

**Annual Meeting of Council  
12 May 2022**

**Questions and Statements submitted for the Public Participation Period**

**Question 1 – submitted by Alistair Chisholm - read by Neil Matthews**

In an email, dated 28<sup>th</sup> April 2022, written to all those invited to the second HYAS master planning workshop for the North Dorchester Garden Community, Wessex Water stated the following:

1.(We) are still not satisfied that risks to Eagle Lodge, a major strategic public drinking water supply source, can be mitigated..... “

and

2. “major development in a source protection zone can result in significant water quality deterioration in the aquifer.....serious pollution may render the source unusable.....”

and

3. "Significant investment is likely to be required to serve the site,

including new service reservoirs."

In view of these damning comments, and the massive costs involved in providing suitable mitigation measures to ensure the continued supply of healthy drinking water to the town, why is this Council continuing to spend public money on the DOR 13 site which is clearly and fundamentally flawed?

**Response by Cllr David Walsh**

Any major proposed development will have substantial issues that need to be resolved before it can be approved. This is an important part of devising the Plan as we work with key stakeholders to identify challenges and look to address concerns.

The Council has yet to endorse any specific aspects of the Local Plan and would not do so until asked to support the final draft for submission to the Secretary of State.

However, all decisions need to be supported by appropriate evidence, and we will continue to work with Wessex Water in investigating the issues that they have raised.

**Question 2 – submitted by Rob Pearce on behalf of the Dorset Equality Group**

Dorset Equality Group's question is to ask what progress is being made in implementing the Real Living Wage as the baseline staff employment rate.

As a group we are aware of the debates initiated by Councillors Nick Ireland and David Gray surrounding the Council's current pay structure, especially at the top and bottom of the scale. It is more than just our contention, there is a growing body of evidence, that the

pernicious effects of inequality impact heavily on happiness, health, housing and many other areas of life and that they affect us **all**.

We applaud the tenacity, flexibility and service to the people of Dorset which Dorset Council has demonstrated throughout the pandemic. The contribution of staff undertaking essential, but in the past relatively unrecognised, roles has been widely appreciated by Dorset residents and we urge Dorset Council to become in the very near future a Real Living Wage employer and to be in a position to promote widely the benefits of a more equitable wage structure.

We recognise the huge burdens placed on local authorities to fulfil their statutory obligations with diminishing resources in real terms, but we know too that economic, health and social crises provide unmissable opportunities for imaginative policy formation and implementation. It is our view that now is the time for Dorset Councillors, council officers and staff, trades unions, staff associations and Dorset residents to design such a policy and to see it to implementation. Not only will baseline pay increase, but so too will morale, productivity, local purchasing power and the example set to the private sector.

Dorset, despite all that it offers in terms of quality of life, has some of the highest indicators of inequality in the UK with often exorbitant urban housing costs; isolation and expensive, but frequently poor, public transport links in rural areas; and insecure and seasonal employment in seaside towns.

Let's secure for Dorset not only a highly valued quality of life but also the consideration and respect which the lowest paid deserve, alleviating some of their anxieties about the cost of enjoying life in Dorset.

Thank you very much.

### **Response by Cllr Jill Haynes**

The majority of Dorset Council's pay rates are set through national pay bargaining.

The national local government employers are seeking to increase the lowest pay point, over a period, to achieve the Real Living Wage. As the Council is committed to national bargaining then it is right that we support the national employers in their endeavours.

The pace of Dorset Council's movement towards the Real Living Wage will therefore be determined through national negotiations

### **Question 3 & 4 – submitted by Dr Sandra Reeve on behalf of Dorset Climate Action Network (Question to be read by Giles Watts from Dorset Action Network)**

Dorset Council needs to be seen to operate fairly and to set high standards in public office. **Dorset Climate Action Network** is therefore very disappointed at the way the motion on UK energy self-sufficiency (Agenda 13) was handled at the Full Council meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> April.

It was clear that there were strong feelings in the chamber about this motion which included the proposal: 'Mindful of the current experience of global conflict and uncertainty, Dorset Council urges the Government to introduce an energy policy with the principal objective of securing permanent UK energy self-sufficiency from as early a date as possible, ***utilising whatever forms of energy generation sourced from within the UK are necessary to***

**this end'**. This proposal ignores both the recommendations of the IPPC report and Dorset Council's own Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy.

Following the disruption by protesters, the meeting was moved to another room, where a vote was taken **with no debate permitted, apart from the words of the proposer and the seconder which were delivered before the disruption**.

We note the actions by the two protesters calling themselves Grannies for the Future. However Dorset Council's response to the protest was disappointing. By hurrying through the vote of such a key motion without public discussion and behind closed doors, the Council has stifled an important debate in the face of climate change and clearly failed to respect the principles of democracy, thereby damaging the Council's democratic reputation.

