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DORSET COUNCIL

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 13 JULY 2023

Present: Cllrs Val Potheary (Chairman), Bill Trite (Vice-Chairman), Rod Adkins, Jon Andrews, Pete Barrow, Shane Bartlett, Pauline Batstone, Belinda Bawden, Laura Beddow, Derek Beer, Richard Biggs, Dave Bolwell, Alex Brenton, Cherry Brooks, Piers Brown, Ray Bryan, Andy Canning, Simon Christopher, Kelvin Clayton, Susan Cocking, Robin Cook, Tim Cook, Toni Coombs, R Crabb, Jean Dunseith, Beryl Ezzard, Tony Ferrari, Spencer Flower, Les Fry, Simon Gibson, David Gray, Paul Harrison, Jill Haynes, Brian Heatley, Ryan Holloway, Ryan Hope, Rob Hughes, Sherry Jespersen, Carole Jones, Stella Jones, Andrew Kerby, Paul Kimber, Nocturin Lacey-Clarke, Howard Legg, Robin Legg, Cathy Lugg, David Morgan, Louie O'Leary, Jon Orrell, Mike Parkes, Andrew Parry, Mary Penfold, Bill Pipe, Byron Quayle, Molly Rennie, Belinda Ridout, Mark Roberts, Julie Robinson, David Shortell, Jane Somper, Andrew Starr, Gary Suttle, Clare Sutton, David Taylor, Gill Taylor, David Tooke, David Walsh, Kate Wheller and John Worth

Apologies: Cllrs Tony Alford, Mike Barron, Graham Carr-Jones, Janet Dover, Mike Dyer, Barry Goringe, Nick Ireland, Rebecca Knox, Emma Parker, Maria Roe, Roland Tarr, Peter Wharf and Sarah Williams

Officers present (for all or part of the meeting):

Jacqui Andrews (Service Manager for Democratic and Electoral Services), Kate Critchel (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Susan Dallison (Democratic Services Team Leader), George Dare (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Aidan Dunn (Executive Director - Corporate Development S151), Jennifer Lewis (Head of Strategic Communications and Engagement), Jonathan Mair (Director of Legal and Democratic and Monitoring Officer), Matthew Piles (Corporate Director - Economic Growth and Infrastructure), Matt Prosser (Chief Executive), John Sellgren (Executive Director, Place), Lindsey Watson (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Andrew Billany (Corporate Director for Housing), Vivienne Broadhurst (Executive Director - People Adults), James Potten (Communications Business Partner - Place), Claire Shiels (Corporate Director - Commissioning, Quality & Partnerships), Kirstie Snow (Business Partner - External Affairs) and Elaine Tibble (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

19. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 May 2023 were confirmed and signed.

20. **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests were made at the meeting.

21. **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman welcomed Cllr Richard Crabb the new councillor for Sherborne West, elected on 29 June 2023.

Members of the Youth Council were also welcomed.

22. **Public Participation - Questions and Statements**

Public questions, statements and the responses from the Leader of the Council and appropriate Portfolio Holder are set out in Appendix 1 attached to these minutes.

23. **Public participation - petitions and deputations**

Mr N Sims-Duff presented a petition requesting Dorset Council reduce the carpark charges in Weymouth to those of other towns with immediate effect. A copy of his statement to Council is attached at appendix 2 to these minutes.

The Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance, Commercial and Capital Strategy responded and gave two assurances, that the item would be debated in Cabinet as soon as was practically possible (5 September 2023) and that if the evidence clearly showed a detrimental affect due to the car parking policy he would recommend a change.

The Director Legal and Democratic advised that it was not in the constitutional arrangements for this to go to a Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet could take advice from an Overview Committee and if they wished to do so a Scrutiny Committee could call in the decision or call the Portfolio Holder to account. Members felt it was important to look at residents' health and wellbeing, as well as the impact on businesses and not just the financial implications.

Proposed by Cllr Gary Suttle, seconded by Cllr Spencer Flower

Decision: that the petition be referred to Cabinet for consideration without further debate.

24. **Announcements and Reports from the Leader of Council and Cabinet Members**

The Leader of the Council advised councillors that his report would be published following the meeting and the report included the following updates:

- Reaping the benefits of LGR
- Successful funding grants

- Leader's recent meeting with DLUHC
- A Devolution Deal for Dorset
- Dorset Council's apprenticeship scheme
- The recent Ofsted visit to our Care Leavers Service
- MJ Awards - Corporate Director of the year
- Customer Services Awards

25. **Questions from Councillors**

There were thirteen questions received from councillors. A copy of the questions and the responses are attached as Appendix 3 to these minutes.

Supplementary question from Cllr R Hope (Question 3)

Cllr Hope requested an emailed response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment and asked why he believed it was fair for the residents of Weymouth to foot the bill just because they were in a tourist location.

26. **Youth Justice Plan**

The report was presented by the Portfolio Holder for People – Children, Education, Skills & Early Help.

Proposed by Cllr Byron Quayle, seconded by Cllr Mark Roberts

Decision: that the Youth Justice Plan 2022/23 was approved.

27. **Comfort break 20:46 - 21:05**

28. **Dispensation Under Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972**

The Leader introduced a report to approve a dispensation for Cllr J Dover due to ill health.

Proposed By Cllr Flower, seconded by Cllr Canning.

Decision: that a dispensation for Cllr J Dover from attending meetings of the Council until 2 May 2024, by reason of ill health be approved.

In accordance with procedural rule 8.1 a vote was taken, Council agreed to exceed the 3 hour meeting time limit.

29. **Notice of Motion - Cllr T Ferrari**

Asylum Seekers Barge – Portland Port

The Chief Executive laid out some background information prior to the council debate. This is attached at appendix 4 to these minutes.

Notice of Motion

“That this council condemns the commercial Agreement between the Home Office and Portland Port for the mooring of the Bibby Stockholm barge to accommodate up to 500 asylum seekers at this location.

That the mooring of the barge in Portland Port is an entirely inappropriate location and should be removed at the earliest opportunity.

That Dorset Council, while not the decision makers, will work with agencies to mitigate the impact this will have on Dorset.”

Proposed by Cllr Tony Ferrari
Seconded by Cllr Louie O’Leary

Supported by:
Toni Coombes, Graham Carr-Jones, Barry Gorringe, Jill Haynes, Cherry Brooks, Nocturin Lacey-Clarke, Mary Penfold, Robin Cook, Paul Harrison, John Worth, Jean Dunseith, Belinda Ridout, Mike Parkes, Mike Barron, David Shortell, Gary Suttle, Peter Wharf,

In accordance with Procedure Rule 14.3 (a) this Notice of Motion, upon being proposed and seconded, was debated by Full Council.

The following amendment was proposed by Cllr Paul Kimber, seconded by Cllr Brian Heatley.

Amendment

“This Dorset Council recognises the contribution that Refugees have made to our Dorset economy and Society, over the years whilst we accept the Bibby Stockholm Barge is inhumane and is entirely inappropriate.
Dorset Council welcomes all refugees to be treated, with dignity, and respect”.

The amendment was carried.

The following amendment was proposed by Cllr Kate Wheller, seconded by Cllr Jon Orrell.

Amendment

“DC’s opposition should be voiced at every opportunity and any legal means taken to reject the Barge.
That DC urges the Home Office to increase resources to speed up the asylum application process.”

The amendment was LOST

The following amendment to Cllr Ferrari's NOM was proposed by Cllr Ryan Hope.

