

Public Questions – Cabinet 28 July 2020

Question 1 from Sarah James, Chief Executive, the Arts Development Company

Draft Dorset Council Economic Growth Strategy, agenda item 10:

Arts and Culture in Dorset is an essential component in supporting both economic growth and the development of higher paid, year round, skilled jobs and in attracting tourists to our county as well as an essential ingredient in what makes our towns and our county an attractive place to live, work, leisure and invest in. Dorset LEP's Industrial strategy now includes the Creative and Culture as 1 of its 4 priority areas.

Why then is arts and culture not mentioned nor name checked in the draft Economic Growth Strategy as a key industry contributing to Dorset and one which needs supporting through the recovery plans?

Response from the Portfolio Holder of Economic Growth and Skills

I welcome the question from Sarah James and acknowledge that arts and culture do have a role to play in the future prosperity of Dorset and this will be acknowledged in the final strategy. The significance of arts and culture has been discussed during the development of the strategy, and they have a particular role to play in addressing crucial issues such as seasonality in the visitor economy, bringing vibrancy to our towns and making Dorset an attractive inward investment proposition. Arts and culture have been severely impacted by COVID-19 and we must seek to recover and increase resilience to future economic shocks. These issues will be detailed further in the action plan to accompany the strategy, and we look forward to collaborating with the Arts Development Company and other appropriate partners.

Question 2 from Julie-Ann Booker (on behalf of Extinction Rebellion, Dorset)

When will costs and timetable be available

We welcome the release of this draft strategy and it's clear that a lot of time and effort has gone into researching, preparing and writing it. And on first review, the threats we face from this climate and ecological emergency are clearly stated. Dorset Council openly state we only have 8-10 years at the current rate of carbon emissions to take action to avert this crisis and avoid the worst impacts.

The first half of the document provides a well-researched, easy to understand and read analysis of the current scientific thinking. Indeed it could act as a 'stand-alone' document.

A strategy should be a document that shapes the future. Setting out and describing a vision of the end goal and actions for reaching it. Unfortunately, the draft strategy's second half sets out little more than a 'wish list' around a number of themes. Without any priorities, costs, targets or detailed action plans. Given how long it has been since Dorset Council declared an emergency this is indeed disappointing.

The document has been honest on this point by saying (p.57) "This strategy is a start at setting out the general direction of travel that is required within the County". This is not the ambitious statement that is needed to deal with a declared 'emergency'.

Question

When will Dorset Council's Climate and Ecological Strategy include a fully costed and timetabled action plan?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment

As included in the Next Steps section of the Climate Strategy, work is now taking place on a costed detailed Action Plan which will map out Dorset Council's journey to being Carbon Neutral by 2040 against the Carbon Budgeting set out in the Strategy Document (p 22)

Our Action Plan will set out our objectives, specific detailed actions, who in Dorset Council will be responsible, timescales and performance measures. We will also include details of other key partners required to help deliver these actions, the scale of potential carbon savings and the associated co-benefits (health, economy, ecology and resilience).

The Action Plan will be completed and presented to Dorset Council Cabinet in Oct 2020.

Question 3 from Len Herbert

TELL THE TRUTH ABOUT THE CLIMATE & ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCY

I am pleased Dorset Council has released its Climate and Ecological Emergency draft strategy and I commend all involved on its scientific content about the facts of Climate Change. But only a minority in Dorset will read the document in full. When Extinction Rebellion presented to the Inquiry Day on 4th March, we provided 5 practical ideas for Dorset Council Tell the Truth.

Question:

So I ask Dorset Council that the next step is to communicate the climate and ecological emergency in a letter to all Dorset residents, businesses and institutions, telling the truth in a concise format about the crises facing us and the actions we must all take to avoid its worst implications.

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment

The release of the draft strategy and public consultation will be comprehensively communicated by Dorset Council through a wide variety of channels incl. social media, web site and printed media.

The Climate Change Strategy forms the public facing document and is a summary of the full technical analysis, found in the accompanying technical papers, which can be accessed using the links in the Strategy. There are numerous images, diagrams and video links along with a glossary & index to make reading the document as easy as possible, but which unenviably adds to the length of the overall document.

