

**Full Council
15 July 2021**

Questions and Statements submitted for the Public Participation Period

Question 1 – submitted by Toby Branston

Dorset Council has signed up to addressing the Climate and Ecological Emergency. Therefore can they answer why they are prepared to put over 800 houses on organically farmed fields in Wool with high levels of biodiversity including at least 10 priority species of birds such as cornbunting and yellowhammer plus brown hares. For reference; 'priority species' are those that were identified as being the most threatened and requiring conservation action under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP). The identified fields are important for several priority species of bat (all species are protected) which feed nightly on the abundant insect population of over 300 recorded species. These fields are also the most diverse botanically in the area due to being managed organically and sympathetically for wildlife.

Question 2 & 3 – submitted by Russell Todd

The Broad Oak Residents Association (BORA) has recently been involved with a planning application and, as a result of engaging in the planning process we believe that it is unfair and lacks rigour:

It is not particularly clear how the process works and now having taken part, it would appear that the process is obliging the objector to second guess what the applicant might say in response to your objection. This has the result of making your objection overly long and potentially unclear.

Question 2

The planning process does not automatically notify neighbours that an application is starting or ongoing and if the applicant fails to put up a notice to find out what is going on you have to constantly refer to the Dorset Council (DC) website. Not everybody uses the internet and it can be difficult to find planning applications that are relevant for your immediate area.

I would have thought that DC has a duty to inform those with neighbouring properties or has a process of notification that allows for those who do not have access to the internet or do not use it?

Question 3

When an applicant makes a statement why does DC not require evidence to support that statement? Most people keep records of business or receipts for other purposes and it would not be hard to add this to an application.

There does not seem to be an overarching view of individual planning applications and how that affects what is going on beyond an individual application. A series of individual applications in a small area can have significant impacts on roads and

services, but this is not accounted for in the current process.

BORA request that the committee review the planning application process to create a fairer system that has some rigour to it, so that all parties involved in an application can have some confidence that a fair decision has been arrived at and that the process is not leaning one way.

Question 4 – submitted by Helen Sumbler

With regard to the Community Governance Review of Parishes in the Dorset Council area:

What is the background behind this / the urgency to undertake the governance review at this particular time, when we are still in the midst of the Covid pandemic, the impact of Brexit is still unknown and there are so many other pressing matters that require council officer resources; and also bearing in mind that any recommendations would not take effect until 2024, 2 years after the Order is made?

Question 5 – submitted by Helen Sumbler

With regard to the Community Governance Review of Parishes in the Dorset Council area:

As part of the review process, will Dorset Council be proposing any changes, or will the only change proposals to be developed into recommendations be those as a result of submissions / representations received from the parties consulted?

Statement – submitted by John Grantham

Item 14 tonight gives the opportunity for ANOTHER Council to move to REAL democracy..... FROM a position where the Leader of any biggest party, (voted in on just 39.3% of votes), is able to hand-pick from just one party, the 10 councillors, assisted by Lead Members, to comprise the Cabinet, which effectively then determines policy.

When “Public First Group” planned to achieve a Committee system for West Dorset District Council in 2015, an essential step was Research. In Sherborne over 2 days we interviewed 306 people at our stand, discussing the merits of Cabinet v Committee. Before we started an official-looking gentleman said “Everyone wants the Cabinet system!”

Not so! The research found less than 50% even knew there WAS a ‘WDDC’ and a ‘DCC’. Under 10% knew there was a Cabinet system operating. And of the 306 respondents ...301 opted for the Committee system,.... most scarcely believing the archaic nature of the Cabinet system.