We call on the Council to deem the vote on the motion Agenda 13 null and void and bring the motion back to a future meeting so that it can be openly debated in public before a second vote is taken. We gather that this is possible if 24 members provide notice of a revised motion.

Question 1: Will the Chair please give their reasons for moving to an immediate vote on Agenda 13 without debate, rather than adjourning the vote to another occasion, which they could have chosen to do?

Question 2: We hope Dorset Council agrees that our energy and climate security is important enough to require a proper public debate; if so will the Council bring the motion back to a future meeting as this appears to us to be the most equitable way forward?

### **Response by Cllr Val Pothecary**

In the introduction to their questions Dorset Climate Action Network merely **note** the actions by the two protesters who disrupted the last Full Council meeting and they then go on to criticise the Council for what they say was a failing to respect the principles of democracy.

Noting the actions of the protesters is not good enough. What the protesters did was a deliberate attempt to prevent a democratic vote from taking place. It resulted in disruption to our meeting, it resulted in the police having to be called out and it is now resulting in council tax payers having to meet the cost of additional security measures for our meetings, tonight and in the future.

The question describes the vote as having taken place behind closed doors. That is not true. The disruption by the protesters meant that we had to reconvene in a different room but I did not re-start the meeting until members of the public were present, as we are obliged to do.

In fact it was the very presence of the three members of the public that influenced my decision. They had been in the gallery with the two protesters and having just witnessed such an extraordinary event I was most concerned that no further incidents occurred – who knew what might still happen!? So for reasons of members and officers safety I took the decision to forgo the usual debate and move straight to a vote. Yes, I could have adjourned the meeting, but I did not wish the protesters to succeed in preventing a democratic vote from taking place.

I was supported in my decision by both the Chief Executive and the Monitoring Officer. Debate was curtailed because of the actions of the protesters but my decision was to ensure that a democratic vote took place on an item that was included on our agenda to be decided that evening.

Questions, answers, motions and updates relating to climate feature regularly on our agendas and I expect that will continue. The Leader's motion to our last meeting was agreed and it stands now as a decision of the Council and has been enacted.

### **Question 5 & 6 – submitted by Caz Dennett XR, Dorchester, Weymouth and Portland**

On the 4<sup>th</sup> April 2022 UN General Secretary Antonio Guterres said:

*“We are on a pathway to global warming of more than double the 1.5°C limit agreed in Paris. Some Government and business leaders are saying one thing, but doing another. Simply put, they are lying. And the results will be catastrophic. This is a climate emergency.*

*Climate scientists warn that we are already perilously close to tipping points that could lead to cascading and irreversible climate impacts. But, high-emitting Governments and corporations are not just turning a blind eye, they are adding fuel to the flames.*

*They are choking our planet, based on their vested interests and historic investments in fossil fuels, when cheaper, renewable solutions provide green jobs, energy security and greater price stability.*

*Climate activists are sometimes depicted as dangerous radicals. But, the truly dangerous radicals are the countries that are increasing the production of fossil fuels [which include the UK].*

*Investing in new fossil fuels infrastructure is moral and economic madness.*

*We must triple the speed of the shift to renewable energy.*

*Leaders must lead.*

*If you live in a big city, a rural area or a small island State; if you invest in the stock market; if you care about justice and our children's future; demand an end to all fossil fuel subsidies.”*

**Is Antonio Guterres, the United Nations and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change wrong to say we must prevent all new oil & gas extraction, including here in Dorset?**

Question 2

Three years ago Dorset Council declared we are in a climate emergency, yet last month passed a motion to support new oil & gas extraction including here in Dorset, and continues to invest £41 million of our Dorset Pension Fund in fossil fuels.

**Does Dorset Council understand you are saying one thing and doing another, and displaying the moral and economic madness Mr Guterres refers to?**

**Response by Cllr Ray Bryan**

If I may, I would like to answer your questions together as one is relate to the other.

Dorset Council has committed to the leadership required to deliver the aspirations of the climate and ecological strategy, working across multiple systems and partnerships. The council has significant tools and levers that it can utilise to help us on this journey, but it cannot deliver the change required on its own. As with any change of this scale, there will out of necessity be a period of transition where energy, transport and other key systems decarbonise, and wider behavioural change reduces our environmental impact. Reducing

the discussion to a simple binary set of choices minimises the scale and scope of the challenges that we all face within society. We are all facing a huge challenge to make the necessary changes, and therefore I have committed to continue dialogue with government and other key partners and communities to investigate how we can remove barriers and empower councils like Dorset to make decisions on their energy needs. I have always been open for dialogue on how we can work on accelerating the transition, and concrete ideas that are cognisant of the complexity of delivering on our aspirations that understand the role of local government are always welcome.