The consultative questions will be clearly linked to the relevant sections of the strategy to make answering the questions as easy as possible. Each section of the public consultation documents will contain an executive summary of the subject area.

Question 4 from Michael Tunbridge

"I very much welcome the publication of Dorset Council's Draft Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy on the 15th July 2020. There was much to appreciate in this thorough and professionally produced document.

As a long-standing member of the Dorset Pension Fund I was very disappointed to find no commitment or statement of intent on fossil fuel divestment.

It may have been argued by the authors of the strategy that fossil fuel divestment does not relate directly to a narrow calculation of Dorset's carbon footprint. However, fossil fuel divestment certainly does relate to a wider understanding of the Climate Emergency - an understanding demonstrated in the excellent, analytical first half of the Strategy. Maintaining investments in fossil fuel and carbon intensive industries is incompatible with the declaration of a climate emergency.

I appreciate that the chain of authority is complicated, in that it is the Dorset Pension Committee that is the administering authority for the Pension Fund. The committee also includes BCP members and union representation. Despite similar complexities, some councils have chosen to send a powerful message as part of their strategy.

I particularly commend to you the motion passed on 16th July 2020 by Conservative-led Shropshire Council (42 in favour : 1 abstention). This motion calls on Shropshire pension fund to 'set a three year timescale for the reinvestment of funds currently invested in fossil fuel dependent assets'. This motion also recognises that fossil investments constitute part of the council's carbon footprint and resolves that this element should form part of the regular reporting.

<https://shropshire.gov.uk/committee-services/mgAi.aspx?ID=14947>

<https://www.shropshirelive.com/news/2020/07/16/shropshire-council-makes-historic-decision-to-divest-pension-fund-from-fossil-fuels/>

On 16th July 2020 Shropshire Council took the lead and called on Shropshire County Pension Fund to divest from fossil fuels within three years and resolved to include fossil fuel investments in their carbon footprint accounting. Will Dorset Council take similar steps?"

Response from Cllr Andy Canning, Chair Dorset County Pension Fund (read out by Cllr Peter Wharf)

As you recognise in your question the governance arrangements for the Dorset County Pension Fund are complex. While Dorset Council is the fund administrator the Pension Fund Committee is made up of members from BCP and a staff representative as well as Dorset Councillors.

We are conscious that both Dorset Council and BCP have declared a climate emergency and I can assure you that the Pension Fund Committee will take this fully into account when it makes investment decisions.

The Pension Fund reviews its investment strategy every three years based on an independent actuarial analysis of our level of funding and any action that is required to meet any shortfall. This is followed by an independent evaluation of investment prospects leading to recommendations concerning the Fund's Investment Strategy.

We will receive these recommendations in the next few weeks and they will be discussed and agreed at our next meeting on September 10th.

We have specifically requested that the independent evaluation includes an assessment of the merits of a Decarbonisation strategy versus a Fossil Fuel Free strategy.

To further complicate matters we are members of the Brunel Investment Partnership and are moving speedily to transfer all of our investments into their pooled funds.

The Brunel Partnership is committed to leading the way on sustainable investments. It is achieving this by:

1. A commitment that its mainstream funds are in line with the targets set in the Paris Climate Accord and, as a minimum, will reduce their carbon footprint by 7% a year
2. Launching a series of Sustainable Funds with low carbon footprint. The first of these (the Global Passive Low Carbon Fund) has a carbon footprint of around 50% compared to the MSCI World Index. Brunel will be launching three further Sustainable Funds in September – details of which will be presented to the Pension Fund Committee.

Question 5 from Bridget Joslin

I understand that it is possible to ask a question or make a statement before the meeting on July 23. I have read the document as best I can and applaud the work the committee has done on seeing a way forward.

My comment and question all in one is: are these targets ambitious enough? The Climate Change Commission's report to government in July 2020 spoke of only 4

out of 21 targets being met to be carbon zero in 2050, a date which many people believe is at least 15 years too late. Of 31 milestones 14 have made no progress at all, 15 have been met partially and 2 have been fully met. By 2050 runaway climate change will be unstoppable. All your hard work as a Council will be wasted. I believe we must be much more ambitious and be prepared for our lives to change as they have had to do with the Covid crisis. I recognise central government is blocking the path but lobbying must continue much more forcefully to clear the way. We also have a duty to inform the public what we must expect in the years ahead.

