

Cabinet of 6 April 2021

Public Questions

1. Question from Mike Allen

I am concerned about how Dorset Council intend to process the comments they have received in reply to the Draft Local Plan Consultation.

In particular, it is important that members of the public are able to see the full range of comments without undue hindrance, but DC's Statement of Community Involvement has only this to say:

"All comments received in response to a consultation will be considered. A consultation report summarising comments and a response to the issues raised will be made available on the Local Plan web pages."

A summary alone will not enable the public to see all the comments, nor will a list of them suffice, because there will be so many. I suggest they ought to be stored in a **searchable online database** (a spreadsheet for instance) so that anyone can see easily what others have said about each policy or paragraph in the Plan. Collating the responses in this way will lead to observers being able to relate meaningfully the Council's response to those comments to the comments themselves.

With this in mind I would like to ask a question please of the Cabinet regarding the involvement of local communities in drafting the Local Plan:

Question:

If the Council do not store the comments received about each policy and paragraph in a searchable database accessible to the public, how can the public be certain that the Council's responses have taken reasonable regard of all the comments received?

2. Question from William Kenealy

1. Why has the portfolio holder made repeated political statements to the press and still not replied individually to the questions and over 20 e-mails sent in to the October cabinet meeting by residents, local organisations and the Parish Council in respect of works in Dinah's Hollow as stated in the meeting minutes?
2. Why has the portfolio holder ignored requests to meet the Parish Council and residents to address their concerns about the proposed Dinah's Hollow works and the poor traffic management in the village?

3. Question from Mary Calvert

1. The piecemeal use of consultants with a Finance rather than a need-led assessment has resulted in hasty proposals that are likely to prove unwise and unrealistic in the long run. In particular, it is doubtful that South Walks House will attract a developer with 30% affordable housing in one building. It would seem advisable to keep the option of a hotel on the table since the Council has already been approached.

Will the Council commit to 30% affordable housing in South Walks House even if this may make the development uneconomic for a developer; and has the Council got a plan B?

2. Dorset Councils (past and present) have failed over decades to ensure the provision of disabled access at either station in Dorchester. It is therefore essential that access is given sufficient attention as part of the current rationalisation and consolidation exercise. This is particularly relevant at the County Hall/Colliton Park site which is to be a "public service civic hub" having due regard to the Equality Act 2010.

Which community interest company established by disabled people, older people and carers is the Dorset Council commissioning to undertake the fresh series of Access Audits (as reported to the Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee), what are the terms of reference of the Access Audits and how can Dorchester residents get involved?

4. Question from John Calvert

As a Dorchester resident I am concerned at the detrimental effects on location of staff, resulting location of services and access to those services of the recommendations in the Dorset Office Strategy report in item 14.

I note that the report is provided by the Director of Property and Assets and was initially sent to the Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee. It is not then surprising that the implications are given as Finance, then Climate then other. It was admitted at that meeting that the actual numbers and location of staff was fluid. However counting numbers of desks was seen as key to the recommendations.

Where is located Dorset Council's vision for the services needed by its residents and visitors and the organisation of staff to provide those services? Shouldn't that come first before a narrow accounting examination of office space?

5. Question from Pete West Secretary Dorset Community Energy

The council clearly understands the importance of reducing net CO2 emissions to zero as quickly as possible through your declaration of a Climate and Ecological Climate in 2019. The only realistic way to achieve this for Dorset as a whole is through an offshore wind power scheme on the scale of the previously proposed

Navitus Bay project, which would decarbonise the total electricity consumption of Dorset, Bournemouth and Poole at no cost to the council and create hundreds of new local jobs. However there was almost no mention of offshore wind Power in Dorset Council's recent Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy document.

Does the council recognise the importance of an offshore wind scheme to meeting Dorset's targets for net emissions and that public opinion has changed a lot since the previous Navitus Bay scheme was rejected ? Would the council be prepared to support a new proposal for an offshore wind farm sited 9-18 miles off the coast of Dorset ?

