

Cabinet of 27 July 2021

Public Questions

1. Question from David Nash

Those of us who live in the vicinity of the current building in Wimborne Rd, or have to travel along that route at school start and finish times know only too well the impact caused by some 12-15 minibuses, as well as parents providing their own vehicles, used to transport these vulnerable children to and fro.

Could you please ask the committee to take this into account when considering the site earmarked for expansion, the old Wimborne 1st that was, as it is located in a very narrow lane (School Lane) leading directly into traffic flowing from the north, Blandford, Cranborne etc., via Stone Lane through and around Wimborne town centre. Parking in West Borough is limited and congested at the best of times. Indeed, this often presented some difficulty / snarl ups at the peak times when the site was still a School. The number of minibuses School Lane could accommodate would be no more than 5, and turning would present a nightmare to both students, parents and members of the public in the Lane at the time. An accident waiting to happen!

Access / Egress will have to be drastically improved before the site can be used for this important and very necessary purpose.

Does the proposal make provision for addressing the major Health & Safety issues for students, staff, and members of the public, which using the old 1st School will doubtless present, particularly as most students are potentially vulnerable and have to be driven to site by minibus or parental transport?

Response of the Portfolio Holder for Education, Childrens, Skills and Early Help

The narrow access road to the former Wimborne First School site has been recognised as this proposal has been developed. Noting this issue and the potential concerns it would raise officers have worked with the School and Highways colleagues to look at an alternative solution utilising a local public car park, which is close to the site. This could allow Minibuses to drop off and collect students from the car park with students walking to and from Beaucroft College via two safe walking routes. Beaucroft staff have tested the walking routes with a group of students from the school and are content that the routes properly safeguard learners. It is felt that this will work very well in encouraging more independence for the post 16 students and will assist them with development of important life skills. A similar arrangement worked well in the past when Wimborne First School operated from the site and parents had permits to use the car park to drop off and pick up pupils at the beginning and end of the school day. These proposals will be discussed further and

formalised with Parking Services and Wimborne Town Council should this project proceed.

There will be parking for staff in the existing school car park off School Lane. This is gated and will be managed by Beaucroft School for staff parking only. A small area on the existing school site may be available for overspill parking for visiting professional specialists or they will park off site in nearby public car parks. This overspill parking will be accessed via an existing vehicle gate at the west end of School Lane.

This existing vehicle access point will also be available for an occasional visiting minibus to drop off at the school Reception entrance and to turn around, off School Lane.

2. Question from Gareth Elkins

There have been a number of traffic surveys along Stapehill Road, Ferndown since the residents submitted a petition in July 2018 to request the road be made safer. After each one we have been told several times the road "does not meet the criteria" to make it safer.

What are these criteria and in what way does the road not meet these criteria?"

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment

Thank you for submitting your question. A similar question was put to Full Council at its meeting on 15 April 2021 and I refer you that response in answer to your question.

3. Question(s) from David Redgewell

Question 1

What progress is being made on delivery on the Bus Railway interchange facilities at Weymouth Railway station and Dorchester south Railway stations?

And making sure this station scheme are fully accessible for bus rail Taxis interchange for passengers using wheelchairs access.

Is their Progress on Disabled lifts at Wareham station for disabled access a Rail head for swanage by bus and the swanage railway the station requires a fully accessible toilet.

With Network rail wessex routes First group Great western railway and south western railway and First group Wessex. Buses and Go south coast and purbeck and wessex Community railway partnerships.

Response of the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment

Weymouth Station: The Weymouth Station Gateway project has completed the detailed design stage and is programmed to start construction this October 2021.

The scheme reconfigures the station forecourt, removing the existing roundabout and providing a new public space with much greater accessibility. A new transport corridor past the front of the station building will be restricted to buses and taxis only. Bus route numbers A53 and X52 will use new bus stops in front of the station plus the 501 seasonal service to Portland Bill and the 502 seasonal service to Littlesea Holiday Park. In addition there will be a new bus stop on King Street, opposite the station, that will be used by the Number 1 service to Portland. The station car park will have additional disabled parking and a new exit on to King Street.

Dorchester South Station: Works to improve bus/rail interchange at Dorchester South were completed in 2015. There are a number of connecting buses which serve the station for onward travel to Bridport, Sherborne and Blandford. We will continue to seek Access for All or similar funding to provide an accessible crossing between platforms.

