

Public and Member Questions County Council 5 MAY 2021

Public Questions

PQ	From	Topic	Question/statement
PQ1	Joey Barrington	Anti-social behaviour by Glastonbury Tor	Question 1 I live on Stone Down Lane which is the top entrance of one the country's greatest landmarks, Glastonbury Tor. An area of outstanding natural beauty and have done for 40 years. This is now far from glorious with what has happened in this past year There has been extreme abuse of parking restrictions firstly with the double yellow lines being ignored and covered over. (after being cleaned by the town council still ignored) The clearway was then put in to alleviate this but sadly it backfired and failed massively. 80% of the new clearway signs were defaced and vandalised 3 times and then just taken off and stolen. There is a full-blown encampment living on the roadside for this last year (on a day with nice weather there can be up to 50 vehicles parked there increasing since the clearway was implemented.) Creating a terrible atmosphere with refuse and extensive human waste on the roadside. It's now become a serious hazard for emergency vehicles. This was massively highlighted when an ambulance couldn't get passed to access our house and had to be re directed a longer way round. My 6-month-old daughter was rushed to hospital suffocating with COVID 19. Local farmers have had their land taken over, misused and abused for camping and dumping of refuse/ waste. Local residents have stopped walking their dogs and young families, through that area and have pretty much stopped going up to the Tor due to intimidation and abuse they have received. The local Ice cream man was set upon a few days ago and was severely threatened and abused. He has sold ice creams by the Tor for the past 10 years and will not come anyway near it now. This has ruined a main part of his business. There has been aggressive and offensive graffiti about the police sprayed several times in large words in the middle of the road. The Glastonbury way cannot be finished as there are vans parked where the new information boards and benches are meant to be put. The local caravan sites which are now open are already getting negative feedback from tourists about the state of Stone Down lane and the general atmosphere around that area of the Tor. The Verges and drainage ditches on Stone Down lane have been completely flattened and ruined by vehicles, the hedges are suffering. Wildlife is also suffering. A local farmer can't even put his animals on his main field due to human waste that's been put into it through the

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			<p>roadside hedge! Field gates have been blocked completely. Extreme noise at night-time from drumming and general partying too with marijuana and other narcotics being smoked in public during the day and night on the roadside.</p> <p>I have photos and numerous accounts from local residents and local councillor's alike. Can the Leader of the Council assure me that he and all the councillors understand how terrible/critical this situation is? The impact on local residents who work hard pay taxes, pay council tax, adhere to rules and most of all want to keep their young families safe. I would like to know what is happening and what updates are going to be taken to make the road safe and to protect locals', residents, farmers, tourists, the local economy, and Glastonbury Tor itself. In respect to the Tor that can't be just left to the National Trust. Thousands and thousands of people visit the tor and its crucial for the town's economy and dwindling reputation.</p>
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Response – Cllr Fothergill

Thank you, Joey.

We appreciate you bringing these issues to our attention. We are acutely aware of the problems that are currently being faced by the residents of Glastonbury and the particular issues for the residents of Stonedown Lane and the distress this situation is causing.

I am sure you can appreciate however, there is no easy solution to the problem. We know the Glastonbury community has always been a tolerant society, but we acknowledge now that patience is being sorely tried and recognise that this tolerance is frequently being tested and exceeded. You will be aware that recent measures to introduce a Clearway to Stonedown Lane have been unsuccessful in preventing the encampment, due to the signs erected, which are required by law for enforcement purposes, having been vandalised and when cleaned and reinstated, having been totally destroyed.

Throughout Covid, based on Public Health England and government guidelines, there has been a deliberate decision not to disperse the encampments with the aim of limiting the spread of the virus. With an easing of lockdown restrictions and new guidance emerging we are now hopefully moving to a phase when we look again at the options open to us. We have therefore recently set up a multi-agency group who are focused on identifying solutions to limit these recurring illegal encampments, The working group is looking at a multitude of potential measures, which will be communicated at an appropriate point in time before the summer. Hopefully this gives you some

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reassurance that we are well aware of the issues and are proactively seeking to come up with a long-term solution that works for everyone.