“Dorset welcome's refuges however this council condemns the commercial Agreement between the Home Office and Portland Port for the mooring of the Bibby Stockholm barge to accommodate up to 500 asylum seekers at this location, Portland Port is an entirely inappropriate location. **Furthermore, the use of the Bibby Stockholm barge is not appropriate for people fleeing war and legally seeking asylum in this country. They should be housed in decent accommodation with proper facilities and more crucially, their claims should be properly and consistently processed.**

The Bibby Stockholm is required due to the government's Governments mismanagement of the asylum system and this is what needs to be reviewed therefore

“Dorset Council calls on the government not to allow the Bibby Stockholm barge to be placed at Portland Port and for the government to carry out a urgent review asylum system to remove the requirements to use such accommodation”

Should the government not listen and The Bibby Stockholm barge still come Dorset Council, while not the decision makers, will work with agencies to mitigate the impact this will have on Dorset **and explore avenues to have it to be removed at the earliest opportunity”**

Following advice from the Director Legal and Democratic Cllr Hope withdrew his amendment.

The substantive motion was CARRIED

Decision:

“That this council condemns the commercial Agreement between the Home Office and Portland Port for the mooring of the Bibby Stockholm barge to accommodate up to 500 asylum seekers at this location.

That the mooring of the barge in Portland Port is an entirely inappropriate location and should be removed at the earliest opportunity.

That Dorset Council, while not the decision makers, will work with agencies to mitigate the impact this will have on Dorset.”

“Dorset Council recognises the contribution that Refugees have made to our Dorset economy and Society, over the years whilst we accept the Bibby Stockholm Barge is inhumane and is entirely inappropriate”.

Dorset Council welcomes all refugees to be treated, with dignity, and respect”.

30. **Notice of Motion - Cllr K Clayton**

“The heavy rain parts of Dorset experienced last month once again resulted in sewage being discharged into the sea – this time at West Bay, Lyme Regis, and seven locations across Weymouth and Portland. As a result people were advised not to bathe on certain polluted beaches.

The main reason this occurs is our antiquated sewage system – a single system that has to deliver both foul water and surface water to the treatment plants, a system that is unable to cope with sudden large amounts of surface water.

Whilst the investment and determination to upgrade this system is largely outside the remit of this Council, there are three things it can do. This Council, therefore, resolves to:

1. Engage positively with central government in implementing Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Act 2010 (and any subsequent changes in national planning guidance) to ensure sustainable drainage systems are designed, constructed and adopted to national standards for the lifetime of the development, securing the separation of foul water from surface water.
2. Through both its new local development plan and any associated guidance, promotes the use of permeable surface treatments where this is achievable.
3. engages with Wessex Water and South West Water to focus their investment plans on reducing sewage discharges by the substantial amount needed.”

Proposed by: Cllr Kelvin Clayton

Seconded by: Cllr Belinda Bawden

Supported by: Peter Barrow, Dave Bolwell, Alex Brenton, Susan Cocking, Beryl Ezzard, Les Fry, Brian Heatley, Ryan Hope, Rob Hughes, Nick Ireland, Howard Legg, Jon Orrell, Maria Roe, Andrew Starr, Clare Sutton, Kate Wheller

Decision:

Council, resolved to:

1. **Engage positively with central government in implementing Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Act 2010 (and any subsequent changes in national planning guidance) to ensure sustainable drainage systems are designed, constructed and adopted to national standards for the lifetime of the development, securing the separation of foul water from surface water.**
2. **Through both its new local development plan and any associated guidance, promote the use of permeable surface treatments where this is achievable.**
3. **Engage with Wessex Water and South West Water to focus their investment plans on reducing sewage discharges by the substantial amount needed.**

31. **Urgent items**

There were no urgent items.

32. **Exempt Business**

There was no exempt business.

Appendix 1
Appendix 2
Appendix 3
Appendix 4

Duration of meeting: 6.30 - 10.14 pm

Chairman

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Full Council– 13 July 2023 Public Participation Questions and Responses

1. Question from Alex Bailey

Bibby Stockholm

Councillor Laura Beddow, at a Portland Town Council public meeting on the sixth of June, shared that Dorset Council (DC) had sought legal advice over the secretive agreement between Portland Port and the Home Office. Based on that unknown advice and counsel, Dorset Council had weakly decided not to proceed with any legal challenge. DC, then, complied with their “duty of care” via laws still, again unknown, while secretly pursuing the Home Office for additional funds.

I consider this pivotal reasoning from an unknown legal person and their advice important, and frankly central, as is evident by the four other ports who were never in need. Perhaps, Dorset Council took in the wrong counsel due to the growing pressure from the Cabinet, though I would remind the members here that other councils pushed back. A list that includes, but isn't limited to, East Riding of Yorkshire Council, Ipswich, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, and Great Yarmouth Borough Council, which I shared with two members here in the hall.

I'll go on... in April of this year, Hambleton District Council raised concerns over a plan to convert a disused RAF base in Linton-on-Ouse to an asylum reception centre. The Home Office abandoned the plans after Hambleton Council threatened legal action claiming there had been a "lack of consultation" by the Government. Maybe, DC should have got a second opinion on their “specialist” legal advice it received - pause - I understand it has not been all plain sailing, such as the judgement that has been reserved at Braintree and Skegness.

I would share with you at nearly 300 words a story of a valiant gentleman from Bexhill-on-Sea, named Jeff Newnham, who is still fighting the Home Office over HMP Northeye, and was able to raise £15,000 for a judicial review over a Class Q ruling - how amazing is that, and better than what you - Laura - have offered. How can you a ‘county’ council be in debt by what Cllr David Gray, shared was around £47 million in June, wimble at the above... Be like Jeffery, be better.

There are unanswered questions around multiple occupancy, but I think this amble has pre'd enough, and my question is direct and is as follows: Please detail the legal advice Dorset Council sought and received, and from who, when, and where regarding the agreement between Portland Port and the Home Office? The people of Portland, Weymouth, and Dorset want answers, and your silence has been deafening... while your lies have just left a poor taste...

2. Question from Stephen Coggins

Bibby Stockholm

Why has Dorset Council not mounted legal action blocking Home Office plans to house asylum seekers on Barge in highly deprived area with limited single road access and the areas main income is Tourism while at least 3 other Councils have succeeded in Court Injunctions with little cost and 100% success.

3. Question from Susan Phoenix

Bibby Stockholm

I would like the council to raise as many local concerns as possible at your Thursday meeting, concerning the Barge to be placed in Portland harbour.

However, the one that I found most people were concerned about that were at very well attended March on Saturday was -? please would the council consider changing their position and challenging the placement of the Bibby Stockholm in Portland Harbour.?

It cannot be too late, and it would restore so much confidence in the local communities of Portland and Weymouth.

Response to Questions 1 – 3 from Cllr S Flower

Whatever the first questioner might claim the Council has not lied about the barge. Dorset Council was first notified about a planned asylum barge on 21 March 2023. This was after the Home Office had already reached a provisional agreement with Portland Port Ltd to site the barge in the Port.

Knowing the particular challenges that Mr Coggins mentions in his question I agree with him that Portland is not the right place for the barge. This is why we sought advice from a leading barrister, Richard Wald KC, about potential grounds for a legal challenge. Mr Wald was chosen because of his expertise and his success in obtaining an injunction against Home Office plans for asylum hotels in Great Yarmouth.

