 19 emails received.

The survey responses showed mixed views: 44% of survey respondents supported the proposals, whilst 47% of respondents opposed the proposals. The proposal with the highest level of opposition was closing the subway, which 64% of respondents opposed to some degree. Full details of this consultation and the responses can be seen in the consultation report published online.

It is not possible to deliver the active travel gateway improvements without the additional space provided by the infilling of the subway and its closure. Without public support for the closure of the subway, this report recommends that the Exmouth Gateway proposals is removed from the Destination Exmouth LUF package of improvements. Officers will continue to work with the Department for Transport to ensure that the delivery of the Dinan Way Extension continues.

## 4) Alternatives

### **Continue with Exmouth Gateway Proposals**

Proceeding with the full active travel and public transport gateway improvements and supporting the original Department for Transport submission expectations for the Levelling Up Fund package was considered. There are financial risks associated with removing the

gateway part of the funding package (see section 6); however, this option was not pursued with such strong public opposition against the subway element.

### **Amend Exmouth Gateway Proposals**

An option of keeping the subway open but delivering other elements of the Exmouth Gateway scheme was investigated; however, these would not be feasible without the space unlocked by the subway closure. It would not deliver any meaningful active travel benefits to the area that would meet the Levelling Up Fund objectives and so was not supported as an option.

## **5) Strategic Plan**

The Exmouth Gateway proposals aligns with the vision and priorities set out in the Devon County Council's Strategic Plan 2021 – 2025 in a number of ways, including:

- Responding to the climate emergency;
- Improving health and wellbeing;
- Helping communities be safe, connected and resilient.

However, by listening to the consultation feedback and responding accordingly, we are ensuring strong alignment with another of Devon's Strategic Plan priorities to engage directly with people in meaningful ways and encourage participation in decisions that affect them.

## **6) Financial Considerations**

Destination Exmouth (consisting of Dinan Way Extension and Exmouth Gateway) is funded through the Government's Levelling Up Fund (LUF) (£15.765 million), with match funding of £1.752 million contributed by Devon County Council, East Devon District Council and Exmouth Town Council.

Negotiations with the Department for Transport are ongoing to understand the financial impact of not delivering the gateway scheme as part of the Destination Exmouth package. We anticipate that this will result in the loss of the remaining LUF funding towards the Exmouth Gateway package. There is also a risk that the authority could be asked to return all costs incurred on the Exmouth Gateway scheme to the Department for Transport and will need to be covered by Local Transport Plan funds. This is estimated at £0.2 million. The Gateway package has a budget of £4.4 million.

It is not expected that funding secured for the delivery of the Dinan Way Extension would be affected, but this cannot be confirmed until a Project Adjustment Request (PAR) form is submitted. This will be progressed should the Cabinet decision support the recommendations.

## **7) Legal Considerations**

The lawful implications of the recommendation has been considered and taken into account in the preparation of this report.

## **8) Environmental Impact Considerations (Including Climate Change)**

These recommendations have no Environmental Consideration impacts on the existing situation at Exmouth Gateway.

Should the scheme have been delivered, there would have been environmental benefits arising from encouraging modal shift and rebalancing the provision for sustainable and active travel options in the area.

## **9) Equality Considerations**

These recommendations have no Equality Consideration impacts on the existing situation at Exmouth Gateway.

Should the scheme have been delivered, there would have been equality benefits from providing infrastructure that rebalanced the travel options in the Exmouth Gateway area, such as upgrading the existing crossings to support vulnerable road users and reducing potential conflict in high use areas outside the station and the end of the Exe Estuary Trail.

## **10) Risk Management Considerations**

These recommendations have no Risk Management impacts.

## **11) Summary**

The Destination Exmouth package secured funding from the Levelling Up Fund (LUF) in 2022 and is made up of two schemes; Dinan Way Extension and Exmouth Gateway. Exmouth Gateway is a collection of active travel and public realm improvements to the area around Exmouth railway station. This included the area outside of the railway station; the closure of the subway; improvements to Imperial Road roundabout and; changes to the leisure centre car park. The proposals were agreed and supported by East Devon District Council and Exmouth Town Council as part of the original grant funding submission.

Early engagement in the summer of 2023 showed that 60% of respondents opposed the closing of the subway. Despite additional technical work and evidence to demonstrate its importance in delivering wider active travel improvements, this remained a significant issue in the Winter 2023/24 public consultation when 64% of respondents opposed the closure of the subway.

With the continued strong level of opposition to the closure of the subway and lack of suitable alternatives that delivers benefits in line with the Levelling Up Fund objectives, it is recommended that the Exmouth Gateway proposals are removed from the Destination Exmouth Levelling Up Fund package. This supports Devon's Strategic Plan priority to

support people and communities by engaging with communities in a meaningful way and encourage their participation in decision which affect them.

It is understood that this will not impact the ongoing work to deliver Dinan Way Extension and officers will continue to work closely with the Department for Transport to pursue this element of the Destination Exmouth package.

**Meg Booth**

Director of Climate Change, Environment and Transport

**Electoral Divisions:** Exmouth

Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment and Transport: Councillor Andrea Davis  
Cabinet Member for Highway Management: Councillor Stuart Hughes

**Local Government Act 1972: List of background papers**

Nil

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