

## Cabinet Public Questions and Answers- Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2026

Name of Person submitting	Questions
Barry Warren	<p>My questions relate to item 5 on the agenda and in particular comments from the Deputy Chief Executive (S151 Officer) in his report at Paragraph 2.4 – the first bullet point where it states:</p> <p>Pressure, REF 17, reduced maintenance costs through the transfer of assets or increased financial contributions from Town or Parish Councils – looking unlikely this will be achieved given the limited conversations – moving the £50k pressure from Amber to Green. However, conversations continue with several Town and Parish Councils on the potential transfer of assets or increased financial contributions.</p> <p>This last sentence is a problem for me and our Parish Council.</p> <p>At the end of last year, our Clerk wrote to the Deputy Chief Executive with an enquiry about the Parish taking over complete ownership of two of the main sites located in Willand. But no response, not even an acknowledgement, was forthcoming from the Deputy Chief Executive - even after the Clerk sent him a reminder.</p> <p>Our Parish Council lease six of the nine Mid Devon District Council (MDDC) play/open space areas within the village. Historically we would have taken over ownership of them, but officers would only agree 25-year leases. They are maintained more frequently and better than the MDDC areas. Over the past 12 months the Parish has spent about £35,800 + VAT on these areas which have been a saving to MDDC.</p> <p>It is very disappointing to see the generalised, almost critical comments, of the Deputy Chief Executive when our Parish has done as much as we have, at some cost to our Parish, without much recognition.</p> <p><b>Question 1:</b> Is it recognised that Willand Parish Council has been positive in their response?</p> <p>Response from Deputy Leader – Yes. I can confirm that the update position referenced in the report was clearly a generic one summarising an aggregated response from all of the District's 62 Town/Parish Councils.</p>

## **Cabinet Public Questions and Answers- Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2026**

### **Question 2:**

What are the alleged conversations which have taken place with our Parish?

### **Response from the Deputy Leader:**

I am aware our Property Services team has been in contact with the Clerk in early December providing a positive initial response.

### **Question 3:**

Is MDDC going to engage with the Parish Council in relation to the latest approach?

### **Response from the Deputy Leader:**

Yes.

### **Question 4:**

Alternatively does this lack of response indicate that the Parish Council should consider a hand back of the leases?

### **Response from the Deputy Leader:**

No, it is hoped that an ongoing and mutually beneficial dialogue will be continued.

### **Question 5:**

Under REF 17 is there an error in moving from Amber to Green? Should this be Amber to Red or removed completely?

### **Response from the Deputy Leader:**

This is not an error, as moving the figure to green signifies that we are now confident that this is the correct revised figure required that will be included in the 2026/27 budget.

## **Cabinet Public Questions and Answers- Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2026**

<b>Paul Elstone</b>	<p><b>Question 1:</b> The Phoenix Lane multi story car park is in a prime location, having very close access to shops and other facilities not least public transport. Several Local Authorities have or are currently progressing cost-effective conversions of redundant multi story car park space into accommodation units. Has this Council commissioned a fully independent technical and cost feasibility study in respect of making use of the redundant upper levels for the purpose of providing either a Category 1 or 2 MMC (in full) social housing development?</p> <p><b>Response from the Deputy Leader:</b> Over the years we have considered alternative uses for the Multi Storey Car Park. Unfortunately, due to way the building was originally constructed there are a number of significant constraints that make major structural changes or enhancements both operationally and financially unviable.</p> <p><b>Question 2:</b> If a feasibility study has been done, will you make it available for public examination?</p> <p><b>Response from the Deputy Leader:</b> No detailed feasibility study has been carried out based on my comments included in the answer to question 1.</p> <p><b>Question 3:</b> Failure to investigate this option would indicate that social housing in Mid Devon is not the high priority currently being projected.  That a Phoenix Lane solar panel project costing £640,000 and with a near 10-year payback period takes priority over the real potential of being able to house many families in need. This at a lower cost and in a less contentious location than its present plans.  If this Council has not conducted a feasibility study, will they do so before Cabinet agrees this officer recommendation to approve the Phoenix Lane multi story car park solar panel project?</p> <p><b>Response from the Deputy Leader:</b></p>
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## **Cabinet Public Questions and Answers- Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2026**