PQ/MQ	From	Topic	Question/Statement
PQ2	Catherine Cannon	Plant based school meals	<p>Question 1</p> <p>After declaring a Climate Emergency, the impressive Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy set an ambitious target of net zero by 2030, with the Strategy document recommending that Somerset residents, I quote, 'consider a more plant-based diet'. Here, the council is rightly acknowledging the carbon emissions that are embedded in the consumption of animal products. Now, the task is to take steps to encourage, incentivise and support residents to make changes to their diets, and schools are an obvious place to start.</p> <p>This should absolutely not be seen as an attempt to impose any type of diet on people. Over recent decades the demand for cheap meat and dairy has skyrocketed, and as a result, farmers across the UK have been forced to intensify - the only option for many has been to farm in ways which cause harm to the environment. In Somerset we have a long tradition of livestock agriculture, and we are rightly proud of our farming heritage, so our farmers shouldn't be struggling and undervalued as they are. We must value the expertise of our farmers, and we need to be willing to pay a little more to allow them to farm in the best way possible.</p> <p>In schools, the meat on menus is generally cheap, often imported, and certainly not the highest quality. Despite this, it remains the most expensive part of the meal - plant-based meals are considerably cheaper. Serving meat only three days a week, and healthy vegetarian and plant-based meals on the other two days will save money, ideally allowing for procurement of higher quality, preferably local, meat and dairy. In the UK, only 18% of children get the recommended 5 portions of fruit and veg a day and most young people's diets also lack fibre. More plant-</p>

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based protein in schools is an excellent way to address both.

ProVeg is a leading food awareness organisation and is offering free support to catering managers who are keen to make positive changes. ProVeg offers menu consultations, chef training and PR support, all for free. Even if the actual menu options remain the same, ProVeg are experts in making changes to the language and layout of menus that dramatically increase the uptake of plant-based meals. Since Somerset schools organise their own contracts for school meals, all the council has to do is use its considerable influence over headteachers and governing bodies by writing a letter recommending action. I have been told by Cllr Purbrick that officers are looking into what can be done but I would like to see this issue treated with the sense of urgency that the climate emergency requires.

I have been writing to councillors about this since December and I know many of you are keen to see changes that normalise plant-based meals and bring them into the mainstream. As people become more aware of the climate crisis and the need to put it at the forefront of every decision we make, eating less meat and dairy is growing in popularity. When Leeds Council made this their top priority for school meals they were overwhelmed by support and found the transition easy. Here in Somerset, there is growing support from local businesses, college students, school children, parents, teachers and farmers, with over 300 signatures so far on a petition.

Can the council confirm it will take the straightforward step of encouraging schools and catering companies to accept support from ProVeg, so that revised menus can be ready for September? This will be a very easy win for our planet, our children's health, our local farmers and council & school budgets.

Response – Cllr Faye Purbrick

Thank you Catherine and for your correspondence over recent months, as you said - The Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy highlights

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the carbon impact from the consumption of animal products and the benefits from considering a more plant-based diet.

Our Catering Advisory team within Support Services for Education (SSE) currently support a number of schools with their responsibility for arranging the supply of meals to their pupils. Some have their own teams, whilst others use outside catering contractors to meet central government's 'School Food Standards'. Many schools and caterers are trying to promote a meat free day and will have a plant-based option every day as an alternative to a meat or fish lunch. There is also an increased presence of plant-based food within secondary schools in particular -as their students become more aware of their surroundings and have a greater interest in Climate issues.

We promote and suggest that school dining rooms have a 'taster' table for trying new products and different foods as this will help both meal planning and provide an opportunity for children to try new foods -including plant based options.

On the wider matter, SSE is keen to support schools in becoming more environmentally friendly across their whole remit and have been liaising with a number of organisations to understand how they can work together to best support schools in taking action to support our Climate emergency ambitions. They are currently looking to develop some specific content on their website that's structured around the framework used to achieve the Eco Schools green flag award. This will provide information and signposting to various local and national organisations that can provide resources and support to schools.

The main catering companies used by schools all have nutritionists who specialise in ensuring a fully balanced diet on each menu cycle. They will not change their menus to suit one particular school that wants to make specific changes, so it is important that organisations such as ProVeg create good relationships with these caterers

SSE have a meeting arranged with Colette Fox from ProVeg, which I believe is taking place today, to discuss our plans and I hope to include information and links on ProVeg within the Support Services for Education website to help raise awareness of their services to schools. We are also working to deliver a virtual conference in October 2021 on becoming an Eco School and will be asking if ProVeg would be interested in running a session at this event for schools.

