

May 2023 Devon County Councillor update. Debo.sellis@devon.gov.uk

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Dear Councillors,

Following the elections there will be some new faces, congratulations on your election and I hope that DCC, WDBC and Tavistock Town and Gulworthy Parish Councillors will find my updates useful. In the past the TTC felt there was too much information, so I will keep my reports short and hopefully the links below will help you find the information easily. Please note that information can be obtained from the Devon County Council website: <https://www.devon.gov.uk> you can report issues on-line, for example issues with Roads and Transport, Waste and Recycling, Education and Families.

Transport and Environment - This week the government announced a further extension to the popular £2 bus fare, this will continue until the end of October and then the capped fare will be £2.50. This is very welcome news.

Here at DCC we are looking at how this affects the fare proposals we have been working up as part of the BSIP (Bus Service Improvement Plan) element of our allocation. I will be meeting Cabinet member for Climate Change and Environment to discuss improving the local bus services in our area. I am pleased that Transition Tavistock will hopefully be working with us too.

The Department for Transport has agreed the funding of the West Devon Transport Hub. This will see a £13.4m new station at Okehampton which we hope to have open spring 2025.

Langage Green Hydrogen project - Carlton Power, who originated and developed the Langage gas-fired power station and the Langage solar farm (located eight miles east of Plymouth in South Hams), has secured the UK Government's support to build a green hydrogen hub on land within the Langage Energy Park. Langage Green Hydrogen is the only project in the Southwest of England that is backed by the Government and announced on 30th March. Subject to agreement with Carlton Power, the Government will provide financial support to the project through its Hydrogen Business Model process, which aims to stimulate the growth of the hydrogen economy in the Southwest and across the UK. Carlton's 10MW hydrogen hub project at Langage is the first of its kind in Devon and Cornwall and will form part of the Plymouth & South Devon Freeport.

Highways - Residents mentioned two major issues during the election. Boats and potholes. Though not the area of WDBC and the parish councils, residents are very fed up with the state of the roads. DCC's Team Maintenance Contractor has continued to deploy additional resources to pothole repairs and is focused on the safety of the travelling public. The impact of these additional resources to catch up the backlog is that we will see that works planned for our areas, particularly patching will have been reprogrammed for later in the financial year.

Works are programmed for: Pixon Lane, Callington Road, Lumburn Bends, Fore Street, Drakes Statue area, Gulworthy to Bere Alston patching

The additional £9.4million funding announced in the Chancellor's budget is very welcome and will go some way to countering the inflationary impacts of the last couple of years, particularly felt since the war in Ukraine.

The other significant change we have all experienced over this winter period is an increase in the volume and strength of public abuse. Some of the correspondence received is nothing short of vile and totally unacceptable. The worst of this abuse

has been seen on social media with explicit threats made to Officers in some areas, I am advised. In response to this increased level of threat, officers have been told that when responding to members of the public they should not provide their surname and send emails from a shared mailbox. Can I take this opportunity to remind members that they should not be disclosing officer's names or email addresses to the public. Sadly, the threat is very real.

The Service is working very hard to address the current backlog of safety defects that remain across the network. The winter season has been a real challenge with an extended period of sub-zero temperatures from late November through to the wettest March for over 40 years. The fragile nature of the asset resulted in reports from the public regularly more than 400 per day. The Highways and Traffic Management Service has just published its new Service Plan which is available publicly via the County Council's web pages. The document has been produced with the input of everyone in the service and lays out the way colleagues want to work with each other and our communities as we go forward. [Highways and Traffic Management Service Plan - Roads and transport \(devon.gov.uk\)](https://www.devon.gov.uk/Highways-and-Traffic-Management-Service-Plan-Roads-and-transport)

Children's Services - It is currently "Fostering Fortnight" information can be found on the website. It is important to have as many children cared for by loving families.

Libraries - Devon County Council's mobile library service is being reviewed with the mobile consultation lasting until the end of May. There are lots of ways in which we could provide a service to people who currently cannot access the static libraries, but the mobile service is obvious quite unique. We have the home library service which is provided by volunteers in partnership with library staff to support people who are not easily mobile (many people use the free request service for home library service users to request their own books for delivery; Good Neighbours membership for family and friends to borrow for relatives and neighbours with special concessions; online books and audiobooks which can be accessed through smartphones and tablets (Libby and Borrowbox apps) free of charge; online reference services which are accessed free of charge. Library staff provide outreach visits to schools, for example, to support the use of the library services by children and their families.

If the mobile service is not able to continue, we can certainly look at all the options with partners across West Devon to support people to access books, information and contact with services. The local WDCVS, Tavistock Library Manager and I have been in contact.

Life in general has been busy with the elections. I look forward to my previous years works and hoping to see the realisation of the new Household Waste and Recycling Centre, and the Tavistock College new build coming nearer to reality. I expect next month's report to be more detailed as we all get cracking to represent our local communities to the best of our ability.

Best Debo