Dorset Council has delegated its responsibilities as an administering authority for the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) to the Pension Fund Committee which has a duty to scheme members and their employers to ensure that the contributions they pay into the pension fund are invested appropriately to make returns sufficient to meet the fund's obligations to pay pensions and other benefits.

In September 2020, the Pension Fund Committee agreed a strategy not to divest completely from companies involved in the sourcing and refining of fossil fuels but instead to seek to reduce investment in all high carbon emitting companies and to influence the demand for fossil fuels and their financing, not just their supply. Significant decarbonisation has been and will continue to be achieved through the transition of assets to the management of Brunel Pension Partnership, the pension fund's LGPS investment pooling manager. 10% of the pension fund's assets are now invested in Brunel's sustainable equities fund and all other actively managed Brunel funds are committed to a policy of a 7% year on year reduction in their carbon footprint."

### **Question 7 – submitted by Giles Watts**

My wife and I are lucky enough to be hosting two lovely Ukrainian Families who are seeking sanctuary from the war. They are two women in their 30s and three children aged 5, 8 and 8. Both families are from Kharkiv which has been largely destroyed by Russian forces. At the start of the war they spent their first week cowering in an unlit cellar beneath a Barber's shop before escaping to Poland. The Polish welcomed them in without any delays and quickly allocated them a single room in a large apartment block in Katowice along with many other refugee families.

The families arrived in Dorchester on Friday after a 5-week struggle to obtain visas. Two of the children did not have passports and had to travel to Warsaw for biometrics (photos and fingerprinting). Despite intervention from Chris Loder's team – for which we are grateful – the last visa for the 8-year-old boy was not granted until Wednesday evening just hours before flying. The stress levels have been very high and our first hand experience of the Home Office's visa system has been a shameful disgrace.

Local support in Dorset has been fabulous and heart-warming with everyone wanting to help with everything including phone chips, clothing, events and even offers of monetary support. it is truly the kindness of strangers. Dorset council have also supported us in a number of ways. DBS checks and a safety check of our property have both been carried out with common sense and efficiency, while your helpline and welcome packs were well received although ultimately less useful than local networks such as "Help for Kindness" in Weymouth.

School places are our first priority and we were surprised that schools have not been provided with any additional resources and many are already full. We have been incredibly lucky. The Prince of Wales School in Dorchester under their inspirational head, Gary Spracklen, agreed to take in the children immediately, and has provided them with free

second hand school uniforms and allocated them with school meals out of their own budget until universal credit is confirmed.

For the mothers, the next stage may prove to be even more difficult. They need to sign up for medical and dental services and they need a bank account before they can apply for universal credit and child benefit which we have been informed will take at least 6 weeks and may require originals of documents they do not have. Until then, they will have almost no funds coming in. To work, they must also apply for a National Security number which we hear can be very tricky and time-consuming.

### **Question**

We believe Dorset Council is receiving £10,500 from the government for every Ukrainian refugee. Out of this the Ukrainians receive £200 each on a pre-paid card and the Host families receive £350 per month. How do Dorset Council intend to spend the remaining funds? We wondered whether some should go to local schools that take on refugee children to provide additional staffing and resources and whether the council might also support language classes for both refugees and host families.

### **Response by Cllr Laura Miller**

We thank Giles for their response and indeed offer our thanks to all hosts in Dorset. We are humbled by the wonderful warm welcome being provided to Ukrainian refugees by Dorset residents.

We recognise the challenges that people are facing in receiving their visas and share your appreciation of the work our local MPs have been doing to help address these issues with the Home Office.

The support from Dorset Council and partners, including 'Help and Kindness' and Volunteer Centre Dorset, who are undertaking the DBS checks on our behalf is coordinated through our Dorset Together network so I am pleased to hear how well this has worked. It is a strong multi-agency partnership that continues to respond to questions and emerging needs at both county and local level.

We are coordinating admissions to schools through our school admissions team and can confirm that 27 schools across the county have welcomed children or are in the process of welcoming children.

The council is due to receive funding based on a formula of £10,500 per guest arriving through the Homes for Ukraine scheme. This funding is being used to deliver the requirements of the Homes for the Ukraine scheme in the following ways:

- Undertaking the suitability checks for hosts including accommodation and DBS checks
- Set up our call centre response and undertaking the administration of payments to hosts
- Making interim payments to guests
- Providing guest welfare checks through in person visits once they have arrived
- Meeting any care or support needs of guests
- Helping guests settle if they wish to remain here
- Supporting voluntary and community organisations that are supporting hosts and guests

- Helping guests if initial accommodation arrangements don't work
- Supporting integration

I can confirm that there is a separate funding scheme for schools and early years settings. The council has agreed to release this funding as quickly as possible to settings as children arrive.

- £3,000 per child for Early Years settings for children accepting children aged 2 to 4 years
- £6,580 per child for Primary schools
- £8,755 per child for Secondary schools