Wareham Station: We are meeting with Network Rail in the coming weeks to discuss plans.

Questions 2

With Dorset council and Bournemouth Poole and Christchurch Council.

What progress is being made on Audit on Public transport interchange as part of Bus back better the government National bus strategy and bus service improvements plan?

As part of plan is the council looking to reinstate bus service that have been withdrawn on Key bus corridor across the county.

For instance, Yeovil bus station to Dorchester south station. Via the A37

And provide a county wide bus and rail rover card valid on all bus service and rail in the county of Dorset Bournemouth Poole and Christchurch. Similar to Wiltshire council area .Or Bristol Bath and west super mare.

To look at the provision of a Saturday service Between Salisbury city centre Blandford forum Dorchester and Weymouth.

To look at Evenings and Sundays service between Dorchester south railway station ,weymouth x53 Bridport bus station,lyme Regis and Axminster station for trains to London Waterloo yeovil junction and Exeter central and st David station.

And Bus connection for Chard and Taunton. Town centre.

This is especially important to maintain winter bus service in west Dorset

With passenger's information and real time information at Bus stops and shelters. and disabled access in the form of castle kerbs.

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment

Our response to the National Bus Strategy is a really important piece of work. By working in close collaboration with operators and local groups we will develop and

deliver an ambitious Bus Service Improvement Plan for Dorset that puts the passenger first, raises further the perception of bus travel, generates mode shift away from private cars, and sees decarbonisation of the local transport fleet.

We will work in close collaboration with neighbouring authorities, especially BCP, to ensure that our plans align so that cross-border services are consistent. At this time, it would not be appropriate to comment on the specific routes and services that you mention in your question. In order to provide better access to rural communities we may have to think of alternatives to fixed bus routes. Simply reinstating bus services that were in place 10 years ago isn't a sustainable solution going forward.

The BSIP will take action on five key focus areas and the issues you raise in your questions will be considered under these 5 topics:

- Networks and Services
- Fares
- Ticketing
- Passenger facilities and information
- Bus priority measures

Following extensive data gathering and stakeholder engagement, the Council will set out its vision and objectives in the BSIP which will enable us to bid to the Department for Transport for funding.

4. Question(s) from David Berry

Question 1

With the proposed nominal 6 month delay in adopting the Dorset Local Plan from Quarter 2 2023 (published in September 2020) to Quarter 4 2023 (proposed in July 2021) there is a serious risk that the Dorset Council will miss the Government December 2023 deadline for it being adopted. What are the results of the risk analysis and mitigation measures to produce the Local Plan to meet this deadline, including but not limited to, the effects of your proposed reduction of the submission and examination duration from 15 months to 12 months, the new National Planning Policy Framework issued on the 20th July 21 and the proposed Government Planning reforms ?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Planning

The delay in the local plan programme is due mainly to the large number of responses received to the first consultation, but it is essential that all of these are properly considered before moving forward to the next stage. We had originally aimed to adopt the plan early in 2023, so this delay should not risk the December 2023 deadline. We do not yet know when the national planning reforms will come into effect but it is likely that there will be transitional arrangements allowing plans that are in progress to continue.

Question 2

Can you please provide to the public a more detailed breakdown of the indicative dates for each stage of the local plan development including how the public will be engaged for comments on the pre submission draft version of the Local Plan now scheduled for publication in May 2022.

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Planning

The stages of local plan preparation are set out in the Local Development Scheme. The publication draft plan will be brought to Cabinet and full Council for approval before it is published in May 2022, and a more precise date will be given at that time. At the publication stage, there will be an eight-week period during which people will be invited to comment on the plan and whether they consider it to be sound. All the responses received will be submitted to the inspector who will examine the plan.

5. Question from Mike Allen

A discussion took place at the recent full Council Meeting about housing numbers used for the draft Dorset Local Plan. There was concern among councillors that perhaps too many houses were being planned. I would like to take a quick “More or Less” look at the data, leading to a simple but profound question.

The draft Local Plan has been framed using the Government’s Standard Method to determine housing need, based upon the Ministry’s own 2014-based annual household projections for Dorset. These projections show, each year, how many households are expected. The household figures, for key years in the draft Local Plan, are:

2020	169,070
2021	170,289
2030	182,073
2038	191,087

The Standard Method uses the average growth over the ten years 2020-2030, which is $(182,073 - 169,070)/10 = 1,300.3$ households per year.

