

Cabinet 3 November 2020
Public Questions and Statements

1. Question from John Calvert

The financial management report for Quarter 2 has a section on Forecast overspend on Place.

It states that most is due to a shortfall on income from car parks, commercial assets etc.

As a resident of Dorchester for 10 years now the Market on the Fairfield site has been a delight. It has coped with the Virus and the coaches were back last week. It is important to Dorchester.

Can the Cabinet please avoid a knee jerk reaction such as seems imminent on car parking income, and look at ways to develop/support the market now. Serious thinking needs to start now so that the situation does not drift through.

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment

We are in support of the market at the Fairfield site and we are not actively looking at any form of parking strategy that would adversely affect holding the market.

2. Question from Alistair Chisholm, Town Councillor (Dorchester Town Council)

"At a time when the natural and man-made heritage of the county is likely to play an even greater role Dorset's future economic prosperity, how will a massive development, such as that proposed north of Dorchester, assist in promoting the Dorset "brand" whether that be as an essentially rural county with a World Heritage designated coastline and/or Thomas Hardy Country?"

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Planning

Dorset's environment and heritage are important for its economy – but Dorset also needs housing if its economy is to thrive. The availability and affordability of housing are important to enable businesses to attract workers.

The Dorset Local Plan needs to provide for the economic, social and environmental needs of the area – allocating land for new homes and for businesses to grow, while protecting and enhancing the area's environmental assets. Previous housing growth has not harmed the local economy or the Dorset brand, and the local plan provides for environmental protection and enhancement alongside development.

3. Question from Ken Huggins, Parish Councillor (Hazelbury Bryan Parish Council)

Question regarding the Public Consultation on the draft Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy & Action Plan

A period of only 6 weeks has been set for the Public Consultation on the Council's draft Strategy and Action Plan to address the Climate and Ecological Emergency.

The Climate and Ecological Emergency is THE most pressing and defining issue of our era, with potentially catastrophic consequences for every single one of us unless urgent action is taken NOW to avoid it. The effectiveness of any actions taken will depend to a significant extent upon the understanding and cooperation of the general public. It is therefore vital that as many members of the public as possible are encouraged to engage with the Council's Public Consultation on its draft Strategy and Action Plan.

Given the relatively short period allowed for the Consultation, how does the Council intend to publicise the Consultation, and will it include an information document sent to every residential property with individual copies for every member of each household?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment

The Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy Consultation period has been decided upon so the results and subsequent analysis of the consultation will be complete in time for the 2021/2022 budget setting process in order to ensure that work to progress the actions identified in the strategy can be delivered as quickly as possible.

The Consultation is accompanied by a comprehensive communications plan which aims to ensure that during the period of consultation as many people as possible are made aware of the surveys and encouraged to take part. We gave residents advance notice of the consultation through our Dorset Council News magazine, which is delivered to all households in our area. We have already sent links to the strategy and consultation to over 30,000 residents via e-mail, have issued a news release to all local media outlets, and will continue to publicise the survey via various channels throughout the course of the consultation period.

Responses to the survey and response levels will be monitored throughout and appropriate targeted additional communication efforts will be made to address any particular areas of concern.

4. Question from Caz Dennett

The C&EE Action Plan consultation period is set for 6 weeks. The local government association website suggests 12 weeks is best practice for consultations on

substantial issues. (<https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/guidance-and-resources/comms-hub-communications-support/resident-communications-4>).

1. Will Dorset Council please extend the consultation period to e.g. 8-10 weeks in order for people to really have a considered say in what is the most important issue of our lifetime, if not our human history, and to enable more people to engage, especially in structured community-based / Town Council supported consultation events such as People's Assemblies?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment

In the case of the Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy Consultation there is no minimum legal requirement for the length of consultation. Best practice suggests between 6 – 12 weeks. There is a comprehensive communication plan associated with the consultation which aims to ensure maximum coverage is given to the opportunity to comment and Dorset Council will be actively engaging with residents, Councillors and Town and Parish Councils via hosted webinars.

2. What reasons would justify this request being declined, given Dorset Council say they would like a high volume of responses?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment

Due to the need to progress work on the actions contained within the strategy it has been decided that a 6 week period is most suitable as it will allow the results and subsequent analysis of the questionnaire to be included in the 2021/2022 budget setting process. The 6 week consultation does not cover any holiday periods and there has been substantial effort made prior to the consultation being published to raise awareness of the forthcoming opportunity to comment.

5. Question from Penny Quilter

Thank you for providing an update on the future of the former Council Building at North Quay to #WeymouthTogether network of community organisations.

We are working on a project charter for Dorset Councils consideration and would like to have a look at the building.

1. How do we get access to the building to assess its suitability for short term use by the community?
2. What is the total current monthly cost of maintaining these premises and what is the breakdown of the costs?

Response from Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth, Assets & Property

Unfortunately, the building is not in a suitable state of repair at the present time to allow for short term use by the community. It is the intention to engage with the community early 2021 with regard to the future of North Quay.

The total annual cost at present for maintaining this building is £102,636 broken down as follows:

Rates: £95,760
Security: £ 2,555
R&M: £ 474
Utilities: £ 3,847

6. Question from Tricia Mitchell

All the indications point to there being a proposal in the Local Plan for a huge housing development beyond the water meadows of the river Frome immediately north of Dorchester.