The significant delivery of social housing units in the last 3-4 years and our ongoing delivery plan clearly evidences that this is one of the Council's top priorities. The solar panel project for the Multi Storey Car Park was well debated at Cabinet, and the decision was based on the thorough officer report and after the deliberations of the Members. This project will help deliver on another one of the Council's corporate priorities, the move towards Net-Zero by 2030.

### **Question 4:**

Much is being made of the Governments fair funding cuts causing financial distress to this Council. A Council which charges well above the County and Country average Band D District Council Tax amounts.

It is noted that after many expenditures cuts the Draft 2026/27 General Fund Budget still shows a shortfall of over £1 million.

This Council purchased five properties at Haddon Heights Bampton at a top market price of £3.15 million in March 2024

After being subject to an over £200,000 plus price reduction, these five properties have not been openly marketed since July 2025.

The estimated loss to date is around £600,000 this inclusive of price reduction, lost investment income and double Council Tax.

Time prevents from commenting on the reasons for these properties being taken off the market other than to say after speaking to the existing residents, it is believed that yet again members and the public have been knowingly misled.

Will this Cabinet and this Administration look at its own gross financial failings even it is believed maladministration before always blaming others for the state of its finances?

### **Response from the Deputy Leader:**

Clearly these are the views/opinions of the questioner. However, recent reports presented to our Audit Committee by our external auditors on both our Accounts and our delivery of Value for Money provide the

## Cabinet Public Questions and Answers- Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2026

	<p>Council and hopefully our residents the reassurance that is required regarding our overall financial position, governance and management.</p>
<b>Nick Quinn</b>	<p>Agenda Item 11 – The Leisure Pricing Strategy</p> <p>Firstly, I commend the Cabinet for considering this report in open session, instead of excluding the public and press as they have done in previous years.</p> <p><b>Question 1:</b> This is another case where officers have put forward, for approval, a price rise report that contains errors.</p> <p>At paragraph 3.5, the report states that there is a concessionary discount of “25% off ‘Pay as You Go’ sessions”.</p> <p>But at paragraph 3.10, in the Price Table which you are being asked to approve, the new concession prices have not been discounted by 25%.</p> <p>For example: The proposed Fitness Studio price is £8.65 and the proposed concession price is £7.00. A discount of 25% would mean concessions should only pay £6.49.</p> <p>All of the concession prices shown in this table are wrong.</p> <p>Will Cabinet please refuse to consider this Leisure Pricing report and ask that a revised, and accurate, report be submitted to their next meeting?</p> <p><b>Response from the Deputy Leader:</b> The Cabinet considered the report after receiving clarity on paragraph 3.5.</p> <p><b>Question 2:</b> In this report, officers are making a 3% increase on the previous leisure session prices and then rounding-up to the next 5p, for the new price.</p>

## Cabinet Public Questions and Answers- Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2026

	<p>This rounding-up is overcharging.</p> <p>An example can be seen in the table: For a junior swim session, a 3% increase would put the current price up to £3.81 - but this is then rounded-up to a proposed price of £3.85.</p> <p>That is an extra 1%.</p> <p>I know that price rounding is often done to 'simplify' cash payments. But all Leisure Service payments are electronic (no cash accepted), so percentage increase can be applied directly to session prices without any problem.</p> <p>The proposed prices increase charges by more than the stated percentage. If Cabinet are minded to approve a percentage increase to Leisure rises, will they ask that the rise on current prices is properly calculated and only increased to the nearest penny?</p>
<b>Andrew Moore</b>	<p><b>Question 1:</b></p> <p>The Council is proposing to spend a significant capital sum on the solar scheme in meeting its 'climate action' and 'carbon reduction' objectives. However, these objectives could readily be achieved without any capital cost and associated risks simply by switching to a provider using only sustainable electricity sources. Has such an</p>

## **Cabinet Public Questions and Answers- Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2026**

option been fully researched in developing proposed options for consideration, and if not why not? Or, in fact, is the Council using such a supplier already to meet its strategy? If it is, of course, then there are reduced CO2 savings to be made.