This is uplifted by a factor, based on the annual affordability ratio in Dorset, which, for 2019, comes to 37.875%, and drives the annual growth up from 1,300.3 to **1,793 households per year**. This is the annual figure used in the draft Local Plan over 17 years, and results in a total requirement of $17 \times 1,793 = \mathbf{30,481}$ households.

Seemingly, the idea behind the uplift is that it will help to stabilise high prices (though no-one in Government has ever suggested it will cause prices to fall).

Notice though, that the Ministry’s household projections for 2021 to 2038 actually project the formation in Dorset of only $191,087 - 170,289 = \mathbf{20,798}$ households over the same Local Plan period, which is 9,683 less.

Therefore my simple question is this:

Given that these projections take account already of net in-migration from other areas and countries (they are calculated for every authority, not just Dorset), of population growth (the householders have been born already) and of declining household size, whom does Dorset Council expect to live in the extra 9,683 homes that are proposed over and above the homes necessary for the Ministry's projected household growth?

This question is not addressed in the draft Local Plan, but we can be sure that it will be in the minds of developers, who will welcome the offer of extra land allocations throughout Dorset, but build homes only to meet actual demand, not to stabilise prices.

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Planning

The new homes delivered will help to meet the needs of those who wish to live in Dorset for a range of reasons including for work or for family reasons. It also enables for the formation of households from those who already live in Dorset where a suitable property is not available (such as young adults who live with their parents) and for those who need or wish to move to Dorset and where a suitable property is not available.

6. Question from Sandra Reeve

Questions will be read out by an officer of the council and a response given by the appropriate Portfolio Holder or officer *at the meeting*. All questions, statements and responses will be published in full within the minutes of the meeting.' (Dorset Council's stated procedure - my italics)

These are the guidelines for questions submitted to a virtual meeting. On June 15, at the Pension Fund Committee, a statement was read out by Cllr Andy Canning (supported by Cllr P Wharf) stating that a decision had been taken not to read out the questions submitted by engaged members of the public, on the basis that the Pension Fund Committee had already explained their approach to Pension Fund Divestment from fossil fuels in September 2020.

This was already puzzling to me as one of my questions was based on statements made on June 1, 2021 by Cop 26 President Alok Sharma at the first NetZero Pensions Summit, who said: 'Putting your money in fossil fuels creates the very real risk of stranded assets.' His speech was not available for consideration in September 2020.

Another public question pointed out: 'Brunel has made a 'net-zero by 2050' commitment. There is a clear contradiction here between Brunel's date and Dorset Council's own target of 2040. Surely this is a 'direct action' and Dorset Council should instruct Brunel to invest in order to meet their 2040 date?' This is a new and valid question

And a third question from a Scheme member asked for poll to establish what demand there was for an ethical investment option, which seems important when current policy runs until 2022.

We were told on June 15th that members of the public who had asked a question would receive a written response, which would also be put in the public minutes. After two emails to Democratic Services and to the Pension Fund Committee, I was told by email on July 8th that I would 'shortly' receive an answer to my own questions. I have still not received a response. As a result, I do not feel that this committee is interested in any form of engaged public dialogue.

Questions:

1. Can you explain from a procedural point of view why Democratic Services supported the decision/request by the Pension Fund Committee to ban questions at the virtual Committee meeting on June 15 (without informing the public before the meeting) given what the public is led to believe will happen on your website (see above) ?

Response from the Portfolio Holder from Corporate Development and Change

Questions were *not* banned from Pension Fund Committee meeting which took place on the 15th June. Ten questions were received in advance of the meeting. Each of those questions related to the pension funds exposure to investment in fossil fuels

Given the number of questions, the Chairman gave a statement addressing the topic in general and advised that the written responses to each of the questions will be published alongside the minutes of the meeting. This approach to responding to questions is in accordance with Paragraph 9.10 of the council's rules of procedure, which states that ***A reply to any question shall take such form as the Member replying considers appropriate, including "where an oral reply cannot be conveniently given, a written response to the person submitting the question be provided"***.

2. Can you tell me how much time Dorset Council permits to elapse between a question that has not been answered at a meeting and the promised responses from the Pension Fund Committee?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Development and Change

The time taken to respond to a question depends upon the circumstance. In this particular case the Chairman of the Pension Fund committee stated that response to the questions will be published alongside the minutes of the meeting. These will be published ahead of the next meeting which is scheduled for 8th September 2021.