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PQ3	Chris Waddilove	Cycling in Taunton	<p>Question 1 In August last year, Taunton Area Cycling Campaign (TACC) submitted to Council a Cycling Manifesto which represented the views of active travel groups in the county. This document urged the Council to reverse its transport prioritisation of expenditure away from motor vehicles to the cycling and walking infrastructure. A Freedom of Information disclosure showed that this expenditure was skewed 13 to 1 in favour of the motor car. Does the Council recognise the need to invest significantly , and deliver actions that will improve safety, accessibility and connectivity, for cyclists in order to get more people out of their cars - particularly as this is a recommendation expressed by the government in its Gear Change 2 policy document, endorsed in the foreword by the Prime Minister?</p> <p>Question 2 Cycling has experienced a boom during the Covid lockdown as the reduction in cars on the road and the imperative to stay local, encouraged more people to cycle both as a means of pleasure and transport. There is the opportunity here to effect long-term behaviour change to the benefit of all. Does the Council recognise how expenditure on cycling would complement its climate change and health and wellbeing agendas?</p> <p>Question 3 TACC's research has shown that one of its most popular and beneficial infrastructure proposals is a Wellington to Taunton Cycle Trail, a route used on average for 1600 journeys per day. A first dedicated, off-road trail would be a very significant move and show serious intent to support cycling. Will the Council work with Somerset West and Taunton District Council, TACC, Citizens Somerset and Sustrans to achieve this project, aiming to get construction under way before the end of 2022?</p>
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Response – Cllr J Woodman

Thank you for your questions Chris.

As we have previously stated, the FOI to which you refer related to circumstances in a specific year, and indeed significant spend on walking and cycling measures which formed part of our major schemes programme was not able to be included in those figures. We have also

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clearly stated that our spend is largely dictated by the grants given to us by Government for specific purposes, and much of our funding is for maintenance of nearly 7000km of road network. This is investment which benefits all road users, not just drivers.

Q1/2

I will respond to the first 2 questions jointly. Yes we do recognise the need to invest in walking and cycling, which is why we have successfully bid for Government Active Travel grants this year and have allocated £1.5m of our own funds in our capital programme specifically to increase our Active Travel programme. We are expecting that further DfT capital funding will also be made available in due course.

Q3

The Council is already a part of the working group that has been set up to look at the feasibility of this route. There are many complex issues to resolve not least establishing in detail where such a route would run, securing the funding and acquiring the necessary land; so your proposed timescale looks extremely optimistic. Nonetheless we will continue to play an active role on this and other similar proposals across the County.

MEMBER QUESTIONS

MQ	From	Topic	Question/Statement
MQ1	Tessa Munt	Climate Emergency Community Fund Decision making arrangements	Question 1 May I ask for the carbon impact assessment per pound sterling of the successful and unsuccessful projects? Question 2 May I ask that this Council changes the way Councillors confirm that they have read the notification of a key or non-key decision, refraining from the use of the the words "sign off" and in their place, substitute or add the word "seen" so as to indicate that Councillor's understanding but not their implied agreement with that decision? Thank you.

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Response

Q1 a) Cllr Paul

It was not possible to undertake a carbon impact assessment per pound sterling for each of the projects due to the information provided with each application and the amount of complex modelling involved with some projects. Also, not all of the projects were concerned with reducing carbon and it was not given as the prerequisite of applying to the fund.

Whilst being a key major consideration in assessing the projects, carbon impact was only one of many factors that was taken into account when judging the merits of each application, others included:

- fulfilment of the Climate Emergency Strategy and delivery of its goals
- being well thought-out, including consideration to risks and their mitigation
- being innovative in some way
- having a lasting legacy of continued ownership and behavioural change within the community

Q1b – Monitoring Officer

Thank you for your request which is timely as I am shortly due to review the Council's report templates and guidance notes following the proposed revisions to the Council's Constitution at today's meeting and I will consider the suggestions as part of that work.

MQ	From	Topic	Question/Statement
<u>MQ2</u>			

Response Cllr

MQ	From	Topic	Question/Statement
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MQ3			
<u>Response Cllr</u>			