

Please see below an update for this month. – I've just put together a summary of what's happening over various departments. If you have any questions or any specific areas you want me to look into, please do not hesitate to contact me.

September report :-

### **Climate change and transportation update**

#### **Marsh Barton Station**

Marsh Barton was officially opened on the 3rd July, with the first passengers on the 4th.

#### **Response to Rail Future consultation on ticket offices in railway stations.**

Letters went to SWR and GWR on 24th July, who operate ticket offices in Devon the date was extended to the 1st Sept.

#### **North Devon Link Road**

The wet weather in July and August has hampered progress, now hoping for a lengthy dry spell to help with catching up on the scheme. Work in rivers has had to be suspended on several occasions due to rivers being in spate, this is of some concern as permissions from DEFRA are in place and time limited to certain times of the year, some dry weather in September would help a lot.

#### **New Environmental Improvement Plan:**

In line with the statutory requirement introduced by the Environment Act, government published its new Environmental Improvement Plan for England on 31st January. This five-year delivery plan sets out the ambitions to restore nature and improve the environmental quality of the air, our waters and our land

It is important to understand the role and content of this plan in the context of the wider statutory requirements of the Environment Act 2021, particularly the following key points:

1. There must be a long-term Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) that sets out the steps that government will take to improve the natural environment. The government had, previously, identified the 25 Year Environment Plan (25YEP) as the first EIP. This second EIP (EIP23) effectively updates and provides the delivery plan for the 25YEP (although exact relationship between them is now unclear).
2. There must be statutory targets for improvement to the natural environment. This is what the government published on 16/12/22. What EIP23 does is repeat these statutory targets but also adds further (non-statutory) interim targets along with the intended delivery approaches to be taken by government to achieve these.
3. These environmental targets and delivery approaches must be considered alongside the Environmental Principles Policy Statement that applies across government (i.e. these principles being set by statute).
4. It is the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) which is the new oversight body charged with ensuring compliance with these three statutory requirements above.
5. Although not a statutory requirement stemming from the Environment Act, the EIP23 also makes it clear that its content needs to be considered alongside a wide range of other national strategies which include specific policy programmes to drive progress towards the goals set out in 25YEP and EIP23. Examples are: England Trees Action Plan; UK Marine Strategy; The Agricultural Transition Plan etc.

As you will have seen from press reports, one of the headline commitments is that every household should be situated within a 15-minute walk of a green space or water, which is addressed by Natural England's newly launched Green Infrastructure Framework. Other measures include commitments to restore at least 500,000 hectares (1.2m acres) of wildlife habitat, and 400 miles of river. This will include 25 new or expanded national nature reserves and 3,000 hectares (7,400 acres) of new woodland along England's rivers. Sewage spills are also to be tackled, with upgrades to 160 wastewater treatment works by 2027, and a plan – to be set out in detail later in the year – to tackle the increasing pressures on the water system from pollution, new housing developments and the climate crisis. From November every Government department will also have an obligation to consider the environmental and climate impacts of each new policy and piece of legislation. The full plan can be seen here:

[Environmental Improvement Plan \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

## **Devon (and nationally) Bus Issues.**

### **Background**

Up until 31 March 2023 local bus companies and local authorities have continued to receive additional funding from the Department for Transport to support the recovery in bus services since the pandemic. This funding is due to finish at the end of the current financial year.

In Devon, working with our bus companies, this funding has been used to maintain as much of the commercial and supported network as possible. Alongside the £2 fare initiative and improved driver position with Stagecoach locally we are starting to see improvements and, linked with the County Council's continued financial commitment thanks to the on street parking, alongside the improvements we have planned from our National Bus Strategy allocation, we have an excellent opportunity to build back confidence in the network and see more people back on the buses.

### **Future funding concern**

This could all be in jeopardy though. There was some earlier indications that some additional Government funding would continue into the new financial year but the current messaging coming from the DfT feels very different and there is no guarantee that anything will come forward. We are aware that buses are the most popular form of public transport and carry significantly more passengers than railways, but the funding invested into the mode is substantially less and the bus may miss out again.

We are trying to get some feedback about the likely impact nationally as many areas will be seeing significant service reductions. In Devon we hope changes will not be on this scale but there is a possibility of some marginal services being withdrawn with the expectation that the local authority can pick them up when funding is already fully committed and we are seeing significant contract prices increases.

This article sums it up:

[LocalGov.co.uk - Your authority on UK local government - Future of bus services 'hangs in the balance'](https://www.localgov.co.uk)

Adults services

### **1. Integrated Care Partnership update**

Cllr James McInnes Chairs the [One Devon Partnership](#), a statutory body of partners across Devon working to improve and influence, and hold to account, joined-up action on the wider determinants of health. Our role is to ensure the delivery of the [Devon Plan](#). At our last One Devon meeting this month we reflected on how far The Partnership had come over the last year and how effective we have been. This was an honest and open conversation which Cllr McInnes lead and members of The Partnership drew on the 'outward mindset' approach that we have been embedding.