A team of council officers drawn from our legal service, planning, regulatory services, housing and children's and adult social care prepared detailed background information and held meetings with the barrister to identify possible grounds for a legal challenge.

We focused on the planning status of Portland Port and whether it could be argued that the proposal to site the barge in the Port was unlawful because no planning permission had been obtained. In addition we asked for advice about whether the Home Office should have consulted the local community and the Council about their proposal. We also sought advice about whether the barge proposal was so obviously wrong that a court would be likely to intervene and declare it unlawful (what lawyers call an irrational decision).

After a thorough examination of the issues the barrister advised that we did not have strong grounds to bring a legal challenge. He also advised that there was no requirement for the Home Office to consult us about their proposals. Ahead of the meeting this evening the barrister has confirmed that this is still his opinion.

In some cases councils have obtained temporary injunctions after arguing that accommodating asylum seekers in hotels would involve a change of use from hotel to hostel accommodation requiring a new grant of planning permission. The circumstances at Portland Port are very different because where the barge is to be positioned is below the mean low water mark. This means that the barge is outside of our planning control and there is no requirement for planning permission from the Council.

I still believe that Portland Port is the wrong place for the barge and later this evening I will be supporting a motion from my colleague Cllr Tony Ferrari in opposition to the deal reached between the Home Office and Portland Port. Despite this I have also accepted advice that we do not have good grounds to bring a legal challenge. I for one do not wish to use local council tax to pay for an unsuccessful legal challenge.

4. Question from Kevin Graham

Corelli Estate, Sherborne

There are numerous problems associated with the development of Corelli Estate in Sherborne, constructed by Persimmon. After close to 10 years on site, developers have now left the estate with incomplete roads, pavements, streetlighting, blocked drains, building material rubbish discarded in various locations on site, two 10 metre high soil spill tips, various poorly supported and dangerous metal grid fencing, alongside unmown verges for months at a time. Persimmon, via their Managing Agent, Blenheims, have imposed an Estate Rent Charge on purchasers and use this mechanism to collect an ever-increasing annual maintenance fee with no accountability or transparency. This gives them the power to dispossess owners of their property if the charge is unpaid or challenged. Why have DCC never enforced the Persimmon planning requirements and what are they doing about ensuring satisfactory compliance with all of their obligations to the residents of Corelli Estate?

Response from Cllr David Walsh

The Council currently has an open planning enforcement case in relation to this site, and officers are looking into various concerns as part of this case, including concerns about the footway link, highways, street lighting and soil heaps. Officers have been in correspondence with Persimmon to seek to resolve the issues, and the Enforcement Manager will now be reviewing this case in consultation with the Highways team, to establish whether the issues can be resolved informally. The enforcement case remains open and the team will review potential options for formal action if it is not possible to resolve matters informally.

5. Question from Paul Rollason - WITHDRAWN

Barton Farm Estate

In December it will be ten years since planning permission for the development of the Barton Farm Estate by Corelli / Persimmon was granted. The former farm buildings, including the Grade 2 Listed Farmhouse and Dairy Cottage, have been allowed to decay throughout that time with no sign of the approvals given for their

renovation being implemented. Soon they will rival the nearby Newell House in their state of dereliction and decay. How and when will the planning authority ensure that redevelopment of the farm buildings is carried out?

6. Question from Cllr M Bell on behalf of Weymouth Town Council

Weymouth car parking

The new pricing structure for Dorset Council car parks is a complete U-turn from the 2019 manifesto to unify the charging structure across the county, which they announced in November 2021.

The current fees set by Dorset Council Cabinet are having a detrimental impact on Weymouth's residents and businesses.

Weymouth residents now pay 3 times more than residents in other towns to park in the main car parks, and spend a few hours on the high street, beach, attending medical appointments or enjoying other facilities. Recently we were informed that this is having an impact on the health of our residents in one of the most deprived areas. They are missing medical appointments as they cannot afford the parking, or they are leaving prior to receiving full care as they cannot afford longer durations.

As per Dorset Council's press release dated 29th March 2023

“an increase in the cost of parking in Dorset Council's car parks will be limited to busy tourist areas. The rates will be seasonal, with some only increasing for the spring/summer period. The changes will come into effect from 28 April 2023.

Prices in the Council's other car parks will not rise, except for some 6 hour stays in multi-use car park areas used by larger vehicles such as coaches, large motorhomes, and lorries.”

It also stated that “income from car parking is re-invested into the running of the council's parking service and the maintenance of the car parks and on-street parking places.” This statement is hard to believe when you look at the condition of the car parks in Weymouth.

If parking was cheaper, more people would visit Weymouth, and stay longer, which is necessary to support the Weymouth economy. It would also allow residents to attend medical appointments and receive the health care they need.

In reality, the car parks that are cheaper (away from the town centre) are being filled by tourists meaning residents are driving around looking for cheaper parking and ending up in the most expensive car parks. This also increases emissions.

With the deprivation in Weymouth, many residents cannot afford the parking permits that are offered by Dorset Council even with discounts.

There is also an urgent need to amend the bus routes to pick up from the free Park & Ride site and for the buses to run more regularly.

If Dorset Council uses a uniform approach and increases parking charges across the county slightly, whilst reducing seaside towns to the same level, there will be no revenue decrease and we will have an equitable system that benefits all stakeholders.

Question:

Will Dorset Council respond to the concerns of Weymouth's residents and tourists and reduce parking fees now?

7. Question from Honorary Alderman Christine James, Independent member Westham

Weymouth car parking

As the parking brief holder for the former borough council for nine years I feel I'm in a good position to speak on the matter regarding parking charges.

No one is happy regarding the inequality between towns over the high summer charges. They will and have made residents and visitors think twice before staying. All of which has a huge knock-on effect to our town's economy.

After a little investigating, I feel that DC could maximise their car park with a little jiggling to accommodate a possible extra 200 spaces within certain car parks.

This would enable a different charging regime to be brought in thus helping Weymouth but still giving DC extra income. My working out could increase the income by almost a million if done properly.

Looking at long stay and short stay, how DC charge, possibly having just parking with no designated length of stay?

During my term as brief holder I worked with former officers Alan Muncaster and Bob Savage to design the installation of 'aires'. Spaces for camper to hook up to, thus creating an income both for parking as well as the town's economy. Those plans are still in the ownership of those officers who are both keen to see this happen.

We also worked on possible evening boot sales, car dealer monthly sales, pop up and open-air cinema to boost income.

I'm proud that I took on and made happen the biggest shake up of parking for years which were agreed and then under the leadership at the time shelve it with their misguided view that a women could not possibly know what she is talking about. Times haven't changed much.

Parking should not still be a 'cash cow', the detrimental minuses to residents include those missing a doctor's appointment because the charges are extremely high for many. As we don't have a bus service of any value people need their cars. Trying to be 'green' is all very well but a combination of all those things are having a serious consequence on Weymouth economy.

In light of problems patients are having parking and not overstaying, would it be a gesture to allow so many £1 per hour slots for the surgery? Seeing a doctor is hard enough without the extra worry for many people.

Would Cllr Bryan be prepared to meet with me to discuss further my ideas as rather than just demand a decrease I'm giving you a possible solution for extra income?"

8. Question from Tia Roos

Weymouth car parking

How does Cllr Bryan propose that those needing to drive into Weymouth Town Centre, for mental health community support, during the summer season, afford the increased costs to parking, when they already often struggle to buy a coffee as it is?

