

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC
Thursday 7 September 2023

1. QUESTION FROM ANTHONY LEGON (in Attendance)
Re: Petition re Parking by Exeter University students, staff, contractors
in the upper part of Stoke Valley Road (including California Close).

I presented the petition in person to a meeting of Devon County Council on 20 February 2020. I received no acknowledgement of its receipt until 8 September 2020, even though even though the constitution requires a response within 15 days. I have since tried numerous times to move this matter forward, both with the help of our local County Councillor (Percy Prowse), and by writing to the Chief Executive Officer, etc., etc. I will not bore you with the details, but in summary: the petition has been ignored.

It is important to understand why the question of Residents-Only Parking in the section of Stoke Valley Road from Pennsylvania Road down to (but not including) Plassey Close needs to be addressed with some urgency: (a) University cars (i.e. owned by students, staff and contractors) park in this small section and are typically about 35 in number. They do not use the remainder of Stoke Valley Road. (b) The residents of Stoke Valley Road from Plassey Close down to the junction with Collins Road (from Nos. 78 down to No.1) are in a preponderant majority and, being unaffected by University free-parkers, voted against in the Residents-Only Parking in the previous poll (and will do so again), for reasons I can expand on but lack of space here forbids.

The problem of University free parkers increased as a result (a) of the huge increase in student numbers, (b) the policy of granting planning permission for student accommodation with inadequate or no parking space, and (c) the conversion of almost all roads around the University to Residents-Only Parking. The result of (a) to (c) is that Stoke Valley Road (upper part) is highly sought after as free parking by students and staff alike.

When planning permission for the University's East Park Development was sought (for 1300 students), Councillor Prowse secured an agreement for (I believe) £30,000 for the specific purpose of protecting residents in roads around the University from student parking (if 1 in 10 students were to bring a car to Exeter, this would mean 130 extra cars seeking free parking). I have written several times to find out whether the Council has received this money, but it appears that no one knows the answer to this question, no one knows whose responsibility it is to find out, or no one cares enough to obtain these monies from the University.

In summary, the whole experience has been farcical. Nothing has happened in three and a half years! Urgent action is now required to convert Stoke Valley Road (upper) to Residents-Only Parking. Whether the money comes from the East Park Development agreement or otherwise is a secondary matter.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

I understand that issues around this development and residents parking remain important to the community. It is not accepted that the petition you submitted in February 2020 was ignored; a response was provided, although I accept that this was late, and can only apologise again for this.

The situation is that monies from the university have not yet been released. Therefore, the Authority cannot progress with the work that you seek.

However, the monies must be released prior to commencement of works on the new accommodation planned for the site of "Existing Car Park D, University of Exeter (east Of Amory Building)". The developer is legally obligated to make this payment prior to that point, albeit that may only be a very short period in advance.

Should this not be the case, action will be taken by both Exeter City Council as Planning Authority and Devon County Council as Highway Authority. We currently have no indication of a start date and have not been approached by the university on this matter.

There are no other funds identified to progress these works at this time therefore progress is reliant on the development.

2. QUESTION FROM MARILYN SPURR (IN ATTENDANCE)

Re: Investment in fossil fuels

DCC states on its website 'Finding banks with a strong ethical investment policy is an amazing way to make sure that your money is not causing harm to the planet.'

However, a FOI request shows that you bank with Barclays, one of the least ethical banks in terms of investment in fossil fuels.

I believe that your contract with Barclays lasts until 2026. Will you commit to letting Barclays know that you are seriously reconsidering that contract and thus exercise any leverage you might have with them? They may offer value for money but to quote Kurt Vonnegut 'We will go down in history as the first society that wouldn't save itself because it wasn't cost-effective'.

REPLY FROM COUNCILLOR TWISS

The current contract with Barclays lasts until 2026. When that contract comes to an end and we need to put in place a new banking contract, we will look to factor in consideration of the bank's approach to climate transition. However, that will need to be considered alongside the need to ensure we continue to get value for money and that the Council's requirements for banking services can be met.

Work commissioned by the Council when the current contract was awarded identified that only three banks, Barclays, Lloyds and Nat West, were interested in bidding for new local authority contracts. HSBC also provide banking services to some local authorities but were not interested in bidding for new contracts. The Co-Operative Bank, generally considered as having a high ethical standing, withdrew from the local authority market some years ago. The smaller banks are not geared up to provide banking services to complex local authorities and would be extremely unlikely to bid for the Council's banking contract. Should that position change before 2026, then we can consider the alternatives available at that time, but we would need to be assured that an alternative bank would be able to provide the service required. We cannot take a risk with the Council's banking arrangements.

Between now and 2026, we will certainly engage with Barclays, and urge them to reconsider their position on financing of the fossil fuel industry and in particular the exploration and development of new fields. We can also make them aware that we will take into account the bank's approach to climate transition when we decide upon a new contract in 2026.

For clarity the recommendation on choice of bank referred to in the question is not on the Council's website, but on the Devon Climate Emergency partnership website.