At the session we agreed that as a partnership we would have a priority focus on Children and Young People, and seek to influence and encourage action across Devon, particularly with regards to

employment and education, housing, and health inequalities. Devon County Council have joined Plymouth City Council in formally recognising [care experience as a protected characteristic](#). As One Devon Partnership we are encouraging all member organisations to follow suit to help address the tragic inequalities those with care experience face, including:

- A UCL study which showed 70% of care experienced people die early.
- Over 50% of people who are in custody up to the age of 21 have been in care (Become Charity)
- A quarter of the homeless population is care experienced (The Independent Review of Children's Social Care).
- Only 14% of care leaver go to university compared to 46% of young people who didn't grow - up in care. It will take 107 years to close the gap at the current rate of progress ([Breaking the care ceiling](#) Civitas)

## **2. Integrated Adult Social Care consultations**

We have actively engaged and supported public engagement across the consultations we have held. It hasn't always been an easy and straight forward process.

We have listened to what people and organisations have told us and changed course or adapted approached in some instances to find common ground and solutions in partnership. The Health and Adult Care Scrutiny Committee has been involved throughout, and has request an update at its next committee meeting on 21 September. [Papers are now published](#).

### 18+ Homelessness contract

- Following the Special Scrutiny Committee Meeting on the 27 July the consultation has been paused. Contracts with providers have been extended until the end of March 2024. The Council will continue to talk to Devon's eight District and City Councils, working together to agree a way forward that ensures ongoing homelessness support across the county.

### Carers contract

- The Council is beginning the preliminary work ahead of a process of recommissioning for the future and will advise as that work develops.

## Highway Management

### Safety Defects

Following the extremely high numbers of publicly reported potholes across the network during the first part of the year, and the increase in repair gangs as a response, numbers have gradually stabilised through the spring and into the summer, however, remain above average for the time of year. This has meant that there is still some residual pressure on inspection teams in assessing backlogs. Evening and weekend working has remained in place in some areas to assist with this. Work is underway to improve the messaging on the 'report a problem' webpages to reduce the number of defects that are incorrectly reported – since January this year this represents around 55% of all reports received.

Following a very challenging winter for asset condition and safety defects, the numbers recorded across the network had reduced sufficiently that Highway Safety Inspectors (HSI) were able to re-start the identification of non-safety or 'serviceability' defects in June. This process offers HSI's the discretion to record defects that do not meet investigatory criteria in our Highway Safety Policy.

The 'Elastomac' trials demonstrated at the Members event in Spring is continuing. The product is envisaged to provide a lower carbon and cost-effective means of repairing carriageway defects. The mastic product uses up to 70% recycled materials, including lorry tyres, that would otherwise be incinerated and, in the right scenarios, allows reactive works gangs to undertake repairs much more quickly when compared to conventional techniques.

#### Winter Service

Preparations for winter have been taking place over the summer, with the fleet of gritters receiving their annual servicing and calibration checks. Works to install solar panels on some of the salt barns have also been progressed and salt stocks are being replenished ahead of winter.

By keeping the age of the gritting vehicles under 10 years old maintenance costs are reduced and ensures the fleet is safe and appropriate for the task in hand. In preparation for this winter, 8 of our oldest/most costly gritters will be traded-in against 6 nearly new vehicles. This will reduce the secondary fleet from 12 vehicles down to 10, an appropriate balance of service resilience against financial pressures.

#### Gully Cleaning

Over 5,000 drainage issues identified by the gully cleaning crews and highway officers have been resolved since April. The challenge remains dealing with over 15,000 outstanding reported issues with funds available.

The ongoing trial to pre inspect gullies due to be cleaned on the cyclical programme has shown 49% of gullies inspected to date do not require cleaning. The aim of the trial is to ensure plant and equipment is being deployed where it is most effective.

A joint trial with Devon's Flood team to place gully sensors in selected streets in Devon is in the preparation stages. It is hoped this externally funded trial will offer insight into whether technology can be used to inform policy or reaction for cyclical gully cleaning. The trial intends to run for an 18-month period from the winter period.

#### Grass cutting

Despite a challenging growing season, the planned 1st cut of rural grass has been completed by the end of August. By working alongside Torbay Council efficiencies have been realised in our operations in the south of the county.

Urban grass cutting is now 75% complete with 3 of the 4 programmed cuts completed.

#### Ash Dieback

The expert tree inspections have recorded 113 individual reports of ADB, which is an increase when compared with 96 records at the same point last year. This mirrors the overall increase in the total number of individual trees reported with ADB, which is 437 compared with 235 trees at this point last year.

#### Road Markings

Since April, parish remarks have been undertaken in 6 of our market towns with works planned in a further 17. The main road remarks and road stud replacement programme has completed 8 locations with a further 12 locations planned.

Following a review, it has been identified that the condition of our rural give way markings was an area for improvement and that these provided important information to drivers. As such a new workstream has been developed to systematically remark these features in rural areas. There are approximately 6,000 markings that will be treated through this project that is anticipated to take 4-5 years to complete.

#### Traffic Management

Since April, 162 requests for waiting restrictions have been delivered through the HATOC Waiting Restriction Programme and work has continued on 20mphs limits in Winkleigh, Atherington, Ashburton and Tiverton, which will be implemented later this financial year. In addition, the team have progress 350 applications for new or the remarking of disabled bays and 56 applications for new or the remarking of Access Protection Markings which have been processed and orders for works placed.

Best wishes

Lois Samuel