7. Question from Bob Driscoll

Subject: The Strategic Inter Urban Public Transport Corridor between Bridport and Yeovil

This route was operated by Damory as service number 40, between 2011 and 2017. It operated 6 days a week and provided a useful lifeline for commuters to Yeovil and served Yeovil College. The route received financial support from Dorset County Council (DCC) but, with careful planning of the timetable, the numbers using the service increased to the point where Damory felt they were prepared to operate the service without subsidy. This was announced at our public meeting in January 2017. When the secondary schools transport contract was tendered by DCC, Damory lost a major part of the work and could no longer justify having a presence in Bridport. It therefore gave notice to withdraw from the route at the end of summer term in July 2017. It is now 4 years since Damory withdrew and, in spite of initial assurances that there would be a seamless transfer to a new operator, it is now a shadow of its former self. The first casualty was the Saturday service, which ceased in October 2017. Fortunately, Beaminster Town Council stepped into the breach and started its own community bus, manned by volunteers, which started in June 2018 and runs every Saturday. The second casualty was withdrawal of the 07.30 service from Bridport to Yeovil and corresponding 17.15 return, which – at a stroke – destroyed the commuter market and forced Yeovil College to provide its own transport for students who live along the Bridport and Beaminster corridor. This took place in October 2018 with only one month's notice. Yeovil College were gifted a minibus by DCC and the advice to commuters was to try and car share.

WATAG believes that the passengers who use this route have been treated disgracefully, with no attempt to engage with stakeholders to try and remedy the situation. 2 years ago, at the Cabinet meeting held 18 July 2019, a Beaminster resident raised the issue of bus cuts on the Bridport/ Beaminster and Yeovil corridor, and how it had affected her children travelling to and from school. The reply she received at the time was (and I quote):- *“At the Place Scrutiny Committee meeting on 9 July 2019 which was attended by a representative from The Western Area Transport Action Group (WATAG), the route between Bridport, Beaminster, Crewkerne and Yeovil (service 6) was discussed. The committee has agreed to set up a working group to look at reductions in subsidy for public transport (and the viability of routes) across the county in the context of the climate change emergency. This will include service 6. Until the group has been set up and the review completed, further changes to this service are unlikely to be made.”* In the 2 years since that Cabinet meeting, we have heard nothing from this working group, and the complaints still come in. The reputation of this service has become so bad that it actually featured in our MP Chris Loder's maiden speech in the House of Commons! We have even used this route as our case study in the “County All Party Parliamentary Group: The decline of rural buses”, submitted in May 2020. A meeting was held at Beaminster Public Hall on 03 February 2020, chaired by Dorset Councillor Rebecca Knox, about the state of the bus service. Over 100 people attended. I was asked – at the meeting – by Councillor Simon Christopher to write to Councillors Spencer Flower and Ray Bryan to highlight the depth of feeling and the need for urgent action on this strategic route. I did get an acknowledgement from Councillor Flower.

In our latest exchange of correspondence with Dorset Travel, in which we have asked for a slight retiming to the last bus from Yeovil to Bridport to allow Yeovil College students to use it, we have been told that the National Bus Strategy means (and I quote): ***“If changes are to be made to specific routes, it will be as a part of this work so we will not be making changes for September 2021.”***

Question

We welcome the National Bus Strategy and are pleased to have been included as part of the Stakeholder Engagement sessions. However, we see no need to use the NBS as a delaying tactic. Will DC Cabinet please insist that Dorset Travel gives the highest priority to resolving the issues on this route, and creates a timetable that serves the needs of its users?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment

The government sets out a clear timetable for delivering the requirements of the National Bus Strategy. By the end of October 2021 the Council must publish its Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). This will be produced in collaboration with local bus operators and by working closely with our neighbouring authorities. The plan sets out how the Council aims to rejuvenate local bus services by making them more attractive for passengers, more affordable, easier to understand and use, faster and more reliable and greener. Following input from stakeholders, we will be looking at the existing network, identify any gaps in provision and will consider innovative ways to meet the needs of communities including in the rural areas. Dorset's network will be considered as a whole with no preference given to a particular route or timetable, until the overall vision and objectives are established.