

Deborah Collins statement

Two major problems facing us today are the climate emergency and the chaos in NHS and social care.

Climate emergency

The Council is discussing the climate emergency tonight. We must reduce carbon emissions, 29% of which come from transport, in order to tackle this.

NHS and social care crisis

Our NHS has spent a terrible winter; our social care has been damaged by years of Tory cuts. This is made worse by demand caused by diseases like type 2 diabetes. Public health recommends 150 minutes of moderate activity a week; but studies show that even a little extra activity helps tackle heart disease, obesity and even dementia. But walking on streets with high pollution can worsen respiratory diseases, like asthma. So we need to make our streets places where people can enjoy walking and activity safely.

Some inconvenient facts

We live in and around a beautiful city set in lovely countryside. But our narrow streets and hilly, winding roads give us very limited space for transport. So it has to be shared out between the different uses.

Our population and economy continue to grow. We are desperately short of places for our young people to live, so we need more housing and community facilities. That means increased pressure on transport.

What can be done?

Today, there is a real challenge with the amount of traffic on our roads. Most of us walk and find the noise and pollution stressful; some of us are cyclists, or would be if we felt safer; and many of us drive and get frustrated by sitting in traffic jams.

The old policies of giving more space to motor vehicles encouraged people to use those while walking and cycling were squeezed out. If we take action to increase traffic, that is precisely what we will get again: maybe a short term boost in convenience for us as drivers - quickly replaced by increased traffic and jams.

So it makes sense to support active travel, so that those who can walk or cycle feel that is a safe and pleasant choice. Of course, sometimes we all need to use a car or a van. But if, at the margins, more people can make a choice that supports the climate and their own health, then that will lead to less traffic and easier journeys for drivers.

Widcombe Parade is a good example. It used to be a noisy, smelly place to be avoided. But the residents association had the vision to see how it could be improved by sharing space differently, and the council had the vision to support them. People had real, genuine fears that this would ruin businesses and make life impossible for elderly residents; but now most people prefer it and businesses are thriving.

I congratulate all the councillors in the current administration for their bravery in looking beyond short term political gain to act to reduce emissions and support healthier travel choices. I ask the opposition to draw on their best selves and support the long term health of the planet and our people over short term policies that will make traffic worse for everyone.

If we work together, we can make transport work for everyone.