

John Birch
SHDC Member for Totnes

Report to the Totnes Town Council
meeting to be held on Monday 3 October 2022

I report on the following matters.

BROWN BIN MISERY CONTINUES

With over 200,000 missed brown bin collections since April the SHDC administration has decided to add to the misery by not only cancelling the collection service during the Autumn and Winter but when its reintroduced next Spring residents will have to pay a charge for the service.

At SHDC Council meeting last week I and other Lib Dem councillors sought to convince other councillors that such a move was wrong especially as council taxpayers had already paid for their brown bins to be collected. At the meeting I made the point that by cancelling the brown bin collection residents would quite rightly feel cheated.

Unfortunately we were voted down and the brown bin service is being suspended and when it resumes there will be a charge

As to the introduction of charges for the brown bin collection, which will commence next Spring, the Council's approach appears to be that other local authorities in the area make charges and it will follow. This argument doesn't stand up to scrutiny.

At the Council meeting I asked the Council to come clean and admit that it is having to introduce charges to cover the millions of pounds of costs it is incurring as a result of the failed privatisation of the waste collection service.

From the figures provided by the Council in its reports available to the public I estimate that the additional costs to be incurred up until Spring 2027 will be in the region of £8 million. This is disputed by the administration and yet it is not prepared to provide a full open financial report to councillors that can then be shared with residents. It continues to hide behind the Council's confidentiality rules.

The Council's administration should apologise for the mess it has got the Council in as a result of the failed privatisation scheme and in the first instance should continue the brown bin collection throughout the Autumn and Winter.

IVYBRIDGE PROJECT CANCELLATION

SHDC's project to build a supermarket on one of its car parks in Ivybridge has been cancelled after the Council spent a sum in the region of £500,000. I have called for an examination of the Council's procedures leading to the cancellation of the project.

I sent the following request to the Council's Chief Executive

I submit this written request for the following to be included in the Work Programme of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee pursuant to Chapter 3, Part 6.1 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules.

The Item.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee examine and receive evidence on the procedures followed by the Council in respect of the Ivybridge Regeneration Project from its inception to the decision taken to cancel.

Following such examination and evidence gathering the committee submits recommendations to the Executive on policies and their implementation to be adopted in respect of similar projects to avoid any unnecessary costs and non-productive officer time.

Reason

The SHDC Constitution provides

"The Principles of Scrutiny underpin the Council's overview and scrutiny function. This means that scrutiny:

- Provides a critical challenge to Executive policy makers and decision makers;*
- Enables the voice and concerns of the public to be heard;*
- Is carried out by "independent minded governors" who lead and own the scrutiny role; and*
- Drives improvement in public services.*

*The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is responsible for scrutinising decisions the Executive is planning to take, those it plans to implement, **and those that have already been taken/implemented. Recommendations following scrutiny enable improvements to be made to policies and how they are implemented.** The Committee is therefore to be seen as a "critical friend" rather than something that opposes the Executive"*

Emphasis added in bold to highlight those parts of O&S's function that are relevant to this request.

The costs of in the region of £500,000 arising from the Ivybridge project deserve scrutiny and in particular the procedures followed by the Council that gave rise to such expenditure. Such scrutiny will result in a recommendation to Executive on policies and their implementation to be adopted in respect of

similar projects to avoid any unnecessary costs and non-productive officer time

The Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on Thursday 29 September 2022 will decide whether or not this failed project is to be scrutinised. I will report on the outcome at the Town Council meeting.

STAGECOACH CHANGES

Stagecoach SW has brought about changes to its bus services within Totnes without any consultation or input from the various local authorities or residents. Chris Watson has produced a report on the changes and I thought it helpful for this to be set out below.

“Following an announcement by Stagecoach SW regarding changes to its key service (Gold) and replacing it in part with a secondary public transport service that serves Totnes

The notice is that the Gold route will have two major alterations to the service route:

- 1. Truncation of the route from Paignton to Torquay with the Gold service being turned around at Paignton bus station and the passengers will have to utilise the 12, 22 and 122 services to continue their journeys into Torquay. From the 2 October the later two services are either halted for the season or offering a very reduced service to those who may wish to travel on*
- 2. The Gold Bus route will no longer serve the Westonfields/Higher Westonfields road through Bridgetown route. This will be altered to use Bridgetown Hill giving the company additional time this also has changed the timings slightly by bringing forward departure time between 4 and 10 minutes depending on the time of day.*
- 3. We will find that the hourly service replacement by the 88 will be a very poor substitute to the half hourly frequency in both directions, provided by the current timetable as this bus in its new timetable ceases service at 1858 while the Gold currently continues well into the evening. Not only that we have documented failures of this service where the bus has not provided the loop service as the driver had a cigarette/vape break (time & date stamped photo)*
- 4. Judging by the current timetable places like Stafford Court will go from 32 possible services in each direction to just 12 services travelling uphill that then run back to Coronation Rd by looping back down hill via Bridgetown Hill which is likely to increase costs and journey time for passengers not using the day rider/bus pass/standard tickets as going to Coronation Road to get the bus will increase the fares due to that bus stop being in a different fare stage zone.*
- 5. The new route is significantly more difficult for the residents to access the Gold service due to the bus stops being further east of Bridgetown and*

Paignton bound services are on the far side of the main road which is also a long term health hazard due the stops being in the AQAMA zone and not provided with any shelters or clear signage especially the up stop near Blackpost Lane and Jubilee Road.

6. This then leads onto safety for the passengers wishing to catch Paignton bound services in crossing the A385 higher up than the pelican crossing by the junction of Bourton Rd and the A385, especially as two footpaths come out higher up the hill near Blackpost Lane that come through from Higher Westonfields. This safety issue is then reversed should passengers alight from the Paignton bound service and therefore have to run the gauntlet of crossing the A385 especially in the evenings or in bad light.

7. In summary we will be losing close to 40+ services through Bridgetown each day and having added inconvenience pushed onto the travelling public, extending journey times, inconvenient bus stop locations(no shelters) fast traffic, bad air in the AQAMA zone unlike the less well trafficked Higher Westonfields section of the current route.

8. This at a time when we are trying to get better public transport so as to work towards target of car usage reduction, The current conversation with other bus operators will have to be substantially uprated to serve the residents from a just Saturday service as was being investigated to a full 6 days a week service to make some inroads into the loss of service due on the 5th September as the changes being made by Stagecoach are further isolating the residents of Bridgetown.

9. The more critical change which seems to have been decided upon without consultation that is the route change taking the service from a route through the Bridgetown area of Totnes to skirting this area on the A385 and placing passengers at a severe disadvantage and into an area recognised as a highly polluted section of the Totnes (AQAMA).

10. The Gold service currently provides over 50 journey opportunities for the residents of the area, these changes no mean that the high frequency is to be replaced with 12 loopback services with the 88 (a notoriously unreliable service for punctuality and actually turning up) the timing of this "new" service only allows 3 minutes to get to Stafford Court and then a further 4 minutes to return to Coronation Road for the bus to loop back to Coronation Rd bus stop via Bridgetown hill as the time required for a much needed service but not provided via Dukes Road and Weston Lane is between 11 and 15 minutes

11. The "new section of the service will add a significant time lag for those not able to cross the road (A385) and the 88 will then take the passengers back into Coronation Road a retrograde step in journey distance if heading into Torbay and if not able to utilise a day rider ticket a single fare will increase as the ticket from Coronation Road is within a different fare stage.

12. As for timings the timetable will mean that there will be two services at Stafford Court within 12-13 minutes (88 and Bob1)and nothing for the

remainder of the hour where there would have been a further uphill service and two downhill Plymouth bound services, this timing now means that passengers who are Plymouth/Ivybridge/South Brent and Dartington bound will have to wait at the Coronation Road bus stop for 25 minutes (based on the Current Gold timings).

I thank Chris for preparing this comprehensive report and the issues arising out of the changes, as identified, may wish to be considered by the Town Council.

RIVER DART LANDING STAGE

I recently met representatives of the Totnes Canoe Club at the landing stage used by their members. This is situated upstream from the Totnes Weir and is not only used by the Canoe Club but also widely used by wild swimmers and paddleboarders. The stage has developed into a much used community facility and yet it is in need of urgent repair.

The Totnes Canoe Club is currently in the process of getting quotations for the repair works as well as obtaining the necessary permissions to carry out the works. The likely cost of the repairs is going to be beyond the means of the Canoe Club and it will need financial assistance from the local councils as well as from the community possibly through a financial appeal.

I am sure the Totnes Canoe Club will appreciate any assistance the Town Council may be able to offer to bring about this urgent repair.

Cllr John Birch

SHDC Member for Totnes

27 September 2022