Thank you for this opportunity for me to voice my grave concerns.

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment

Dorset Council made it clear at the point at which it declared a climate and ecological emergency that its strategy to tackle this would be based upon informed and fully investigated actions against a realistic timetable that was achievable set against the financial pressures that are facing not just Dorset Council but all Local Authorities.

The Carbon Budgeting section of the Strategy shows the progress towards Carbon Neutrality will bring about significant reductions in Carbon emissions well in advance of the 2040 target.

Question 6 from Dave Warren

On Page 55, under The Waste section of the Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy paper, is an Indirect Action to “*Establish appropriate infrastructure to support circular economy as part of Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy for Dorset 2008 – 33*”.

In Section 9 - Residual Waste, of the same 2008 -33 report there is a league table that ranks Energy from Waste Incineration (aka Direct EfW) as the Council's No1 preferred option for the future management and treatment of residual waste (page 39 of 2008-33 report).

Even though it has been roundly criticized in two parliamentary debates this year with high profile MP's like Priti Patel, Dr Therese Coffey and Sir Ian Boyd (Defra Chief Scientific Adviser), all openly criticising the impact it has on the environment, local recycling rates and the circular economy, Energy from Waste Incineration appears to be the Council's No1 choice for treating Dorset's residual waste. I was also surprised that while tacitly stating it will establish this infrastructure, the Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy paper makes no direct reference to energy from waste. **Please could the climate and environmental Advisory Panel publish their findings and recommendations concerning the environmental and ecological effects of EfW incineration?**

Because, if this is truly a forward looking document, it needs to advise on both current and potential future events that will impact the County's ability to achieve its climate targets.

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment

As part of any future waste treatment solution a range of technologies and different solutions would be explored taking into account environmental and ecological impact assessments, not just EfW, the results of this research and any future waste treatment solution would be publicly available.

Question 7 from Dave Warren

To protect investors from misleading claims by Finance Houses, who claim that their products only contain environmentally friendly investments, The EU have recently passed a set of laws and regulations that list (by name), all environmentally sustainable economic activities. Along with nuclear and fossil fuel activities, The EU have excluded energy from waste incineration from its Green List, as they have established that it is neither a sustainable or an environmentally friendly activity. These laws and regulations come into effect next year, with "comply or explain" rules scheduled for June 21. One of the reasons The EU have given to justify its decision is that EfW activities act as an obstacle to the development of the circular economy, and as we know, The Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy for Dorset 2008 – 33 and the Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy paper, makes regular reference to the importance of moving to a circular economy.

I'm sure the Advisory Panel would agree with the EU's Technical Expert Group's findings, as there is a wealth of information available in the UK and across the rest of Europe that correlates the reduction in recycling rates with council areas that have contracts that commit them to supply specified levels of RDF to Energy from Waste Incinerator plants. Sadly, in some councils, recyclable materials end up being incinerated in order to avoid contractual penalty costs.

As this is a forward looking initiative, Dorset's environmental strategy document should be bold and clear on its position regarding the environmental impact of energy from waste activities, and be used to provide other departments within the council with guidance when considering future planning applications to build energy from waste incinerators in Dorset. However, on speaking with one of the council's planning officers, they didn't believe that the findings of this Strategy document would be used to shape, influence or redefine Dorset's planning process. If, like The EU, this document identifies EfW activities as unsustainable, environmentally unfriendly and detrimental to the circular economy, **will the council revisit their position on the future use of EfW as a method to manage Dorset's residual waste?**

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment

The Joint Municipal Waste Strategy for Dorset was adopted in 2008 and revised in 2017. This was prior to the Green List being developed and prior to the Council declaring a Climate change emergency. The Joint Municipal Waste Strategy for Dorset sets out the strategic direction for Dorset's waste up to 2033, however it has already been updated and is due to be updated every 5 years, or if there's any significant change. A significant change in the waste industry is the Government's Waste and Resources Strategy for England, 2019, therefore any updated strategy (due in 2022) will take into account all of these local, national and international changes.