### **Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change:**

The Phoenix Lane solar power project aims to cut the costs of power supplies, and it invests directly in council-owned green power, plus other benefits noted in the report such as reduced exposure to price fluctuations. Another benefit to our local community is that, drawing less from the grid conserves substation capacity, which adds resilience to local supply.

The Council put all facilities on a certified 100% renewable electricity supply in 2023. Buying green power was a very cost-efficient decision, and achieves a carbon offset, although it may not result in more investment in renewable energy, which the Phoenix Lane solar power project would achieve directly.

This proposal would build on the Council's long track record of investing in renewable and low-carbon energy.

### **Question 2:**

Agenda Item 6. The benefit claimed is a possible 215 tCO2e by year 5 of the project. The methodology used is not explained. Has the whole-scheme carbon budget been presented to Cabinet properly to understand the actual carbon reduction? For example, has the significant CO2 'capital cost' associated with all materials sourcing, manufacture, supply, transportation, installation, and all associated project works (eg surface preparation, construction, etc) been assessed? What is the 'break-even' point (using Discounted Returns Flow techniques) where the CO2 'capital cost' has been amortised by annual CO2 savings? Without this, how can Cabinet properly understand what carbon reduction will be achieved in the lifetime of the scheme?

### **Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change:**

Forecast savings in energy and emissions are estimates at this stage and can be dealt with more accurately once a specification is in place, using a recognised methodology.

Procurement of works will require the potential supplier(s) to demonstrate how they would address the matter of climate impact (including embodied carbon) linked to the works, materials and installation. Assessment of the project's embodied carbon has not been undertaken, but this would not be practicable until a contractor and

## **Cabinet Public Questions and Answers- Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2026**

design is in place. Furthermore, largely for expediency, it would not be standard practice to audit carbon impact and certainly not at this stage in the project.

### **Question 3: Agenda Item 6**

The BESS (in full) installations are known to be a significant fire hazard due to thermal runaway, although this is not identified in the risks. Is Cabinet fully aware of the hazards associated with BESS and has a full fire safety analysis been undertaken for what must be a high-risk location atop a car park, next to a hotel, in the heart of Tiverton?

### **Response from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change:**

Potential fire risk is referenced in the Cabinet Report document. Location and system design of the BESS would need to be in line with fire safety requirements and regulations. Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service will be consulted. Enquiries have been initiated on this matter to ensure the proper guidance and advice.

### **Question 4: Agenda Item 8**

The General Fund Budget shortfall for FY 26/27 is predicted to be over £1 million. The proposed grant sum of £20 k is only the headline for this item. What is the administrative cost of the scheme, and why has the Council not been clear about the total cost of the scheme to Council Tax payers? The carbon benefit, in line with previous years, is forecast to be 1 and 10 tCO2e. Is Cabinet aware that this is less than just one person's annual CO2 footprint? Given the severe financial challenges the Council faces, the fact that the cost is actually much greater than the simple grant amount, and that there is near negligible carbon-saving benefit, why does the Council consider such expenditure a high priority compared with cash-strapped services, even charity grants, that would be of more immediate benefit to the local community?

### **Response from the Cabinet Member for Governance, Finance and Risk:**

An important aim of the Green Enterprise Grant scheme was to stimulate invest-to-save projects and, overall, grantees have match funded at a level greater than 50% of the scheme value, i.e. it has driven investment. Grant schemes are already a core part of Economy team activities, viewed as beneficial to the local economy.

## **Cabinet Public Questions and Answers- Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2026**

	<p>The impact is small in scale but has raised significant interest from small businesses and there is added value when Mid Devon enterprises are supported to take positive steps. Charities are eligible to apply, and the latest proposal aims to make this easier.</p>
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