



Tavistock Town Council

Working for the local community

Town Council Offices
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County Councillor Mrs D Sellis
46 St David's Road
Tavistock
DEVON
PL19 9BT

5th October, 2023

Dear County Councillor Mrs Sellis

PROPOSED INTRODUCTION OF CHARGING FOR ON-STREET PARKING IN TAVISTOCK

Please find enclosed copy correspondence to the Cabinet Member for Highways/ Transportation, and to the relevant Director, in connection with the County Council's proposals in connection with the above.

The Town Council would ask you do all you can do to bring your good offices to bear in support of the Town – both for the business and wider community, on this difficult issue, which would be greatly appreciated.

Should you have any questions or require other information please do not hesitate to let me know.

Thank you for your assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Carl Hearn
TOWN CLERK
Tavistock Town Council
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Councillor S Hughes,
Cabinet Member for Highway Management,
Devon County Council,
County Hall,
Topsham Road,
Exeter,
DEVON,
EX2 4QD

5th October, 2023

Dear Councillor Hughes

PROPOSED INTRODUCTION OF ON-STREET CHARGING ACROSS DEVON - JOINT REPRESENTATION FROM AFFECTED COMMUNITIES

We write in connection with Devon County Council's (DCC) proposals to introduce on-street car parking charging in seven towns and one parish, and the associated 'pre-consultation' discussions held with District and Town/Parish Councils and, where applicable, representatives of their respective business communities.

This letter is sent following consultation with, and on behalf of, the Mayors of Crediton, Dartmouth, Honiton, Okehampton and Tavistock Town Councils and the Chair of Braunton Parish Council to express, on behalf of the communities we represent, our collective dismay and disappointment at the lack of rigour that has been adopted by the County Council on this matter.

Whatever the merits, or the drawbacks of the proposals for each community, it is clear the County Council has failed to meet even the most basic standards for an evidence-based approach to the introduction of measures that potentially affect the rights of individuals, the viability of businesses and the vitality of those diverse and sometimes very different towns/communities.

Devon County Council's Highways Officers have made it abundantly clear that the Authority:

- Has undertaken no work, to gather and assess any evidence to demonstrate whether the requirements of s45 Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 would be met.

- Does not plan to gather any such evidence before proceeding to consultation and Order.

The stated use of retail sector vacancy rates by DCC as a 'proxy' to establish:

- o the 'need for maintaining free flow of traffic',
- o 'the need for maintaining reasonable access to premises' and
- o 'the extent to which off street parking ... is available'

required under the Act is unreasonable and unconvincing. The proposed consultation to establish the views of the public, in the absence of any evidence to support the above, and the lack of opportunity to test that evidence is unacceptable and undemocratic.

We do not believe it is the intention of DCC to disregard the legislation, or the legitimate interests of affected communities. However, as matters stand, that is the effect of its methodology.

In the circumstances, and before matters proceed further, we request that Devon County Council defer the consultation on charging for car parking pending a meaningful exercise to gather and assess evidence for each of the communities concerned, to enable properly informed proposals to come forward for consultation.

Doing so will demonstrate both a commitment to an evidence-based, planned proportionate approach consistent with the legislation, and respect for the communities which DCC, and our own Councils serve.

We would welcome the opportunity to be involved in a credible, robust, and evidence-led review for each of our towns/parishes, which would help to restore trust and confidence both within the local authority family and with our communities.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor A Hutton
TAVISTOCK TOWN MAYOR

As subscribed to by:
Councillor M Shapland
Councillor L Brookes-Hocking
Councillor D Wells
Councillor H Hurford
Councillor A Fisher

Chair **Braunton Parish Council**
Mayor **Crediton Town Council**
Mayor **Dartmouth Town Council**
Mayor **Honiton Town Council**
Mayor **Okehampton Town Council**

Cc Ms M Booth, Director of Climate Change Environment and Transport - DCC, Clerks to Subscribing Councils, Mr C Rook Traffic Management Team Manager.



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Ms M Booth
Director of Climate Change, Environment and Transport
County Hall
Topsham Road
Exeter
DEVON
EX2 4QD

5th October, 2023

Dear Ms Booth

PROPOSED INTRODUCTION OF CHARGING FOR ON-STREET CAR PARKING IN TAVISTOCK

Tavistock Town Council met on 19th September to consider the emerging proposals of Devon County Council for Tavistock in connection with the above, the Divisional Member was invited to attend the Meeting, but tendered her apologies. In coming to a view, the Council considered the proposals presented to an informal meeting of stakeholders on 11th September by representatives of DCC, and the related commentary of its Officers, together with the apology tendered for DCC's failure to meet its statutory obligations under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Accordingly, the Town Council has instructed me to write to you, as Director with responsibility for this service area, to convey its dismay and disappointment at the County Council's dismissal of the interests of both residents and businesses in the town, and its apparent disregard for proper standards of probity and evidence led decision making. This is not an approach which Tavistock Town Council would expect from a responsible public authority, and certainly not one such as DCC which has, in the past, held itself to higher standards of governance.

An excerpt from the related Council Minute setting out this Council's position and concerns is reproduced below:

A meeting had been held the previous week with Officers from Devon County Council, representatives of the Town and Borough Councils, Tavistock BID Company and the Chamber of Commerce, to receive a briefing on the County Council's proposal to introduce charging for on-street parking in Tavistock.

