

## **Councillor Questions for Cabinet 6 April 2021**

### **Question from Councillor Paul Kimber**

I would like to request how many social houses are to be built in Dorset during the next 12 months and what areas will they will be built.

### **Response from the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Safety**

We are currently predicting 300 new affordable homes to be built in the Dorset Council area in 2021/22. This number could increase during the year, with up to an additional 200 homes under way during this period. Due to current challenges facing the building industry we are remaining cautious in predicting how many of those additional 200 homes will be built during the next twelve months, but we expect to have 500 new affordable homes within this current pipeline. Dorset Council will continue to work with developers, registered provider housing associations and communities to increase the amount of affordable homes built for local people. Several affordable housing schemes have recently been approved by Planning Committee, but some of these will not complete until after next year.

The new affordable homes will complete across the area with several of the larger towns having homes delivered on open market sites. These areas include Chickerell, Littlemoor, Swanage, Verwood, Wimborne, Shaftesbury, Dorchester and Weymouth.

Some affordable housing developments worth noting are –

Bridport Cohousing – 46 affordable homes under construction

Flaxfield Rise, Beaminster – Magna are delivering an all affordable site of 30 homes  
Clipper Tea site, Beaminster – Aster will continue development of this all affordable site

Stone Lane, Holwell – Stonewater are completing a 14 home rural exception site

Spyway Orchard, Langton Matravers – Aster are developing 28 affordable homes

Thornhill Road, Stalbridge – A 60 home all affordable scheme being developed by Sovereign

### **Question from Cllr Sherry Jespersen**

The work to stabilise the slopes at Dinah's Hollow, proposed in the Capital Programme 2021/22, will necessitate the closure of the C13 for a period of some months. Traffic will be diverted on to the A350. Past experience has shown that this will have a very severe impact on the residents living along the A350 and in nearby villages; to road users and to the structure of the road itself.

Can I ask for assurance that every measure will be taken to mitigate the impact of this road closure and that a clear communications strategy will be put in place to keep everyone informed; and that these measures have been allowed for within the budget?

Can I also ask for assurance that the existing advisory one-way system for HGVs (A350 northbound/C13 southbound) will be reinstated as soon as possible once the work in Dinah's Hollow is completed.

### **Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment**

During the C13 closure, the diversion route will be signed via A350 and additional advisory signs regarding the unsuitability of other routes will be provided.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to prevent traffic using other routes due to the need for access. The condition and use of local routes will be monitored throughout the project.

Communication to all Local Members, affected Local Parish Councils and members of the public about the project and during the works, will be in place. This will be relayed in a timely manner to allow full consultation and processes to take place. Officers will report to Local Members, Local Parish Councils and residents on the progress being made at every stage.

The budget for the Improvement works includes Democratic and communication process for the entirety of the project.

Dorset Highways can reassure Cllrs that the current advisory one-way system for HGVs (A350 and C13) will remain after the works are complete.

### **Question from Councillor Jane Somper**

While I support that Dorset Council must take all measures to protect road users who drive through Dinah's Hollow, my questions to the Portfolio Holder and officers are:

Although some of the trees will be retained and planting holes created for replacements there will still be a reduction in vegetation. Have you identified other areas where trees could be planted to mitigate the harm to the environment by the loss of this vegetation?

Can you confirm when the works are likely to begin and how long this is estimated to take.

The report implies the bulk of work will be carried out 22/23 but is not clear? Have all the background reports been made publicly available and if not could I ask that they should be?

### **Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment**

No other areas have been identified for additional planting Nevertheless, as part of the underpinning, more light will find the floor of the woodland and this will stimulate growth from the dormant seed bank, creating a more diverse habitat. The reduction in vegetation will be temporary.

All the planning documents related to the Tree Preservation Order (TPO) application (including Environmental Impact Assessment) are also available to the public and can be found on the North Dorset planning portal Planning application:

2/2015/1677/TPTREE - dorsetforyou.com (dorsetcouncil.gov.uk) As stated in the 6

October report to cabinet, the TPO application is from several years ago and its validity has lapsed due to the works having been put on hold. Therefore, it will need to be updated prior to any works commencing.

The works are likely to take around seven months to complete. It is not possible to give a date when the works will start at this stage. Land will need to be acquired and this may require compulsory purchase. The start date is governed by environment considerations. The removal of vegetation is best undertaken in January/ February before the bird nesting season and ground works are best undertaken in Spring / Summer as the ground dries out.