That was when we KNEW we’d win a referendum. We circulated 2000 notes to Dorchester homes mid-week, describing the two systems, saying we had a “signing-stand” in South St on Saturday. NO LESS THAN 800 people came out and signed!! They knew the Cabinet system had protected new council offices being built, despite

Dorchester's Town Referendum where 93% had voted against. The build simultaneously obliterated a 226-bay central public-car-park in Dorchester. Among councils converting, using the 2011 Localism Act, were **Fylde**, then **Canterbury**, (where the leading party converted VOLUNTARILY, seeing the hordes of public, signing). By converting VOLUNTARILY they SAVED THE COUNCIL AND TAX-PAYER from referendum costs. **West Dorset** then voted by a landslide for the Committee system. Recently **Cheshire East**, whose Cabinet was judged to have acted highly partially, converted; and at **Sheffield City Council**, Labour's Cabinet system was able to protect its policy of chopping down thousands of trees on Council property, only stopped by public clamour and the Law at 5,400 fellings; leading to a landslide referendum vote FOR the Committee system.

PREDICTION: Hopefully the Council will vote tonight for the Committee system: with the public now meeting again, and with social media, the public WILL get to know the facts. If it's voted down tonight, but all the unfairly squeezed parties make the Committee system their no. 1 election promise at the next Council elections, they will undoubtedly take control of the Council and introduce the Committee system. There couldn't be a better time to implement the 'Committee' system, especially with a dozen WDDC councillors having worked it already, and staff-members who implemented its introduction. Congratulations if you can introduce this **non-party-political** PROCESS in May 2022 to turbo-charge your productivity!

Question 6 – submitted by John Grantham

Tonight there will of course be a vote on the possible introduction of the 'Committee' system into Dorset Council. There is of course experience of a public vote on this issue from the old West Dorset District Council, where a landslide vote by the electorate in favour of the Committee system occurred in 2016.

I hope tonight all are able to defuse the '**party-political**' angle to this issue. This is a vote purely on 'process', not 'politics', and it allows the council the opportunity to show its credentials in terms of its belief in **fairly and proportionately reflecting** the electorate's votes as they've cast them.

I believe Dorset Council could reasonably easily move into the Committee process by May 2022, and that its standing would be strongly and authoritatively enhanced.

I have voted many ways in my life but have concluded that a fair and just **system** is the vital determinant of the Democracy this country holds in trust.

As you can probably imagine, in the landslide referendum win in 2016 in West Dorset, there were many, many voters from the ruling party who voted for the Committee system, (I estimate several thousands), seeing it as 'just' and the 'right thing to do'. In fact the vote was not about politics, but about process.

In 2015 a councillor from the minority Conservative party in Reading, Berks, approached our stand saying they really hoped we'd get the Committee system. They said that as a result of that Council having 'gone Committee' they now went to the Council meetings with hope and relish, sitting as a minority party councillor WITH the other parties in Committee, instead of apart, and not looking to see where there were weaknesses in their arguments. Instead they were at last able to use their collective brain-power to contribute, to look at and discuss together how they could crack critical issues on Children's Education, Social Services or the Housing Build programme.

My Question therefore is: At this late stage I would be interested to learn – if it is possible to say – if Councillors have your support in reassessing all they learn from

this evening and coming to their individual conclusions, and that you will promote the issue as a completely non-party-political **'free vote'** on whether to introduce the Committee system in May 2022?

Question 7 – submitted by Dr Sandra Reeve

CEE Strategy documents - Appendix B

In Appendix B, it is noticeable that, apart from the targets, the only other section where the EAP is mentioned is in the Leadership and Governance section. In item 1, subject area "Ensure strong partnership set-up/over-sight, collaboration and 'bottom-up approach through community involvement (TPCs, young people, assemblies)" the comment in the Recommendation column is "Assemblies – EAP ruled out."

The assemblies that community groups ran to raise public awareness and increase the engagement with the recent Dorset Council CEE Strategy and Dorset Council Local Plan consultations were met with positive responses from the public. Surely the use of similar facilitated public assemblies (also known as peoples' assemblies, community assemblies and community conversations), that provide an opportunity for all participants to speak in a non-threatening, small group situation, could provide an additional means of engaging with the public about the CEE Strategy and Action Plans.

Could the Council please explain why the use of this form of public engagement has been ruled out?