9. Question from Chris Simmons

Weymouth car parking

When 14.5% of your revenue is from rates and you are £2.3 million down on parking revenue, why are you driving people out of town by doubling and tripling, as in the case of park street car park, the existing charges.

Response to questions 6 – 9 from Cllr Ray Bryan

Thank you for all your questions.

The Dorset Council area is unique in its makeup, having very rural and isolated locations, several market towns and popular beach locations; that attract a huge increase of visitor numbers to the area.

The introduction of the 3-level charging scheme that was brought in last year supports these differing geographies and the number of customers who park in each area.

These proposals were subject to full member engagement at every stage.

The increase in level 3 car park charges builds on the 3-level charging scheme. The 3-levels remains, however now there is a focus on tourist destinations, thus in Weymouth there is a higher tariff in Pavilion, Swannery, Melcombe Regis, Park Street, Lodmoor and Beach car parks.

To help and protect local residents from the higher tariff, The Nothe, Council Offices, Governors Lane, Cosens Quay and Royal Yard car parks remain at the level 2 tariff this provides 493 spaces.

This is the same tariff as our market towns such as Dorchester, Wareham and Wimborne.

The other level 3 locations (Portland, Lyme Regis, Charmouth, West Bexington and West Bay) have had the same tariff increase as Weymouth level 3 car parks this year, however unlike Weymouth, these locations do not have the benefit of level 2 car parks for local residents. This is something we are looking at.

There does not appear to be a reduction in car park usage in Weymouth since the charges were increased. As with all changes, we monitor impact on the local area.

The new machines we have installed will enable us to analyse any change in use, and we will make amendments to the tariff if proved necessary.

Previously, Weymouth & Portland Borough Council residents did not have the benefit of a short stay permit and residents would have to pay the full seasons tariff even for their short visits. The prices for that season permit ranged from £546 which included the peninsula car park to £325 which excluded the peninsula car park.

Hence a permit was introduced to support residents when making quick visits to the car parks, whether this be for the shops, dog walks, sea swims or medical appointments. The Short Stay permit which allows 2 hours parking every day, is £78 a year, which is the equivalent to £1.50 a week. Or 22p per day. I would add it also means that a Weymouth resident can use this permit visiting any level one or two car park in the Dorset Council area.

Dorset Council residents from other areas can use their Short Stay permit when visiting Weymouth. These permits have not increased in price, again to help residents and those that work in the Dorset Council area of Dorset.

We have introduced a maintenance plan for our car parks, this includes cyclical vegetation maintenance work, lighting inspections and improvements and ground works. We have recently completed surface works at Overcombe and Beach car parks and have invested in new machines in all our car parks. We will be carrying out relining works and further surface works.

The pricing structure means that the longer you stay the cheaper the parking is per hour, i.e. For 1 hour it is £3 and for 4 hours £7.50 or £1.87 per hour, 10 hours is £1.50 an hour. Parking remains free from 6pm – 8am. In comparison, in Bournemouth it is £3.30 for one hour £19.80 for six hours and £24.20 for 24 hrs.

We have also introduced a rollover tariff, this means that if a customer parks at 5pm and pays for 3 hours parking on one day, they can stay until 10am the following day, as the free overnight period is included in the ticket. Thus a 10 hour ticket gives you a 24 hour stay at no extra cost (This does not include Chesil and Portland that are 24 hour charging car parks and motorhomes as they are not permitted in car parks after 10pm).

The only out of town car park in Weymouth is the Park & Ride, which remains free to park but you pay for your bus fare. First Bus run a commercial service with their local service 2. It is usual procedure for additional buses to run from the park and ride for the summer period to cope with demand. The level 2 tariff car parks in Weymouth are in the centre of town. During the Summer months, visitors are directed to the Swannery car park, so that is filled first.

We have been looking into alternative ways that our car parks can raise revenue, using some of the spare capacity. There are limits due to legislation, however there are some options that we are currently exploring which could fund additional Public Transport in the area.

Our market towns do not have the increased footfall that the coastal towns benefit from and rely on business mainly from residents. The new charges are aimed at the visitors and there is provision for residents of Weymouth to use car parks that have the same tariff as the market towns. Residents also have access to two car park permits, which provide better value if the holder uses our car parks regularly. I am always happy to meet with representatives of the Town Council in Weymouth and I have asked the Director of Highways to contact the Town Clerk. Can I point out that in principle any surplus revenue raised from parking services within Highways is used to maintain our roads and provide potential help in improving our Public Transport.

Appendix

Mr N Sim-Duff Statement for Petition

The 3 tier carpark policy is unfair, unreasonable and no longer fit for purpose. It discriminates against all the beach towns, but especially Weymouth and is impacting badly on residents, businesses and tourists.

Firstly, it is unfair because the main carparks in beach towns are treble the prices of other towns in Dorset.

Secondly, it is unreasonable that prices have gone up 50% in a year in Weymouth whilst remaining the same in tier 2 towns. The period of high prices lasts nearly 30 weeks yet tourists mainly visit for just 6-8 of those weeks.

Thirdly, the whole system is flawed. The pricing structure actively discourages people from spending time in Weymouth because the cost of spending 4 hrs is £7.50 and 5 hours or more is a brutal £15 in your. Think about it, someone meeting a friend to shop and have lunch in Weymouth on a Saturday will each have to pay £15. Its totally unacceptable and understandably, people are staying away and the Council gets nothing! The 2 hr permit is a quick hit and run exercise and is not suitable for most people going about their daily business and should be scrapped.

Free parking after 6pm is also no longer relevant. The day time economy of shops and cafe's in Dorset is subsidising the lucrative nighttime economy of bars and restaurants. It is time to end this practice as well.

In weymouth, the high parking charges have caused anger and frustration amongst residents, businesses and visitors. I have personally presented a petition of over 6000 names from these groups to clearly demonstrate the strength of feeling on this issue. You may have reject hundreds of names from visitors, but they are vital to our prosperity and their voice should be heard. The reputational damage to this Council and the tourist industry will not recover unless changes are made fast.

The petition simply asks for a fair deal for Weymouth and other beach towns. Simply put, carpark rates in other towns need to rise slightly and those in the

main car parks in beach towns should be reduced to the same level. This will create a fair, reasonable and equitable system across the whole county.

I respectfully suggest that £1 an hour across all car parks, running from 8am to 9pm would create more revenue for the Council across a longer period with more footfall in Weymouth and more disposable income for users. Surely it is better to have 3 cars paying £1/hr than one grumpy car owner paying £3/hr.

I believe Dorset towns can and should accept a small rise in their parking to benefit the whole community of residents, businesses and our visitors across the whole county.

Full Council - 13 July 2023 Councillor Questions and Responses

Question 1 – submitted by Cllr L O’Leary

Weymouth car parking

Way back in November 2019 I raised the issue of the unfairness in parking charge disparity across this authority. I hoped one authority would mean one rate but that has sadly not become the fact. Weymouth is being particularly penalised by the new beach levy which is effectively a tax of geography. Why are we charged more because we have a beach? Visitors come across Britain and the world to Dorset to see our beaches yes but also our market towns, Goulds Hill, Sherborne Abbey, Wimborne Minster, Corfe Castle, Portland Bill and other non-beach related attractions yet we are to be penalised. Will the cabinet member look to scrap the beach levy and ensure a fairer rate for all across the county and instead re-direct his approach to filling car parks in Winter and maximisation current parking space areas.