In view of the secrecy restrictions imposed by the County Council preventing public distribution/discussion of prospective configurations, a

pre-meeting open to all Councillors had been held immediately prior to the Council Meeting to afford opportunity to fully understand the proposals. Council was reminded that, to accord with those restrictions, no reference should be made in the Council Meeting to the details of the configurations beyond broad descriptions.

During the ensuing deliberations reference was made in particular to the three potential proposals which DCC had worked up for the Town. In summary they included, by way of broad description:

- a 'main' proposal which covered most of the town centre; or*
- an 'intermediate' proposal, but which still covered much of the centre of the town;*
- a 'restricted' proposal which affected one street in the town.*

Having considered the foregoing in some detail, including previously under the restrictions of confidentiality imposed by the County Council, it was the consensus of the Meeting that none of the options were either acceptable or appropriate for the Town, especially the full and intermediate (DCC officers having indicated it was their intention to progress the latter to advertisement/Order) schemes.

Reference was further made to:

- Surprise and grave concern regarding the failure of Devon County Council to gather any evidence to support or justify proceeding to consultation and Order, and its statement that furthermore it had no intention of doing so on the basis that 'an officer's judgement', without evidence, was sufficient to meet any statutory tests.*
- The disregard shown by the above approach for objective evidence as an appropriate and necessary prerequisite for the County Council to meet the relevant requirements of s45 Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, or for reasonable and proportionate decision making by a public authority more generally.*
- In addition to the foregoing, the Town Council's prior and continuing grounds for objection which, together with lack of evidence were reiterated. They included but were not limited to the proposal: -*
 - being ill-conceived during a cost of living crisis, especially for a town with a substantial and sparsely populated rural hinterland which was unavoidably largely dependent on private transport to access services.*
 - failing to acknowledge the unique street scene of the UNESCO World Heritage Site (the only WHS Town in Devon), and the Tavistock Conservation Area.*
 - failing to recognise or respect the views of the business community, which was potentially most affected.*
 - being contrary to the tests set by legislation insofar as it:*

- *would not benefit businesses or the local economy as these are already well served by existing vehicle turnover;*
 - *would not encourage the use of off-street parking given that visitor off street parking is frequently at capacity in the main car parks and DCC enforcement appears to take place only once per week;*
 - *would encourage the undesirable displacement of vehicles into residential parts of the Town, where there are already major daytime parking problems;*
 - *would not enable enforcement to be undertaken more efficiently – not least as West Devon Borough Council has previously offered this service to DCC and the offer remains open, and DCC’s arrangements appear weak;*
 - *would not make a material difference to sustainable travel choices in the absence of improved public transport provision. Most especially given the size and low population density and sparsity of the rural hinterland, complicated by the proximity to the borders of a County and City that manage their own public transport systems. Local public transport was therefore in the medium term, unlikely to materially improve to the point where sustainable travel choices were economically viable for many. (Indeed, it has since been pointed out that recent changes to the town bus service 89, now split into services 89 and 86, have resulted in a reduction in service in that there are now no 86 Whitchurch buses between 1.55pm and 4.55pm, a time when few taxis are available because they are operating the “school run”. These changes have presumably been discussed and agreed with Devon County Council.)*
- *That an extensive survey to gather and analyse evidence had been undertaken by the BID Co which demonstrably supported the assessments made regarding the tests as set out above. By contrast DCC had chosen to gather no evidence to support its case (or if evidence had been gathered, it had not been disclosed). DCC’s decision to disregard available evidence, gathered on a proper basis by another statutory organisation representing business interests, but to gather none itself is perverse. Furthermore, the BID’s survey also identified extensive adverse traffic/business, economic and financial impacts on the Town should the proposals proceed in their current form and circumstances.*
 - *the ‘retail vacancy’ figures which the County Council had produced represented a wholly inadequate ‘proxy’ for turnover/enforcement/*

business benefit, and which were in any event demonstrably out of date, flawed and selective to the point of being misleading.

- *Devon County Council's approach on this matter, to proceed to consultation and Order without objective evidence or procedural justification, was undemocratic and arrogant, demonstrating a disregard for the interests of the communities it served and the principles of probity and governance which public authorities are reasonably and rightly expected to uphold. As such it represented the high-handed introduction of a de facto Council Tax increase by DCC on the Town.*

You will be aware that, beyond this town, several other affected communities share concerns regarding the procedural approach of DCC in this matter and, with them, this Council will be contacting the Portfolio Holder under separate cover.

Ms Booth, as the Director responsible for this service, and in the interests of good governance, fairness, and community relations, please acknowledge the strength, breadth and merit of these concerns, alongside those of the Business Improvement District, Chamber of Commerce and Borough Council, together with those of other communities in Devon.

This Council requests you place matters in abeyance. That would provide an opportunity to pause to review, with your officers Messrs James and Rook, the procedural integrity and methodology of the processes currently in hand so as to develop a transparent, objective, fair and proportionate approach - working with, and listening to, local councils and the communities both our authorities serve.

Tavistock Town Council would welcome the opportunity to work with Devon County Council on that basis.

Yours sincerely,

Carl Hearn
TOWN CLERK
Tavistock Town Council

Cc Cabinet Member for Highway Management, County Councillor Mrs D Sellis, Mr C Rook, Leader West Devon Borough Council, Tavistock BID Co.

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