Statement from Councillor S Jespersen

The proposal for the Dinah’s Hollow Slope Stabilisation includes the requirement to close the C13 for seven months.

You may recall, as I most certainly do, that during the previous work on Dinah’s Hollow the road was closed from April 2014 to July 2015. I also recall the impact this had on the lives of the residents in the villages in the area, which bore the burden of the displaced traffic.

So bad was this damage and disruption that DCC eventually suggested, in 2015, that the risk associated with the continued road closure was greater than the risk of the slopes collapsing.

The Report to DCC Cabinet in May 2015, on The Risk Comparison Analysis of the Decision to Close the C13, stated:

“The closure of the C13 at Melbury Abbas …has had significant ramifications on the community and the local road network in terms of both the size and the number of vehicles now using unsuitable roads to circumnavigate the road closure and also the subsequent impact this increase in traffic is having on the roads themselves.

…a number of neighbouring hamlets and villages are now experiencing an increase in traffic volumes. This is having a dramatic effect on residents’ quality of life and has led to considerable disquiet from those living in these communities.

It has been suggested that the damage and disruption caused by the road closure outweighs the perceived damage of the slopes collapsing”

The Report further refers to increase in collisions, damage to vehicles and property and serious damage to the highway itself resulting from the road closure, and describes how vehicles, including HGV, avoiding the diversion route are having a disproportionately high impact on those living alongside these roads.

The residents in these same villages are now to be asked to endure this disruption and serious impact on the quality of their lives once again.

Could I ask, therefore that the lessons learned during the previous closure of the C13 are used to

i. Provide all possible mitigation measures to reduce the impact of the road closure on the neighbouring communities

ii. Introduce, in good time, a wide and full communications plan to keep the local communities informed of plans and progress
iii. Plan and budget for the inevitable repair work to the surrounding road network
iv. And, above all, make it a priority to keep the length of the road closure as brief as possible.

Question from Councillor Jane Somper

I have read both the cabinet report and previous reports from 2013/14 in relation to the works to the slopes at Dinah’s Hollow where a geotechnical engineer identified potential complete failure due to the instability of the slopes. The report delivered by Brody Forbes did state the chance of this is rare with no significant slippage where the slopes have existed for hundreds of years.

However the report also states that there is chance that changes due to climate change with extreme weather becoming more frequent and the impact on the vegetation conditions, damage caused by intense periods of rainfall could trigger a major collapse of the slopes and the concrete barriers currently in place would not be sufficient to hold back the tonnes of soil that could fall.

The decision to put on hold the original scheme to provide the required stability of soil nails and mesh in 2015 was due to a discussion on funding bids in relation to the North South corridor of the M4 and ports of Poole and Portland. This has of yet not moved forward although at the last cabinet meeting approval was given for DC to join the Western Gateway Partnership where this and other potential routes are to be looked at in a Government funded strategic transport report.

I recognise and fully accept that this Council must take all measures to protect all road users who drive through the hollow and cannot allow any risk to life.

My question to the Portfolio Holder is:

This is an extremely sensitive and protracted issue for all residents living in Dinah’s Hollow, Melbury Abbas and as a result of this, and in order for me to fulfil the commitment that I have made to my residents I expect to be kept fully informed of all developments leading to the decision as to how the council intends to proceed with Dinah’s Hollow. My engagement with officers must enable me to report to residents on the progress being made at every stage. Can you kindly confirm that this will be in place.

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment

To reassure you on our proposed application to join the Western Gateway Powerhouse – this is mainly to align the geographies of our transport and economic partnerships. While of course we hope this strengthens our ability to attract funding, this does not fundamentally change anything with regards to Dinah’s Hollow at this stage.

It’s obviously important that residents are given clear, accurate and timely information on this extremely sensitive and protracted issue. This is the case whether we are talking about managing the situation on the ground, or the rather
more removed strategic discussions which may not directly impact residents right now but could have significant implications in the longer term.

A communications plan will be prepared for the project. Officers will be proactive in seeking comment and providing progress reports to members and other with an interest in the project. A member of the project team will always be available to answer questions.

**Question from Councillor Nick Ireland**

The recent comments by a Dorset Councillor at the Police and Crime Panel have highlighted the need for at least some councillors to receive Equality & Diversity training.

Will this council’s leader organise an appropriate course for those in need of such training?

**Response from the Leader of the Council**

The recent comments made by Cllr Pipe in the Police and Crime Panel were unacceptable and disappointing. Cllr Pipe has rightly apologised unreservedly for what he said. I can also confirm that Cllr Pipe has requested Equality and Diversity training, and has been removed from the Police and Crime Panel.

Equality and diversity training is provided annually for all members of the council as part of the member development programme and is classed as ‘required’ training for councillors. This area of training is given high importance. Councillors were invited to an equalities session as part of their induction last year and further discussion events were held in May and June of this year for councillors to discuss the Covid-19 Vulnerable Groups Equality Impact assessment. The next training session will be delivered this autumn.

As councillors, we have a responsibility to educate ourselves about the issues and injustices faced by all members of our communities so we can properly represent them. I shall be strongly encouraging all members to attend this training.