Question 2 submitted by Cllr J Orrell

Weymouth car parking

Would you consider harmonising the parking rates across Dorset car parks, and using the revenue to support more public buses?

Question 3 – submitted by Cllr Ryan Hope

Weymouth car parking

The new pricing structure for Dorset Council Car Park is a complete U-turn from the 2019 manifesto to unify the charging structure across the county which was announced in November 2021. As per Dorset Councils press release dated 29th March “An increase in the cost of parking in Dorset Council’s car parks will be limited to busy tourist areas. The rates will be seasonal, with some only increasing for the spring/summer period.”

Can the cabinet for Highways, Travel and Environment Cllr Ray Bran please explain why this U-turn has taken place?

Response to questions 1 – 3 from Cllr R Bryan

The Dorset Council area is unique in its makeup, having very rural and isolated locations, several market towns and popular beach locations; that attract a huge increase of visitor numbers to the area. The introduction of the 3-level charging scheme that was brought in last year supports these differing geographies and the number of customers who park in each area. These proposals were subject to full member engagement at every stage.

The increase in level 3 car park charges builds on the 3-level charging scheme. The 3-levels remains, however now there is a focus on tourist destinations, thus in Weymouth there is a higher tariff in Pavilion, Swannery, Melcombe Regis, Park Street, Lodmoor and Beach car parks. To protect local residents from the higher tariff, The Nothe, Council Offices, Governors Lane, Cosens Quay and Royal Yard car parks remain at the level 2 tariff (493 spaces). This is the same tariff as our market towns such as Dorchester, Wareham and Wimborne.

The other level 3 locations (Portland, Lyme Regis, Charmouth, West Bexington and West Bay) have had the same tariff increase as Weymouth level 3 car parks this year, however unlike Weymouth, these locations do not have the benefit of level 2 car parks for local residents.

There does not appear to be a reduction in car park usage in Weymouth since the charges were increased. As with all changes, we monitor impact on the local area. The new machines we have installed will enable us to analyse any change in use, and we will make amendments to the tariff if proved necessary.

Previously, Weymouth residents did not have the benefit of a short stay permit and would have to pay the full tariff all year for their short visits. Hence a permit was introduced to support residents when making quick visits to the car parks, whether this be for the shops, dog walks, sea swims or medical appointments. The Short Stay permit which allows 2 hours parking every day, is £78 a year, which is the equivalent to £1.50 a week.

We have introduced a maintenance plan for our car parks, this includes cyclical vegetation maintenance work, lighting inspections and improvements and ground works. We have recently completed surface works at Overcombe and Beach car parks and have invested in new machines in all our car parks. We will be carrying out relining works and further surface works.

The pricing structure means that the longer you stay the cheaper the parking is per hour, i.e. For 1 hour it is £3 and for 4 hours £7.50 or £1.87 per hour, 10 hours is £1.50 an hour. Parking remains free from 6pm – 8am. In comparison, in Bournemouth it is £3.30 for one an hour whether you park for 1 hour or 4 hours and is this rate 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

We have also introduced a rollover tariff, this means that if a customer parks at 5pm and pays for 3 hours parking on one day, they can stay until 10am the following day, as the free overnight period is included in the ticket. Thus a 10 hour ticket gives you a 24 hour stay at no extra cost (This does not include Chesil and Portland that are 24 hour charging car parks and motorhomes as they are not permitted in car parks after 10pm).

The only out of town car park in Weymouth is the Park & Ride, which remains free to park but you pay for your bus fare. First Bus run a commercial service with their local service 2. It is usual procedure for additional buses to run from the park and ride for the summer period to cope with demand. The level 2 tariff car parks in Weymouth are in the centre of town. During the Summer months, visitors are directed to the Swannery car park, so that is filled first.

We have been looking into alternative ways that our car parks can raise revenue, using some of the spare capacity. There are limits due to legislation, however there are some options that we are currently exploring which could fund additional Public Transport in the area.

Our market towns do not have the increased footfall that the coastal towns benefit from and rely on business from residents only. The new charges are aimed at the visitors and there is provision for residents of Weymouth to use car parks that have the same tariff as the market towns. Residents also have access to two car park permits, which provide better value if the holder uses our car parks regularly.

I am always happy to continue to meet with representatives of the Town Council in Weymouth and I have asked the Director of Highways to contact the Town Clerk.

Question 4 – submitted by Cllr S Jespersen

HGVs

From May 31st the government has approved the use of longer semi-trailer HGVs on British roads. These vehicles can be 2metres longer than standard size HGVs. The expectation is that these longer vehicles will move the same volume of goods but make eight percent fewer journeys, saving up to 70,000 tonnes of carbon and other emissions and generating up to £1.4bn in economic benefit.

But many of Dorset's strategic roads will not easily accommodate these longer vehicles and there is a real risk of damage to bridges, private property and verges, causing congestion and disruption to communities. In my own Ward beautiful, old Durweston Bridge, which sits at the junction of the A350 and the A357, is already frequently damaged by HGVs and it will, quite simply, be impossible for the longer vehicles to use this junction as it is currently engineered. Others in the Chamber will have similar examples, I am sure.

Dorset Council must begin planning now for these longer vehicles, mapping potential problem areas and identifying the necessary mitigation measures. We must also work with the Local Government Association to support their work with the haulage industry to make the use of specialist Satnav mandatory for HGV drivers.

Could I ask that this council moves swiftly to bring together the necessary expertise to understand the possible impact on Dorset's roads, to plan for the necessary mitigation measures and to set aside the necessary funding over time. Can I also ask that we communicate with communities to reassure residents that the council is aware of the issue and is planning for the future.

Response from Cllr R Bryan

There is no reason to expect more damage. A trial of these longer vehicles has been running since 2012. It is a design requirement that the longer semi-trailers have steering axles that mean the turning circle is no greater than the old standard length trailer. The maximum weight allowed to be transported has not increased. The

advantage is that they have 8% more volume saving 1 in 12 lorry journeys with a significant saving in emission and number of vehicles.

More detail is available from the linked government document:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/longer-semi-trailer-1st-implementation-guide-for-operators/longer-semi-trailers-full-implementation-guide-for-operators>

Question 5 submitted by Cllr D Beer

South Western Railway Consultation

South Western Railway, under the instructions of the department of transport have launched a public consultation on the closure of railway station ticket offices to reflect the falling number of tickets sold in this way and to improve the service to the travelling public.

In practice though this will result in a massive reduction in staff presence at all of our Dorset stations to in most cases twelve hours a WEEK, spread over four days.

The effects of this proposal, should it be implemented, will mean that the public will not be able to access toilet facilities, waiting rooms, and stations will become far less secure.

Of equal importance, those with disabilities such as visual impairment or mental health issues will not have assistance in planning journeys, what tickets are on offer, or accessing the right train.

In our rural area a large number of people of all ages do not have access to smart phones, the internet or other means of information about travel, and many require help in purchasing railcards etc.

This measure, whilst sounding lovely that staff will not be stuck behind ticket office windows, but will be out assisting passengers would be fine if it were every day, for at least six or more hours, but three hours a day, four days a week will not do anything to encourage travel mode shift from the car, and obviously is totally against green travel principles.

What response is this council planning, to influence the consultation exercise and robustly defend adequate staffing at our railway stations in Dorset, with staff whilst present able to sell the right ticket at the right price to those who need help in these matters?