Question 8 from David Redgewell

To provide transport choices in Dorset buses are now funded by the Department for Transport. Covid 19 bus operator grant

We welcome the partnership on Transforming Transport funding of £79 million for sustainable transport in South East Dorset .

We are also unclear as to where the £300 000 rural bus grant is going to be used. The bus network needs improvements with investment required in evening and weekend services.

Key links need to be developed in the in the bus network map regarding service 6 Bridport to Yeovil bus station.

Dorchester South station to Brlport, Lyme Regis and Axminster station needs a 7 days a week bus service on routes X51 and X53 run by with a connection at Axminster for bus service 30 to Taunton and South West Railway services to London Waterloo and Exeter St Davids.

Lyme Regis to Exeter bus station is a key regional bus link service 7. Other important links are Weymouth, Blandford x12, Blandford Forum and Salisbury on services 20, Bournemouth, Poole to Swanage service 40 Poole to Weymouth X54 via Wareham

Poole to Blandford Forum X8 , Blandford Forum to Shaftesbury X3, X9 /and Blandford Forum to Yeovil bus station x10.

Bournemouth Poole links to Verwood but the map fails to show the importance of Ringwood in Hampshire as a key interchange with National Express Coaches to London via Southampton or the X3 Express bus service from Bournemouth to Salisbury.

The plan does not look at the role of park and ride services in Weymouth, Nordon on the Swanage railway and Lyme Regis and ways of reducing private car usage in those towns centres.

The plan lack details of National Express Coaches services serving Bournemouth and Dorset. The plan shows no investment in transport interchange facilities yet new bus/railway station interchanges are planned by Network Rail at Weymouth and Dorchester South stations. Or bus Station s such as Bridport or swanage. Or with in western gateway transport plan.

It's not clear how the public transport part of the climate change strategy will be addressed with covid 19 .and whilst the strategy talks about walking cycling and active travel funding its not clear on public transport or school buses service s which may not be open to the fare paying passengers other School and college students due to social distancing.

How Dorset council is is going to ask the department for transport fund the public transport strategy?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment

Public transport is a component of the response to the Climate and Ecological Emergency and will be reviewed as part of the Local Transport Plan and included in the Climate and Ecological Action Plan.

Question 9 from David Redgewell

The Department for Transport are now managing railway funding through direct management contracts until September and has suspended all railway franchises. The plan is not clear on railway investment projects such as upgrading the Weymouth town station to Upwey, Dorchester West, Maiden Newton, Thornford, Yetminster, Chetnole, Yeovil Pen Mill, Castle Cary, Bruton, Frome, Westbury to Bath Spa and Bristol Temple Meads station route. It is important that there is clear investment in this important railway line both at Weymouth Town station and Dorchester West where disabled access is required to the hospital from the Bristol bound platform improved access to Dorchester South station for disabled passengers and houly train service to Bristol and Exeter.

The Wessex railway partnership or Blackmore Vale Railway Partnership are not mentioned.

Investment is required in the Weymouth to Poole Bournemouth and London Waterloo route with the track doubled through Moreton on the electrified section. The Wareham to Swanage route needs a daily rail service and

Wareham station should have proper disabled access with a lift, footbridge, disabled toilets and improvements in bus/rail integration.

Increasing the amount freight carried by rail should be a priority for the county to meet global emissions targets and investment is required in facilities at Weymouth, Wool and Hamworthy.

The Exeter St Davids, Exeter Central to Honiton, Axminster, Chard Junction, Crewkerne, Yeovil Junction, Sherborne, Templecombe, Gillingham Tisbury, Wilton, Salisbury, Basingstoke, Woking and London Waterloo route need a double track section between Yeovil and Salisbury as well as modern hybrid trains as being developed by south west railway first group MTR. The route needs electrification

What bid is the council making with the western gateway transport board to fund vital railway improvements and services in the plan.?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment

“Thank you for the question. As yet there are no bidding opportunities via the Western Gateway Subnational Transport Body (STB) for rail improvements. What we are doing is preparing a rail strategy with our partners in the STB which will put us in the right position to make the best case for investment in Dorset and set it within the regional context – poor connectivity within Dorset is bad news for our neighbours as well as for us. We can then use this strategy as a basis for working with the Rail Industry and the Department for Transport to bring much needed investment in Dorset’s Railways.