The background papers are in the Dinah's Hollow Project Report published on Dorset Council Website and available for access by the public. The report can be read at Point 25 on the agenda in the Cabinet papers 06 October 2020. [Agenda for Dorset Council - Cabinet on Tuesday, 6th October, 2020, 10.00 am - Dorset Council](#)

The report lists the steps that have to be done and reviewed before we get to construction as follows:

- Ecological studies (protected species including badgers)
- Landscape Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA)
- Tree surveys (trees protected by woodland tree preservation order)
- Tree Preservation Order (previous consent to fell protected trees granted on 02 February 2016 has expired)
- Geotechnical design (review previous work against current best practice for soil nailing and current site conditions)
- Land purchase of West Bank (by agreement or compulsory purchase)
- Planning requirements (planning consent not required by previous planning authority)

### **Question from Councillor Gill Taylor**

I appreciate that this paper was before P&RS recently but I have a number of questions which were not fully answered there and I would like to explore further regarding office space required by our staff and where these offices are located. This is a fundamental requirement before we decide the future of our office accommodation in any location, not just Dorchester. Without this information it is not possible to make sound decisions.

I also appreciate that some office based staff already have desk space across the county and many do not require desk space however there is a need for more staff to be based closer to the communities they live in and work for. I am arguing for Weymouth as a Weymouth Councillor on the basis that 20% of the population of rural Dorset live in Weymouth and hence I would expect at least 20% of DC office space to be located here; others may wish to present the cases for their areas. I would request that a proportion of officers are based in Weymouth for the following reasons:

- To have office space, where required, closer to where our staff live is better for the work life balance of our staff.

- To demonstrate our commitment to reducing staff mileage in addition to that saved by working from home and thus address our commitment to reducing CO2 emissions.
- To support the economy of our conurbations. If DC locate offices to Weymouth it demonstrates a commitment by this council to employment in this area and serves to encourage other businesses to set up / relocate. This also takes into account that not too many years ago the council was a major, highly valued employer in the town.

I was told that there are plans being worked on to evaluate the office locations of all our staff. Without this information this paper is short sighted and does not consider the whole picture.

Please can you tell me when a complete plan for our office location will be available for scrutiny which must include the relocation of office space to Weymouth?

Can you also confirm that an evaluation of the office space required in Dorchester has been undertaken with a view to future office space relocation out of Dorchester?

### **Response from the Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth, Assets & Property**

The Cabinet paper focuses on the Dorchester Office estate where the Council has its highest number of offices and an immediate priority to rationalise the office accommodation within the town where the Council has identified that it not only has surplus office space but space which is high cost.

The Office strategy is geared to rationalising and consolidating the estate, making the best of what we have, operating more efficiently and effectively whilst not looking, particularly in the current climate, to make further investment in office type accommodation.

The Council's future office estate is influenced by:-

- Children's, Adult's and Housing 'blueprints' for future office accommodation to support staff to serve their local communities.
- The Asset Management Plan
- Dorset Workplace

And informed by:-

- Hive surveys
- Employee Forum Workshops
- Meetings with Senior Managers.

The implementation of the Dorset Workplace and increased agile/flexible working with further opportunities for home working will reduce the office demand which has been reflected in the proposal to rationalise and consolidate the Dorchester Office base and the creation of a public service hub at County Hall for not only Council staff but for other public and third sector employees.

We are projecting that, in particular, we will require a reduced desk requirement for Council staff of somewhere between 800-1000 desks within Dorchester in the future and c180 desk spaces within Weymouth (which are already in place and we believe will meet future need).

Over the next 12 months the Council will look to further rationalise its office estate further and locate its main offices in key locations, where in the main it has an existing presence and is best placed to meet Service requirements.

As such whilst a number of central and local functions will continue to be based and operate from County Hall the numbers travelling to and being located within the office will reduce (and that together with staff being offered the opportunity to work from home and more locally will result in reduced mileage, travel time together with associated environmental benefits) without a requirement to create more office space elsewhere and physically relocate staff.

The Council will continue to review the utilisation of County Hall, seek to share space with other public and third sector partners and to consider its options for the future.

A Member Seminar is being held on the 26<sup>th</sup> April to look at the work being progressed around the Dorset Workplace and Culture which will enable Councillors to get a better understanding of how we are looking to support employees in working more flexibly and how this work aligns with our Asset Strategy.

**Question from Councillor Brian Heatley**

**Withdrawn by Cllr Heatley at the meeting**