

# **West Down Parish Council**

## **County Councillors report**

**December 2022**

### **Financial position of Devon County Council**

Devon County Council provides vital services to over 800,000 people from a net revenue budget of £630 million. Devon has the largest local road network in the country and a larger proportion of older people compared to the national average. In the eleven years up to and including 2021/22 the authority's core funding from Government reduced by over £180 million or 72% in real terms. The County Council ended the 2021/22 financial year with a £3.3 million overspend, the first time this had happened in 30 years. We are not alone. New research by the County Councils Network shows 17 English authorities face a combined deficit of more than £500 million in 2023/24.

As you know from my previous reports to the Parish Council, there has been a huge amount of work from mid-summer examining every item of spend and what DCC can change, pause or cease in order to present a balanced outturn i.e. what we actually spent compared to the budget, at the end of every financial year for 2022/23, as well as the need to do build a balanced budget for 2023/24, where the current gap between money we have and money we must legally invest in services is going to be tough to achieve. Work continues apace, so that by the end of this month, going into very early January, targets will have been set, and we will now what the settlement figure we will receive from Government will be.

### **Council agrees to amend North Devon Link Road plans due to rising costs**

Rising costs as a result of inflation are behind a decision by Devon County Council to amend its ongoing North Devon Link Road improvement plans.

Improving the safety of the road, while delivering improved economic benefits to North Devon and Torridge economies - two of the main objectives to the scheme - remain very much a priority.

The £67 million improvement programme, the vast majority of which is funded by the Department for Transport, were costed back in 2019 when the economic landscape was very different.

The unexpected coronavirus pandemic, which has had and still is having a dramatic impact on businesses, followed by the unforeseen rise in costs of materials and energy compounded by the war in Ukraine, inflation, and rising interest rates, and £67 million no longer buys as much in 2022 as it did in 2019.

The entire construction programme is managed within a number of contracts, with one contract in particular accountable for the main work. That's where the problem is now is. Due to rising inflation, the contractor's costs have increased beyond what might usually be expected by more than a quarter, since first costed.

The Council has spoken to the Department for Transport, as the main funder for the project, to see if there's any more funding from them available. There's not. That's the reality of what's happening in construction and other business sectors everywhere

It means that we've had to look within the £67 million budget, outside the scope of the main essential work, to see what we can do differently to reduce costs, that does not compromise the purpose of the improvements.

In addition to the main improvement work, the Council's plans had been to improve junctions at Heywood, Buckleigh, Westleigh, Bishops Tawton, West Buckland and Borners Bridge.

To absorb the extra costs within the main contract, we need cut back on costs elsewhere. So, we will continue our plans to improve junctions at Heywood, Buckleigh, Westleigh, West Buckland, and Borners Bridge, but we will now redesign the Bishops Tawton Junction, to remove what was to be an underpass, and instead install safe crossing facilities.

Plans for a section of overtaking lane between Portmore and Landkey roundabouts, and for a footbridge over the road in that vicinity, will however now be removed from the programme. Plans do still include a footbridge located at the Landkey junction.

We've considered all options, not just by cost, but also considering road safety. Removing the overtaking lane and the footbridge and redesigning the junction at Bishops Tawton will allow us to divert funding to the main work, to meet the additional costs of construction.

With regards to the footbridge, we will be looking for developer contributions in future to help pay for improved walking and cycling access in the area.

The main works are still on track to be completed by the end of 2023, but the Bishops Tawton junction may be delayed until mid-2024.

### **Consultation on DCC's Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Strategy**

From 2030 the sale of new petrol and diesel vehicles is expected to end – the draft Devon Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy sets out how and where we will need to intervene to deliver the needed infrastructure to increase the uptake of electric vehicles across the county.

The strategy is just one of a series of documents that will form part of the emerging Local Transport Plan (LTP).

The EV Charging Strategy, Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans, Devon's Bus Service Improvement Plan, and rail plans for Devon Metro are essential to ensure that Devon achieves net-zero by 2050, as outlined in the Devon Carbon Plan.

The strategy itself includes detail on numbers of current and predicted EV users, capacity, number and location of existing charging points, detail about current local and national policy as well as forecasts of future EV uptake and chargepoint demand.

If we want to reduce carbon emissions and ensure that Devon becomes net-zero we must decarbonise transport. This strategy will set out what we need to achieve and help us to unlock

further funding from Government for new electric charging infrastructure and will ensure that we are well placed to take advantage of new capital funding opportunities as they arise.

Current position; We have almost completed delivering the first 80 car chargers in public car parks and we expect to be able to soon announce plans for more in the future. But this is just the start – we need many more.

You can give your views via our [Have Your say website](#).

Businesses can sign up for a webinar at 6pm on Tuesday 6 December. To register, please email the project team at [transportplanning@devon.gov.uk](mailto:transportplanning@devon.gov.uk).

Paper copies of the strategy and questionnaire will be available in every library.

For further information, please write to: Transport Planning, Matford Offices, County Hall, Topsham Road, Exeter, EX2 4QD.

## Highways

Devon's gritting teams have been out already this winter and they're prepared to face whatever the elements throw at the county's roads over the next few months.

Gritting depots across the county are fully stocked with around 24,000 tonnes of salt and Devon County Council's upgrade of its winter fleet has continued, with eight of its 37 frontline gritters replaced with newer models this year, reducing revenue spend on maintaining outdated vehicles.

This winter, Devon's fleet of gritters will be running on sustainably sourced Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO), which is a waste product from the food industry. The fuel produces 90% less CO2 than regular diesel which will help meet Devon County Council's net zero targets by 2030.

Devon's snow warden scheme, which celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary last year, continues to provide additional support for communities as part of the Council's winter self-help scheme. The 325 volunteer snow wardens across the county treat their priority routes during prolonged spells of severe weather.

### **Reminder of how to report a Highway issue;**

**[Report a problem - Roads and transport \(devon.gov.uk\)](#)**

**[0345 155 1004](tel:03451551004)**

Live chat is available on the Highways website Monday to Friday 9.30 am to 12 pm and 2 pm to 4.30 pm (4 pm on Fridays).

To report a problem with road maintenance, traffic management and parking, streetlights and signs and public rights of way

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