

**Full Council
14 October 2021
Questions from Councillors**

Question 1 submitted by Cllr Kate Wheller

In the general scheme of the matters you will be addressing this evening this question will seem trivial, but I have received a number of messages from residents to whom it is a concern.

At the outset I want to make it clear that I am a great supporter of the Ironman Competition, and indeed regret that we are unable to host the full event.

The problem is the schedule of events. It was always the case that promoters would submit their plans and a schedule was agreed so that there were no undue clashes, as far as possible. Of course, this can be difficult, so many events and a finite number of weekends.

- The Battle of Britain is remembered across the country on the first Sunday after the 15th of September. This year the service was unable to take place because the Iron Man was also taking place on that weekend and access for those wishing to attend was considered far too difficult. This was distressing for many people for whom this memorial is significant.
- I don't know who or what department deals with event scheduling these days, or if anyone has oversight of such scheduling? My question is could we try a little harder to ensure that events that might be low key but still important are not eased out of our calendars because higher earner events are taking place. Thank you

Response from Cllr Ray Bryan

The traffic team administer approximately 200 event closures and 900 road closures (relating to street works) that take place on the highway each year. The scheduling of events is always difficult due to the number of events that happen across Dorset.

The Battle of Britain service is not an event that we have received notification from an organiser in the past or for this year. We do contact event organisers at the beginning of the calendar year that applied for a road closure or traffic management for their event in the previous calendar year to enable us to gain a 'schedule' of events for the next year however there are limitations to this. As above this will be only those events that have a direct impact on the highway. If an event does not have highway impact, we are unlikely to be made aware of it. These for example could be events held on private property etc.

With specific reference to the Ironman, the event date is determined by a number of factors relating to the event and is agreed as a fixed date within the calendar as part of our host venue agreement for the next 3 years. If there are specific events, Ironman or not, that experience clashes (not limited to events, roadworks can also cause clash), we can work with the event organisers to see if there is a solution to mitigate the impact and discuss access arrangements and ultimately work so that events can co-exist, where possible.

Question 2 submitted by Cllr Maria Roe

One of the good news stories which came out of the Conservative Party conference was that the Prime Minister pledges no homes to be built on green fields. He also promised the same thing when he was the London Mayor to the people of London. These promises are like music to my ears and it is very re-assuring news.

Can people in my ward (where every single new house in the Local Plan is to be built on green belt), celebrate this wonderful news?

Response by Cllr D Walsh

Despite the recent statements, national policy has not changed and still expects local planning authorities to plan to meet the housing needs of their areas. Dorset is a rural area with limited brownfield land and if no greenfield development were to take place, we would be unable to meet our housing requirements and there would be significant adverse effects on the local economy and housing affordability.

Not all greenfield land is green belt. The council is considering the release of some green belt land for development, but this can only take place in exceptional circumstances and will be fully tested through the plan making process.

Should national planning policy change, this would be taken into account in the local plan.

Question 3 submitted by Cllr K Clayton

A recent report from the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee concludes:

“The scale of the challenge to retrofit existing homes to tackle the climate crisis is enormous. Energy efficiency is a precursor to the transition to low carbon heat, so action must be taken in the 2020s to set homes on a decarbonisation trajectory to meet our net zero targets.”¹ In Bridport, and other parts of Dorset, many of these existing homes have had requests to install energy efficiency measures, including the installation of double glazing, refused by our planning system because they are listed buildings. These listed buildings are nothing grand. Many are simple terraced houses that have been occupied by generations of working families, and the installation of double glazing would “lead to less than substantial harm” to their significance as a heritage asset. Could I have an assurance that the new Dorset Local Plan will take a different attitude to listed building consent and positively encourage the retrofitting of energy efficiency measures?

¹ ‘Energy Efficiency of Existing Homes’, House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee (22 March 2021)

Response by Cllr D Walsh

The local plan must be in accordance with national policy, which includes the protection of listed buildings as well as on energy efficiency. The planning White Paper included the suggestion that national policy on this matter might be changed to give increased priority to energy concerns, and if this happens it will be followed in the local plan. In the meantime, the plan will seek to maximise the opportunities for energy efficiency measures while continuing to protect the area's heritage.

Question 4 submitted by Cllr K Clayton

I have been contacted by more than one professional involved in submitting planning applications expressing their concern with the planning process within Dorset since we became a unitary authority. Of particular concern are the timescales involved in simply acknowledging applications, let alone in processing them. I understand that the increase in people working from home has led to an increase in applications and that the amalgamation of various planning systems into one has been a challenge, but I need to be able to reassure people who are getting increasingly frustrated by the delays, and I need to be able to reassure those small business owners whose business development plans are being held up by the delays. When can residents and business owners expect acknowledging and processing times to return to normal?

Response by Cllr D Walsh

Following recent recruitment to a number of posts in our technical support teams, we now no-longer have a validation backlog in our Southern and Western committee area. The teams are also working hard to clear the validation backlogs in the Eastern and Northern committee areas, with the aim of all validation backlogs being cleared by the end of this year. This will mean that planning applications will be validated promptly. It will take longer to clear the 'decision' backlogs and achieve our aim of determining most planning applications within the statutory timeframes (usually 8 or 13 weeks). We are aiming to make significant progress on clearing the decision backlogs by April 2022, but applicants and agents should start to see improvements sooner than this, given the positive progress on reducing validation timescales.