

**Full Council
14 July 2022**

Questions submitted by Councillors

Question 1 – submitted by Cllr Andrew Starr

Given that Dorset is blessed with many outstanding protected sites some benefiting much needed statutory protection and in light of the fact that this council has quite rightly declared an environmental emergency. Can I ask for a response to the worrying news that the Environment Secretary has declared his intention to scrap the habitat directive as part of the forthcoming Brexit freedoms bill.

The stated aim of this move is to “cut red tape” or as some see it make it easier for developers to encroach on nationally and internationally important conservation areas. Given that the present legislation has been used in numerous cases to protect habitats and species and that this move has been objected to by such organisations as the RSPB. Can I ask if this Council will be making representations to the Environment Secretary expressing their concern about this seemingly backwards step in environmental protection at a time when it is needed more than ever.

Question 2 – submitted by Cllr Belinda Bawden

The recent sudden announcement by Stagecoach that they would be terminating their bus service from Exeter to Lyme Regis at Seaton from 31st July has left many people in Seaton, Lyme Regis and the villages in between very anxious indeed. Many rely on the service to get to work, to attend medical, dental or hospital appointments, to go shopping, or for leisure travel. Devon County Council has agreed to subsidise the new service but the majority of passengers are, we are told, from Lyme Regis. I hope that Dorset Council will also agree to provide support to retain an adequate bus service between Lyme Regis, Seaton and Exeter.

Could the criteria for and the process by which decisions are made by Dorset Council over which bus services could be subsidised be explained, particularly when the route crosses county boundaries and what assessment could be done of the impact on community resilience, mental health, the cost of living crisis and the climate and ecological emergency strategy and action plan if people lose their jobs or have to increase the use of private cars when buses they rely on are withdrawn?

Question 3 – submitted by Cllr Alex Brenton

In response to the climate and biodiversity emergency, and Dorset Council aims to become Carbon neutral by 2050.

As we all know the public demand that we **Plant More Trees!** However experts agree that preserving mature trees does more for biodiversity and air quality and cooling than a new sapling will, for approximately **15 -20years**. It takes that long for a new tree to capture carbon at a rate approaching that of a mature tree. Therefore, planting two new trees to replace one felled tree is **not** a solution to our problems. The solution is to save existing trees from danger as well as to plant more young successional trees.

In my ward, we seem to have a many cases of the felling of mature trees on possible development sites before planning is agreed, on the principle that if they do not have a TPO (Tree Preservation Order) the owner can do what they like. I would not be surprised to hear that happens elsewhere.

Could Dorset do more to publicise that anyone especially Parish & Town Councils can ask for a TPO to be put on significant trees if there is a perceived risk of felling?.

Could a blanket temporary TPO be put on all trees on a site as soon as any Planning Application is registered to prevent trees 'disappearing' before planning conditions can be agreed. This can then be assessed by Tree Officers as to whether that should be permanent.?

Question 4 – submitted by Cllr Nick Ireland

Allegations have been made in the press, social media and directly to some members of this Council that Coombe House opened prematurely with too many pupils, insufficient staff trained to or having experience at the required level for the needs of the pupils, some fire doors that didn't open, windows without safety glass that were subsequently broken by pupils and, if that isn't enough, some pupils 'escaped' the school site.

Are any of these allegations true?