In addition to the Western Gateway strategy, we are also working with Network Rail on their Continuous Modular Strategic Plan for Dorset which is addressing many of the issues you raise, such as the hourly service on the Heart of Wessex Line. It aims to ascertain what is achievable and what needs to be done to make aspirations deliverable. It is anticipated this work will be completed by the end of the year.

To respond on a couple of specifics in your lead in. I understand from Network Rail that they intend to start constructing disabled access to the North bound platform at Dorchester West later in the year. Also, using some Access for All

funding, Network Rail and South Western Railway will be providing step free access to each platform (though not between) at Dorchester South Station.

As regards Wareham Station, Dorset Council continue to work closely with train operating companies to provide a regular rail service between Swanage and Wareham.

Dorset Coast Forum in partnership with Dorset Council had a successful bid to the South Western Railway Customer and Communities Improvement Fund (SWR CCIF) which is being used as part of a package of improvements known as the Weymouth Station Gateway project More information can be found at www.dorsetcoasthaveyoursay.co.uk. A press release about the consultation will be going out in the next couple of weeks”

Question from Luke Wakeling

In these unprecedented times, many more people are working from home, and more than ever, we are all relying on a strong internet connection.

In Dorset Council’s largest conurbation (Chickerell, Portland & Weymouth) you are lucky to get a 50Mbps download speed. However, if I lived in Bournemouth, I could get Cable internet upto 350Mbps and in some areas Fibre internet upto 1000Mbps. (*See attachments*)

The Weymouth area receives internet speeds that are orders of magnitude slower than in the neighbouring authority. Our communities, already suffering from poverty and deprivation, are being left further behind every day.

Looking at Think Broadband’s stats by Council, Ultrafast (>100Mbps internet) is available to just 7.9% of Dorset Council’s residents- that ranks us 380 out of 419 councils - putting us in the bottom 10% of areas for ultrafast internet availability. Dorset Council’s area is suffering from digital poverty.

I know that DC is still working to get 24Mbps internet to some areas, however my questions pertain to the delivery of the next generation internet to our urban areas.

Questions

What are you doing, and when will we see results, to bring the next generation of internet access (ie. greater than 100Mbps) to the residents of Dorset?

What do you say to the young people of Dorset who are looking for jobs and opportunities in technology, and think they need to leave our beautiful county to succeed?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Corporate development and Change

Dorset Council recognises that universal provision of superfast broadband is critical to the future economic and social prosperity of the county of Dorset. The Superfast Dorset programme provides gap-funding state aid to build open access Superfast Broadband network in locations where the commercial market will not provide a solution. It has been working with BT / Openreach over the past 5 years and has delivered access to superfast broadband to over 84,000 premises in the county, and a host of related activity to ensure strategic benefits are realised. Access to superfast broadband in Dorset has grown from a pre-contract level of 77% to 96% superfast availability across the county. The starting level of coverage represented the hand off point of commercial deployment in Dorset, beyond which 'gap funding' with Council, central government and Dorset LEP funding programme was necessary to fast track further network expansion.

As Cllr Wakeling alludes to, the focus is moving on to building faster, gigabit networks. The starting point for this is low in Dorset, in common with many predominately rural counties. The national strategy was set out in July 2018 in the Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review. This concluded that the most effective way to deliver nationwide full fibre connectivity at pace is to promote competition and commercial investment where possible, and intervene where necessary. This is a long-term agenda nationally, and in Dorset. Many actions are particular to central government and relate to changes to the regulatory (OFCOM) and taxation regimes to encourage greater investment. Specifically in Dorset:

- We are working with suppliers big and small to
 - understand their commercial plans and see how we can support deployment through operating best practice in relation to street works
 - facilitate network designs and access to land

- ensure that new build is provisioned with fibre.
- Our remaining contract with Openreach is now building exclusively full fibre in rural areas.
- Businesses and communities are able to access the Rural Gigabit voucher scheme, again subsidising connectivity at gigabit speeds.
- We are working with central government to understand the opportunity and likely impact of the gigabit 'outside-in' programme. It is too soon to know what the impact in Dorset of this £5b national programme will be, but it is clear that this intervention programme will be needed in large parts of Dorset where the market will not provide alone. The first outcomes from this intervention are expected from 2022 onwards. It is worth noting that this programme is being designed for those areas where commercial investment is not likely to occur.
- We are in discussion with Chris Loder MP who is working on behalf of all Dorset MPs to lobby on our behalf for improved connectivity.