Response from Cllr R Bryan

We share your concerns where there is a clear disbenefit to people travelling on the railways in our area. In particular, the proposals to reduce staffing hours at Gillingham, Sherborne, Wool and Dorchester South stations. We don't think it is

appropriate for Sherborne and Wool to be without station staff on Friday and Saturdays, nor for Gillingham and Dorchester South to be unmanned on Sundays.

The lack of a published EqIA to go with the rail industry's decision to close all ticket offices is concerning as this would give us clarity as to what consideration has been given to those with protected characteristics.

We will be providing a response on behalf of Dorset Council expressing our concerns and would encourage others to submit their own response to the consultation, to reiterate the importance of the railway to our communities. Details can be found how to do this on SWR and GWR's website.

Question 6 submitted by Cllr P Barrow

Grass cutting

I wish to raise my concerns with regard to the significant delays in grass cutting this year.

Dorset Council is ten weeks behind with cutting and this has led to a significant number of complaints from residents. My in box is flooded with complaints as is our local social media.

The main complaints being that the area is looking incredibly uncared for, there is an increased risk of fire, open spaces are inaccessible, the local primary school has seen an increase in hay fever, dogs are getting seeds in their ears and paws. I could go on, but I'm sure you get the picture.

I understand Dorset Council has changed its mowing practices and will in future be picking up the cuttings. This will reduce soil fertility to slow grass growth in the future as well encouraging wildflowers.

So after making changes to the previous grass cutting plans, to bring in these new practices, Dorset Council has a new plan, which it has failed to deliver.

I understand that the delay is down to mechanical failures and having to wait weeks for spares from Italy.

What I do not understand is why Dorset Council has got into a situation where they are at the mercy of mowers breaking down and slow parts delivery.

Dorset Council must have planned and reactive maintenance regimes in place for the mowers, what is apparent is that they have failed this year. Why were parts not readily available and why were there no spare mowers to use whilst the defective ones were being repaired.

In addition, why did Dorset Council not let the residents know what was going on before it became a real issue. This lack of early information led to residents

wondering if the grass was ever going to be cut and much speculation about the cause of the delays.

In conclusion, what lessons have been learnt and what changes have been made to prevent this happening again? Is the grass cutting team under resourced?

Response from Cllr R Bryan

As Cllr Barrow correctly points out. The DC Weymouth team have had more than usual breakdowns this year and parts from Europe are much harder to source than in the last few years.

This has exposed a lack of resilience and despite best efforts the verge cutting has fallen behind schedule.

To recover from this situation DC has made a number of changes, some of which will have a positive effect now, others will take a little longer.

These are:

- Staff are working longer days and Saturdays to catch up.
- A cut and collect mower is being hired in from next week. Previously one was not available.
- DC is purchasing new cut and collect mowers from a different manufacturer and have a much better support network / spare part availability in the UK to reduce down time. To be delivered late July.
- An additional cut and collect mower is ordered for the Weymouth team. To be delivered late July.

These new and additional mowers/ longer working hrs/ hired in mowers are adding extra resource so the team can catch up and reduce down time. This is already helping the team catch up and will further improve when the new mowers arrive.

For the longer term, the team are working on a business case to add additional resource to the Weymouth area. This will help build upon these improvements, adding more resilience and shorten the time frame to complete each scheduled cut.

As we are collecting all the verge clippings, the verges are being left neat and tidy once cut.

Question 7 submitted by Cllr K Clayton

Biodiversity

Since 1st January 2023 all public authorities have been under a statutory duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity. Authorities have until 1st January 2024 to formulate their compliance plans. When will this council receive a report outlining the actions we will be taking to comply with this duty?

Response by Cllr R Bryan

The Environment Act, which passed into law in 2021, enhances the authority's existing biodiversity responsibility first introduced in 2006 by the Natural Environment and

Rural Communities (NERC) Act. It does this by requiring planning authorities to 'conserve and *enhance* biodiversity' rather than just 'conserve' as previously and by requiring authorities to report on their actions to meet this duty.

The government state that authorities must complete their first '*consideration*' of what action to take for biodiversity by 1 January 2024 with a view to agreeing policies and objectives as soon as possible after that date. However, we are still awaiting clarification from central government on the format and content for some requirements of this report. The report on biodiversity policies and actions will be published no later than 1 January 2026, as required under the Environment Act.

Question 8 submitted by Cllr L Fry

Recycling Centre

Dorchester and the surrounding area has suffered for years with a poor quality recycling centre, nearby residents frequently have to put up with heavy lorries travelling past their houses. For health and Safety reasons the system grinds to a halt, with entry gates closed and all users ejected when containers need moving or full ones taken away. Queues build up and can wait for at least 30 minutes or so whilst staff in the centre make any operational changes necessary. A replacement site has been on the cards now for many years with currently no apparent progress on the issue.

As Dorset council plays its part in helping the environment and works to improve recycling rates across our County to have an outdated and inefficient centre does not help in any way and possibly encourages fly tipping.

There is talk of something happening in North of Dorchester, but this is unacceptable for several reasons, not least that there is a strong swell of opinion against this development happening at all.

Can we please have some positive action for a new recycling centre in Dorchester that will actually encourage more recycling and support our community please?

Response by Cllr L Beddow

It has long been acknowledged that the Dorchester Household Recycling Centre (HRC) is inadequate. This has also been recognised in the Waste Plan, which allocated some land at the rear of the current facility, and also suggested that an alternative site could emerge through the review of the Local Plan.

However, finding new sites for waste facilities is not an easy task. If we are to invest in a new, fit-for-purpose site, this would require significant investment - probably in the region of £11million.

As you will be aware, we are actively pursuing a new HRC and waste transfer station in the centre of the county, as a replacement to the existing Blandford site. This is

currently the waste team's highest priority in terms of business continuity and resilience.

Wimborne, Blandford and Dorchester HRCs are our smallest HRCs and all require development. Both Blandford and Wimborne HRC's need to be considered as part of the wider depot/infrastructure review that our Assets & Regeneration team will be leading on. This review will take into account property growth, commercial growth, and environmental factors in relation to climate change and for waste, future flooding will be a key aspect that will be considered.

As a unitary Council we have a great opportunity to maximise the efficiency of our infrastructure. As building a standalone HRC in Dorchester is unlikely to pass the business case stage, we would be looking to co-locate other services on the same site to maximise efficiency and strengthen our waste infrastructure.

Unfortunately, new infrastructure takes a huge amount of planning. Although no decisions have been made yet about which sites may be allocated for development in the Local Plan, we cannot exclude the opportunity that the north Dorchester development may provide if it is allocated.

Question 9 submitted by Cllr L Fry

The Prince of Wales School

I understand that the shortfall in the funding of the Physical Disabilities Unit at The Prince of Wales School was first raised, formally, with Council Officers at a meeting in December 2018. Minor adjustments were made in July 2022 with the creation of a 'small school allowance' in recognition that underfunding by the Council has a big impact on small schools that pick up the challenge of providing a county-wide provision for children with complex needs. However, despite the school's protests, no action has been taken by the Council to resolve the matter on a longer-term basis.

Discussions were re-started in December 2022 with the arrival of Amanda Davis. I am told that progress has been made and that Officers are of the opinion that the school's case is accurate and fair.

