

**QUESTIONS TO THE
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL AND CABINET MEMBERS**

Thursday 6 October 2022

**1. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR BRAZIL
Re: Second homes in Devon**

How many second homes are there in Devon (excluding Torbay and Plymouth) and can you break the figure down to local authority areas?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR TWISS

The local-authority level data on second home ownership in Devon available from Council Tax records is shown in the table below.

	Number of dwellings classed as second homes on 4 October 2021								
Band	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	Total
East Devon	264	389	542	493	326	180	138	16	2,348
Exeter	107	134	111	71	45	23	22	1	514
Mid Devon	31	43	45	30	26	24	12	2	213
North Devon	385	326	385	326	189	108	60	5	1,784
South Hams	392	312	475	596	680	447	469	84	3,455
Teignbridge	272	249	253	229	136	74	49	10	1,272
Torridge	313	204	165	166	90	27	13	2	980
West Devon	79	114	116	80	71	50	26	2	538
Total	1,843	1,771	2,092	1,991	1,563	933	789	122	11,104

**2. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR BRAZIL
Re: Second Homes and Business Rates**

How many homes have switched to business rates in Devon (excluding Torbay and Plymouth) and can you break the figure down to local authority areas?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR TWISS

Some second homeowners have classified their dwelling as a short-term holiday let under business rates but data for the total number of such properties is not readily available as it is included in the database along with caravan parks etc.

These figures have to be taken with caution. These are the statistics that have been gathered from Council Tax and Business Rate data, but it has been pointed out to Government in a consultation on a new registration scheme for holiday lets it is very difficult to give a precise figure. For example, some second home owners might register as a holiday business even though they might not be letting out the property for more than 140 days per year in order to avoid paying Council Tax. Also, some second home owners might be splitting their main residence to attract a Council Tax discount as a single resident. These are currently legal loopholes. As part of its work with the Devon Housing Task Force, DCC has responded to Government consultation to recommend a full registration and regulation scheme for all holiday lets so that we have a better understanding and can control the supply and demand of holiday accommodation and second home ownership across the County.

3. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR WRIGLEY
Re: Costs of maintaining County Hall site

What is the approximate cost of maintaining the County Hall site each year, including taxes, charges and business rates over the past five years?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HART

County Hall Annual Maintenance and Running Costs	18-19	19-20	20-21	21-22	22-23 (month 4 forecast*)
	£1.679m	£1.265m	£1.320m	£2.373m	£1.769m

4. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR LEAVER
Re: Action following revised Highway Code

What action is the council planning to take, and when, in the light of the revised Highway Code of January 2022 and its emphasis on pedestrian rights and priorities?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

As well as publicising and promoting these significant hierarchical changes to the Highway Code, the Council is supporting targeted education and enforcement activities through the Vision Zero South West road safety partnership that contribute towards improving safety for the most vulnerable road users like pedestrians.

The Council has also been developing Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIP's), which set out a long term strategic approach to infrastructure improvements that support walking and cycling. LCWIP's will help us to bid for new external funding opportunities through central Government and local developments, and they will form a key part of the framework for the next Local Transport Plan that will aim to support a low carbon and more active transport system. The Council has just submitted a bid to the Department for Transport for funding which if successful should help to accelerate the production of the LCWIPs.

5. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR LEAVER
Re: Road Traffic Orders in Devon

Are all the 20mph Road Traffic Order in the county fully legal and in order?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

All 20 MPH speed limits in Devon are supported with an appropriate TRO and the correct signing. With best endeavours the signing is inspected and maintained in good order. We recognise that occasionally signing defects can occur, if Councillor Leaver has any concerns regarding any specific sites, please do make myself or the Traffic Team aware as soon as possible.

6. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HODGSON
Re: Pedestrian and cycleway route between Littlehempston and Totnes

How can the long running, 18 plus years of local campaigning for a safe pedestrian and cycleway route between Littlehempston and Totnes be included in plans for capital funding? This could provide an important and safe link from the National Cycle route that comes from Buckfastleigh into Totnes towards the route that is part of the new proposals submitted for the South Devon Cycle way funding bid from the Government's Levelling up fund. The recent cut backs to services by Stagecoach has left a deficiency of non-car choices for all those living along this part of the A381 and since COVID started the A381 between Totnes and Littlehempston has seen a huge rise in cyclists using the main road, but this is such a busy and dangerous road, that alternative safe provision needs to be provided so that a wider range of cyclists and pedestrians can walk or cycle this two mile distance.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

Cabinet considered this proposal in July 2020 and resolved that no further work investigating a multi-use trail between Littlehempston and Totnes be carried out due to the engineering, economic and cost constraints with delivering it. The County Council is prioritising completing the gaps in the Tarka Trail and progressing the Teign Estuary Trail and will be developing a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan for its strategic trails later this year to guide future investment priorities across the County.

7. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HODGSON
Re: Withdrawal of public bus services

With the substantial withdrawal of public bus services, in particular by Stagecoach, how will the Council try to ensure that the public can reduce their car use for local journeys? Will the subsidies otherwise offered to these bus companies, be invested in more pedestrian crossings and more 20mph speed limit zones to encourage more walking instead?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR DAVIS

Stagecoach are making substantial changes to their commercial services from 30 October. As these are commercially operated local bus services, Devon County Council has not been funding them and will therefore will not be making any savings. In fact, as set out in the email sent by our Principal Public Transport Officer to all elected Members on Thursday 29 September, in response to these changes his team are making arrangements, where possible, to maintain frequency and capacity in the bus network. This will be funded from the County Council's existing public transport budget and Government grants awarded specifically to support local bus services.

Further information about the difference between commercial and local authority financially supported bus services can be found on our Travel Devon web pages. [Bus services in Devon - Travel Devon](#)

8. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HODGSON
Re: Publication of Devon Carbon Plan

Will the publication of the Devon Carbon Plan mean that Devon County Council policies will be aligned to ensure compliance and support for the implementation of this important plan sooner rather than later, and thereby provide the leadership and good example that is needed to ensure we make a real difference?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR DAVIS

The production of the Devon Carbon Plan has been an iterative process over the last two years to accommodate a range of consultative approaches and ensure accountability in the preparation of this collective approach to the achievement of net-zero carbon emissions across Devon. This process has run in parallel with Devon County Council's development and adoption of its own Carbon Reduction Plan, which is intended to demonstrate compliance and support for the shared vision set out by the Devon Climate Emergency Partnership and provide clarity on how the authority will achieve its own commitment to net-zero emissions by 2030. The delivery of the County Council's Carbon Reduction Plan is kept under constant review through its Environmental Performance Board and can be amended as necessary in line with changing circumstances and wider approaches being taken in collaboration with others in Devon. Beyond our corporate response, this authority is working collaboratively to deliver the Plan on

issues including electric vehicle charging, providing household energy advice, green economic innovation, food issues via the Devon Food Partnership, supporting the farming sector with the transition, and enabling communities to address local energy issues. A long list of activity from Devon County Council and the Devon Climate Emergency partners is available online at <https://devonclimateemergency.org.uk/taking-action/>

9. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HODGSON
Re: Funding of South Devon Freeport proposals

At what point will the people of Devon be formally consulted on the plans by Devon County Council to borrow up to £15M of Treasury monies towards the South Devon Freeport proposals that are part of the Government's Levelling up plans? Since DCC cabinet agreed this sum in April this year, interest rates have been risen, is this likely to affect the repayments for that loan. Does the leader really believe that we should be borrowing against the Council taxer's public funds of the county, to fund a series of plans that include upgrading the nuclear deterrent at Devonport and a company building a luxury super yachts facility in Plymouth. <https://new.plymouth.gov.uk/plymouth-and-south-devon-freeport>

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR GILBERT

Cabinet took a decision to investment up to £15m capital into three infrastructure programmes needed to bring forward the tax and custom sites at Sherford and Langage, designated under the Plymouth and South Devon Freeport. This investment draws down £9.6m of Government capital funding and would be supported by borrowing repaid through ring fenced new business rates generated on these two sites.

The financial model developed to support the delivery of the tax and custom sites indicates sufficient future business rate income to cover the borrowing allowing for price increases and interest rate fluctuations. A review of a full business case of the infrastructure schemes is required to retest costs, borrowing and repayments. It is expected that the Authority will borrow from PWLB through annuity loans (repayment of principal during the lifetime of the loans), but a final decision will be made based on the best rates available at that time.

The County Council and South Hams District Council have entered into a business rate sharing agreement that sets out repaying borrowing is the first call from the ring fenced sums. The Council is only borrowing to support the development of the sites within South Hams to promote the relocation of overseas high value engineering businesses and is not investing in Devonport.