If this development goes ahead:

- a. How will Dorset Council ensure that 30% of the 4,000+ houses proposed for this site will be affordable?
- b. how will the Council ensure that these properties remain affordable in perpetuity?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Planning

A draft consultation document will be coming to the next meeting of Cabinet, in December. This will include a range of proposals across all of the Dorset Council area, to meet the identified needs for housing and employment development. We need to meet the housing requirements of the area, but at this stage, proposals for where they should be built will not be 'set in stone' – they will be published for consultation, and all the responses will be considered before members make any final decisions.

Within the local plan, there will be policies setting out how much affordable housing should be provided on development sites. These policies have to be tested to make sure that they are not going to make development unviable, but we will be commissioning up to date evidence on development viability as part of work on the local plan, to make sure that our position is robust and can be defended.

We would enter into legal agreements with any developers to make sure that the housing is secured. There would be a range of tenures of affordable housing, as we need to follow the national definitions and policies on affordable housing. But rented and shared ownership housing will normally be managed in the long term by registered housing providers.

7. Statement from Andy Matthews

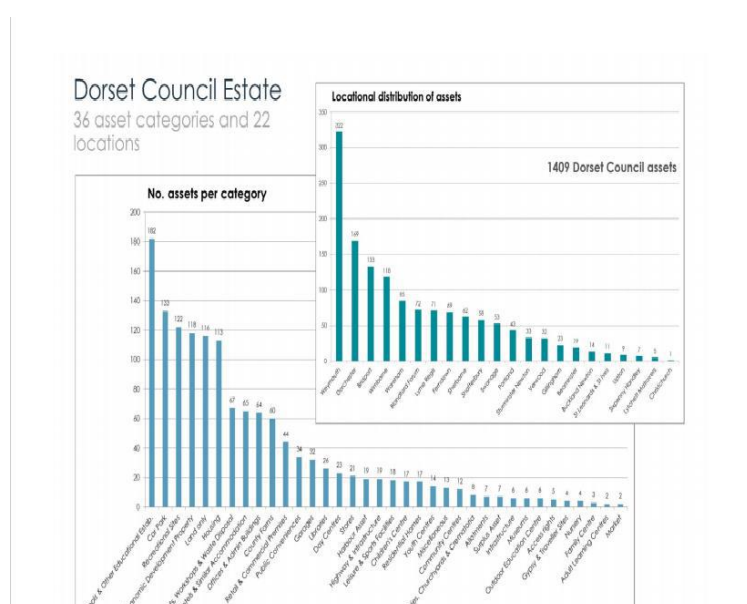
The following request refers to Portland specifically but is intended to propose a general approach.

Although I am involved with a number of organisations who are trying to take the Island's future forward, I thought it would be easiest to avoid issues of perceived conflict if I set out my personal views on the above agenda item.

I have many years' experience in roles where you have to be continually forward looking and be able to anticipate change and the consequences of this.

I have always supported the move to a Unitary Council as a strategic body but equally endorsed an improved role for Towns and Parish Councils and related delivery organisations which are publicly accountable either via officers or members. The report on the Property Strategy and Asset Management Plan sets out a rationale for the management of the public estate over the next few years with the intention with other local organisations under the 'One Dorset' banner to deliver on the objectives within the Dorset Plan.

The key evidence for me on progressing this is shown in Appendix 2 the profile of the Asset Base replicated below for ease of reference.



It can be seen that the strategic aspects of the estate could be considered to cover those localities with more than 100 assets - it should be these that Dorset Council senior officers should be focused on leaving the smaller areas to communities to resolve using a 'One Dorset' agreed delivery framework.

In this way we can all be working on a common endeavour bringing the skills which vest in our communities to achieve satisfactory outcomes.

We have tried locally on a number of occasions to progress a joined up approach to the rationalisation of the public estate and to consider future needs alongside this but with only limited success.

On Portland we have set out a Neighbourhood Plan development framework which we believe can underpin this approach but we also have an urgent need to deal with the relative deprivation that exists and which has been recently re-affirmed in data from the ONS.

When considering Agenda item 8 therefore I seek the Cabinet's support for this manner of working.

Response from Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth, Assets & Property

The Property Strategy & Asset Management not only considers the number of sites within an area but the potential commercial and social value that these sites can deliver.

The Council wish to bring forward the development and repurposing of sites as quickly as possible where this is viable and practicable to do so.

In order to do so and as stated within the Property Strategy & Asset Management Plan the Council will consider a variety of delivery models including where applicable working in collaboration with other parties/bodies.

The first action for the Council is to identify and evaluate its assets to determine whether they are to be retained, retained and developed or disposed of and thereafter to determine its approach and priorities.

8. Statement from the Board of Portland Community Land Trust

Portland Community Land Trust (PCLT) is a community benefit society which has as its objectives to deliver regeneration on Portland and in particular address the issue of Local Housing for Local People.

We receive support from officers at Dorset Council and Wessex Community Assets. The trust has a number of projects on Portland which it wishes to progress as a priority within these is derelict property at the High St on Portland (pictures below) which is currently owned by Dorset Council.



This property has been in this condition for many years and the CLT has been trying to progress its demolition and development for a number of years for which we have received community support.

The CLT also has a number of potential projects which may interwork with this site improving viability.

Notwithstanding approval for the Property and Asset Management Plan by Cabinet can we seek your support for an early determination of this site so the CLT can move forward appropriately?

Response from Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth, Assets & Property

As mentioned in the response to the previous statement the first action for the Council after it has identified its assets is to undertake an evaluation exercise to

determine whether they are to be retained, retained and developed or disposed of. This particular property will be considered as part of that programme from which a decision will be made as to the best approach in dealing with this particular asset and an assessment made of the timescales in which this can be achieved.