The school has now submitted a deficit budget for 2023/24. This budget has been accepted by the Council. The school has taken action on matters relating to the mainstream budget, however, the majority of the deficit is agreed to be caused by the underfunding of the PD Unit. This deficit is likely to increase in the Autumn as pay increases associated with staff directly employed to work with Unit children come into effect. Governors of the School have voted to refuse new admissions until the matter is resolved.

What action are Council Officers taking to bring a speedy resolution to this issue and therefore prevent the closure of the Unit to new children as from 1st September 2023?

Response by Cllr B Quayle

Thank you for your question regarding the funding of the base for children with additional needs at the Prince of Wales School.

I can confirm officers have been in discussion with Prince of Wales Chair of Governors, Martin Butcher an Headteacher, Gary Spracklen, regarding the financial position of the school. The school includes a base for children with additional needs. It was previously the site of a special school and therefore the environment is particularly supportive of children with additional needs. The site is currently shared with Dorchester Opportunity Group. There is an inclusive culture within the school that is well established through the school leadership and community.

In 2023, officers have had a series of telephone conversations and meetings with Mr Butcher and / or Mr Spracklen, both at the school and at County Hall, on the following dates:

- 23rd March 2023
- 31st March 2023
- 25th April 2023
- 15th May 2023
- 12th June 2023
- 26th June 2023

In addition, Amanda Davis (Corporate Director for Education and Learning) spoke to Mr Butcher at the Chair's Briefing (for Chairs of Governing Bodies in Schools) on 13th June 2023 regarding the work being undertaken by officers.

The aim of these meetings has been to understand the financial position of the school and to ensure support is put into place to help manage finances effectively. This is a standard offer for our maintained schools.

Vik Verma (previous Corporate Director for Education and Learning) had agreed to provide additional base funding of £17K. He also provided a further £123.6K to support capital build. This year Amanda Davis has approved an additional £9k, based on the formula previously employed by Vik, to ensure continuity of funding. She has also agreed to an additional £11K to support the costs of running the hydrotherapy pool, in line with other schools with this facility.

Vanessa Eddey (Team Manager in School Finance and Support) has worked with Prince of Wales to look at budgeting and spend. She has benchmarked against other similar schools to assess where the school could make savings. The areas she has found to be higher than other schools are as follows:

- Teaching Assistants
- Premises costs
- Energy – the school have been linked to the sustainable property team
- Capitation (pupil premium and sports premium and how they set aside / utilise these grants)
- Service Level Agreements / external consultancy

We are not yet able to agree to fund the pay rise that may be awarded to school staff. We are not able to do this for any of our schools as we do not yet understand the cost. However, we appreciate that schools are reporting that pay awards are likely to cause budget pressures.

There are other schools in Dorset that provide similar bases to Prince of Wales, and we must fund these fairly and consistently. Our additional funding for Prince of Wales to date, have ensure comparisons to other bases.

Our expectation remains that the school sustains provision for pupils, and we will continue to work with all our schools to meet the specific needs of children. The Government SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan sets out the expectation that, wherever possible, children will attend their local mainstream school alongside their peers, close to their homes. We know that Mr Butcher and Mr Spracklen are very supportive of our strategy to ensure children feel a sense of belonging in their local schools and we will continue to work with them and other schools to plan for emerging needs of children.

Question 10 submitted by Cllr R Crabb

Barton Farm Estate Footpath

The main footway link from the Barton Farm Estate to Sherborne Town Centre is through an area known as the Secret Garden. The route takes pedestrians down to the new light controlled crossing of the A30 at Newell. It is the main pedestrian route to town for nearly 400 households.

When elected members were first shown architects sketches for this route a decade ago it was intended that the route would be accessible by those with disabilities and would be lit at night. It was therefore made a condition of planning that the footway would be built to a design and specification agreed by the planning authority. The planners now say that there is no record on file of approval ever being given for the sub-standard footway which has actually been built by Persimmon. Nor is there any provision for the footway to be adopted as public highway like the rest of the footways on the estate.

How can this failure of planning have happened and will it now be added to the list of outstanding items which are the subject of planning enforcement?

Response from Cllr D Walsh

The Council currently has an open planning enforcement case in relation to this site, and officers are looking into various concerns as part of this case, including concerns about the footway link, highways, street lighting and soil heaps. Officers have been in correspondence with Persimmon to seek to resolve the issues, and the Enforcement Manager will now be reviewing this case in consultation with the Highways team, to establish whether the issues can be resolved informally. The enforcement case remains open and the team will review potential options for formal action if it is not possible to resolve matters informally.

Question 11 submitted by Cllr R Crabb

Platinum Skies Pedestrian Crossing

Platinum Skies is a quite new development on the junction of Horsecastles Lane, Sherborne and the A30 main road to Yeovil on the west side of Sherborne. Residents need to cross the busy Horsecastles Lane road that has 3 lanes leading up to the traffic lights. Many of the people who live there are well into their 70's and beyond, so therefore find this extremely difficult, intimidating and dangerous.

The original plans showed a pedestrian crossing at the traffic light junction. However, for some reason these were not installed and I have no idea why not. This is so dangerous that it is highly likely that there will be an accident causing injury or worse. I watched an elderly resident cross these three lanes of traffic with a trolley. She was on her way to the bus stop that is on the opposite side of the road from Platinum Skies. She did make it, but I could see just how very dangerous this crossing is.

I met with the resident's association who explained that residents are very concerned indeed about this issue. I assured them that I will present their concerns to Dorset Council and help to identify a solution.

What are the possible solution to ensure that the crossing of this busy and fast road is safe for residents?

I look forward to hear what is proposed to alleviate this issue.

Response from Cllr D Walsh

The footway to the south of the development has been constructed as required by the 2016 approval for the development, with an uncontrolled crossing point provided on the main road at the optimum position.

The requirement for a footpath to Bradford Road along where the grass verge was located was a requirement of the planning permission. It was accepted at the time and reported to the planning committee, that there would be no need to provide a footway north to the A30 as required by the Local Plan Policy SHER3. This is because the primary directional flow of pedestrian movement from the Extra Care residents and the Hotel residents was considered to be inwards to the town, and that it would be mostly vehicular traffic going north to the A30.

Notwithstanding this, officers have passed these concerns to the Highways team, who have advised that each year Dorset Council receive many more requests for small highway schemes than we can build. This means we need to prioritise to make the most effective use of limited engineering resources and public money. Our funding comes from central government, and is conditional on us setting out strategic objectives, consistent with the Government's transport policy, in a Local Transport

Plan and spending our money on schemes which go furthest to achieving those objectives. We therefore evaluate all scheme requests against these objectives.

Road Safety is the highest priority for Dorset Council when allocating funding to Local Transport Plan schemes. It is our duty to ensure that our funding is used where it will make the biggest impact and save the most lives. In response to the concerns raised by Cllr Crabb the Road Safety Team will conduct a safety assessment at this location.

Question 12 – submitted by Cllr R Legg

Hummer Railway Bridge

Work on the reconstruction of Hummer railway bridge was completed in April 2022 but the bridge was immediately closed to vehicular traffic because of an argument between the Council and Network Rail over the specification and design of safety barriers on the bridge approach. The dispute centres on whether this is a repair of the old bridge or an entirely new structure. The bridge reopened to traffic in June of last year but only after the installation of a temporary barrier system and traffic lights for the bridge crossing. The cost of those works fell entirely on Dorset. The Office of Rail and Road were asked to mediate in the dispute but they declined. The Council and Network Rail are now seeking to agree on the terms of reference for an independent legal counsel to finally resolve the issue. The outcome is not academic. I am told that a barrier system for a new bridge, if that is what it is, is of the order of £200,000 and that doesn't include legal fees incurred to reach a final determination. The decision on what constitutes a new bridge or a major reconstruction of an old one in Hummer will set a precedent nationally that Network Rail will use in all their future dealings with highway authorities. In that case should we not seek the support of the Local Government Association, including financial support, since we are fighting this case on behalf of all highway authorities?