6. Question from Helen Sumler

The CEE Strategy Making it Happen Section, under Engagement and Communications, states "Through our initial call for ideas, Dorset residents told us they wanted Dorset Council to help with understanding climate change and the steps that can be taken to tackle it", and in addition, at the recent CEE Strategy Consultation People's Assemblies, one of the consistent themes from the public was a request for information about action to take to address climate change. With this in mind, will Dorset Council fund the Sustainable Dorset Green Living Project, (<https://www.sustainabledorset.org/discover-greener-living/>) for 2021, to continue to give households the tools and information, in the form of the project work books, to help them minimise their carbon footprint?

For those households who prefer an online interactive tool, will Dorset Council investigate if Giki Zero (GIKI = Get Informed, Know your Impact, <https://zero.giki.earth>), as used by Norfolk Association of Local Councils as part of their Well-Being initiative, might provide guidance on steps to tackle climate change and if so whether, in order to explore the Dorset County footprint beyond the data provided by Central Government, the Council would consider funding the Giki Zero Pro version for all interested households on a trial basis?

7. Question Professor Michael Dower and the Dorset Climate Action Network (DCAN)

The draft Local Plan proposes to provide land for more than 39,000 new houses between now and 2038. This number is based on use of the Government's 'Standard Method' for assessing housing, and includes about 9,000 houses to meet unmet need which may be requested by neighbouring authorities. Councillor David Walsh has stated that the Standard Method is "set in stone by the government" and cannot be altered; and that any challenge to that method would fail because the draft Local Plan shows that sites can be found for that large number of houses.

What Councillor Walsh did not mention is :

1. The only way that sites for more than about 20,000 houses can be found is by making large encroachment on the AONB, breaching the Green Belt and using large areas of greenfield land, all of which are against government policy.
2. The Sustainability Assessment in the Local Plan shows that almost all new sites proposed for housing or workspace would, if developed, cause grave damage to

landscape and to biodiversity and would gravely impede the Council's own Climate Strategy to cut greenhouse gas emissions.

3. The Government's National Planning Policy Framework states very plainly (paragraph 60) that the standard method is not 'set in stone'; and that a planning authority can use a different method if "exceptional circumstances" apply.
4. The Local Plan provides ample evidence, in Section 1, to justify a claim of 'exceptional circumstances' based on the uniquely rich heritage of the county in landscape, natural habitats, heritage coast and historic towns; the exceptional overlapping density of global, European, national and local designations which protect that heritage; the Green Belt on the west side of BCP conurbation; and traffic congestion & pressures on infrastructure in Central & South East Dorset.
5. Government guidance also clearly states that calculations of housing need should not be used to justify building houses on greenfield sites in the AONB or the Green Belt (National Planning Policy Framework paras 136-137).
6. There is no obligation on Dorset Council to meet unmet need for housing from a neighbouring authority. The 'duty to co-operate' on this was withdrawn in 2018. Moreover, no neighbouring authority has submitted such a request.
7. The Council's main duty is to ensure that local needs for housing, including truly affordable homes, can be met. This points towards a total of about 20,000 new homes over the 17 year period, which can be accommodated without the damage that we describe.

In view of these points, will the Council think again, cut its new homes target from 39,000 to 20,000, and save the county from the impact of a serious and un-necessary over-estimate of housing need?

8. Question from Dr Sandra Reeve

Capital Programme 2021/2022 report

Paragraph 10.2, in the background to recommendations, makes clear that the Capital Strategy & Asset Management Group does not require bids to meet any specific environmental standards.

Within the current evaluation framework 'Clear Environmental Benefit' is just one of seven criteria that can be selected for any particular bid. A bid only needs to satisfy one criterion, which means that proposals can be environmentally unsound.

In the light of the Climate and Ecological Emergency (CEE) declared by Dorset Council, does Cabinet agree that *all* bids for funding should be required to meet this 'Clear Environmental Benefit' criterion?