Dorset Council recognises the importance of faster networks. On this month's Cabinet agenda you will see items:

- Approving our Economic Growth Strategy which recognises digital infrastructure as a foundation for sustainable and inclusive economic growth
- Seeking our own and Dorset LEP investment in full fibre infrastructure.

Government's ambition is to complete a national roll-out by 2025; this is recognised by industry as a really stretching target, by way of comparison the Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review gave a completion date of 2033.

If Cllr Wakeling would like more information or to delve deeper in relation to his own town or ward, Dugald Lockhart, the Lead officer on broadband and mobile infrastructure would be delighted to meet him to discuss further.

Statement from Paula Klaentschi

1. I would like to **thank the DC team** for getting this formative clear communication this far.
2. I ask that **2. Financial Implications** identifies the potential rewards to DC by Generating Renewable Energy in contrast to the costs. That DC promote Dorset expert manufacturers/remanufacturers using Council Tax incentives to lead in new circular economy initiatives.
3. In **3. Climate implications** add to Current/ Residual Risk the Inevitable Risk [what we have to prepare for] predicted rise in sea level, back flooding low ground and swamping Weymouth.
4. In **7. Background Papers** add:
 - 4.1 **Energy.** support the local economy to phase out all carbon fuels in energy generation. DC to stop directing RDF to EfW MSW Incineration and preventing new plants being built. Because incinerators emit more GHGs than a gas power station and crucially undermine the Circular Economy. Richard Drax wrote 07.07.20: “to the Secretary of State at DEFRA. I have pointed out that you have concerns about the whole issue of air pollution and the UK Government’s inadvertent proliferation of harmful emissions from EfW Incineration and the incorrect designation of this form of energy as being renewable. I have also highlighted your concerns that the Environment Agency should have the power to refuse permits on the grounds that a proposal is inconsistent with the declared Climate Emergency and that an Incineration Exit Strategy should become UK Government policy as soon as possible.”
 - 4.2 **Waste** is material, it is part of our diminishing resources. DC can incentivise the circular economy by its purchasing power. Dorset manufacturers need support to adapt to use only materials that can be readily reused or recycled.

Today legacy landfill is being rewilded and turned into leisure and nature reserves. Landfill activity has moved to Incinerator with a green wash on the energy generated. DC can lead the way and control about what is fed into an incinerator so that nothing reusable is pushing GHGs into the air. Professor Ian Boyd, Defra Chief Scientist advises *“If there is one way of quickly extinguishing the value in a material, it is to stick it in an incinerator and burn it. It may give you energy out at the end of the day, but some of those materials, even if they are plastics, with a little ingenuity, can be given more positive value. One thing that worries me is that we are taking these materials, we are putting them in incinerators, we are losing them for ever and we are creating carbon dioxide out of them, which is not a great thing. We could be long-term storing them until we have the innovative technologies to reuse them and turn them into something that is more positively valued.”*

Statement from Jasmine O'Hare

Raise the Roof is a partnership between The Arts Development Company, Wessex Community Assets, Common Ground and Bridport Town Council.

Working with experts such as Assemble and local farmers, we are developing practical ways of how we can utilise sustainable local materials such as timber and start re-growing hemp (as it used to be grown in the area), to be processed into hempcrete for local housing materials, as opposed to high carbon materials such as concrete.

The design and build of these will be done by the local artists, designers, architects and builders. We will also be opening up opportunities for the local communities to get involved, so that they can learn practical skills in terms of helping to inform and build their own environments and how we can all make positive changes locally.

We would welcome the opportunity to share our learning with Dorset Council, as we see this as a way forward to address the climate emergency, as well as helping the affordable housing agenda.