Response from Cllr R Bryan

Network Rail and Dorset Council are jointly appointing counsel to provide advice on the matters particular to Hummer Bridge. Once provided, the advice will be legally privileged and therefore not suitable for sharing in the wider domain. Had the Office of Road and Rail provided a decision regarding the applicability of the various regulations, or if we had taken Network Rail to court, then a wider precedent may have been set. However, as we are now seeking advice that will enable both parties to make informed decisions, it won't set a legally binding precedent.

Question 13 – submitted by Cllr Robin Legg

Pinford Lane

Three parish councils, Sherborne, the Yeohead Group and Milborne Port (Somerset) submitted a joint application in March for a Definitive Map Modification Order to establish Pinford Lane as a bridleway. The route lies predominantly in the parishes of

Castleton and Goathill which are part of Sherborne Rural Ward. It has been a long-held ambition by the parishes to create a safe pedestrian and cycle route between Sherborne and Milborne Port avoiding the busy and at Crackmore Rocks dangerous A30 . Thanks to the tenacity and scholarship of Jim Hart, the recently retired Rights of Way Liaison Officer for Castleton parish, a documentary case for this route has been made. It has taken him two years of research in the Parliamentary archives, reading the records of 19th century Parliamentary Committees and examining the terms used in Acts of Parliament to extinguish different categories of rights of way in earlier Turnpike Acts. It is a unique piece of research running to some 120 pages of submission for the DMMO. The authority has recently reviewed the priority to be given to DMMO applications with documentary claims now only ranking fifth. I am told that it may be four or five years at the earliest before this application is even considered by committee. I understand and support the need to bring forward claims based on user evidence so that they are considered at an early date whilst claimants are still alive. However, I think it is important that Mr Hart's unrivalled understanding of this unique and complex application should be treated in the same way as those based on user evidence and given priority 1 status. Do you agree?

Response from Cllr D Walsh

This Definitive Map Modification Order (DMMO) application was received in March 2023 and the Definitive Map Team Manager has spoken with the applicants to keep them informed of progress and potential timescales.

Cllr Legg is correct in that cases based solely on documentary evidence are ranked fifth in order of priority. However, the implementation of the new Statement of Priorities for DMMO Applications earlier this month has resulted in this application moving from number 260 in the queue to number 29. This means that at the current rate of progress it is likely to be started in approximately 2027. The Definitive Map Team has received over 200 DMMO applications in the last three years and now has a large backlog of cases to work through. Each case can take several years to resolve. The Team do understand Cllr Legg's concerns and greatly appreciate the amount of work undertaken by Mr Hart. If the opportunity arises to deal with this matter any earlier, they will of course begin investigating as soon as possible.

Cllr Legg is welcome to discuss the issue with members of the Definitive Map Team at any time.

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Full Council – Portland barge

Chair

In his opening remarks the Vice-chairman reminded us all of the need to approach our deliberations this evening in a spirit of tolerance and respect.

Our next agenda item is a motion about the agreement reached between the Home Office and Portland Port over the Bibby Stockholm asylum barge. This is a sensitive topic, with some strong views on all sides.

May I remind you all of the need for a respectful debate tonight. Please make your points in a measured way, avoiding any use of inflammatory language.

At the beginning of our meeting I welcomed representatives from the Youth Council who have joined us in the council chamber tonight. Their presence makes it all the more important that as elected representatives we show leadership, listening respectfully to the views of others even when we don't agree with them.

The Chief Executive will now make a statement before Cllr Ferrari proposes his motion.

Matt

Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to set out some background information for members before you debate the motion.

History

In late March this year, Dorset Council was made aware of discussions between Portland Port and the Home Office to site an accommodation barge for asylum seekers in Portland Port.

We immediately voiced objections to this on the basis that Portland is not a suitable location for this vessel. Dorset Council was not consulted by the Home Office and had no say in the decision. Dorset Council does not own the port.

Despite our concerns and those of others in the wider public system in Dorset, the Home Office and Portland Port went ahead and signed the contract for this arrangement in early April.

In recognition of the council's statutory responsibilities and to ensure robust arrangements are in place, we established a Multi-Agency Forum (MAF) with representatives from national, regional and local public sector agencies, Portland Port and the Home Office. This Forum meets weekly to discuss plans and arrangements for the barge, with specialist sub-groups meeting in the time between.

We are working in the best interests of both residents and asylum seekers to make sure arrangements operate smoothly, with minimal impact on local services and communities.

The Forum is overseeing arrangements for the provision of health services, operational arrangements such as transport and waste, and the safety and security of local residents and the asylum seekers.

Throughout April and May, we also investigated whether to pursue legal action to challenge to the Home Office's decision to site a barge for asylum seekers in Portland Port. We have our own in-house legal team, but we also sought specialist, external legal advice from King's Counsel, a national expert in this field.

After much careful consideration and having been advised that we did not have strong grounds to challenge the Home Office we decided to not pursue legal action. The Leader has spoken in greater detail about this in answer to public questions earlier on the agenda.

Faced with clear legal advice, our position has been to work with the Home Office and our partners to ensure the smooth operation of the barge, and to minimise impact on public services, local residents and local businesses.

We have been pushing for the provision for the asylum seekers accommodated on the barge to be properly resourced and effective. As announced last week, Dorset Council has been offered funding of £3,500 per occupied bed and an additional £377,000 for the voluntary and community sector services that will be commissioned. NHS Dorset and Dorset Police have also been securing funding for their work related to the barge.

Key Facts

If I may finish by giving some key facts

The Home Office is working with Corporate Travel Management (CTM) who will be responsible for the day-to-day management of the barge.

The Home Office and Portland Port have a commercial arrangement but as Dorset Council we do not know the detail of that arrangement.

The barge is expected to be in Portland Port for 18 months.

There will be about 50 people in the first group of asylum seekers to arrive on the barge. Over time, this will increase to up to 500 asylum seekers.

Those housed on the barge will be adult males aged between 18 to 65 from various countries. All will have been in the UK for some time.

The asylum seekers will have been through a 'suitability screening' process that includes physical and mental health checks and security screenings such as identity checks against UK immigration and police data bases (including international databases).

Asylum seekers will receive cultural awareness advice aimed at ensuring they understand the social norms in the UK. The process of familiarisation has already begun as the asylum seekers who will stay on the barge have already been accommodated in the UK for some time.

There will be a core staff on the Bibby Stockholm barge, from Corporate Travel Management (CTM) who will be responsible for managing the services on the barge. CTM, who managed two Scottish vessels, have experience of managing this type of accommodation facility. A specialist and experienced security provider will also be working on site 24/7.

The asylum seekers accommodated on the vessel will not be detained and will be free to come and go while adhering to the health and safety of the Port itself. The Home Office will provide a bus service to take asylum seekers from the port to destinations agreed with local agencies. The aim is for most of these destinations to be linked to activities for the asylum seekers, arranged through the local community and voluntary sector.

Chairman, thank you again for the opportunity to provide this background information to members.

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