

## **Full Council - 13 July 2023**

### **Questions submitted by Councillors**

#### **Question 1 – submitted by Cllr L O’Leary**

##### **Weymouth car parking**

Way back in November 2019 I raised the issue of the unfairness in parking charge disparity across this authority. I hoped one authority would mean one rate but that has sadly not become the fact. Weymouth is being particularly penalised by the new beach levy which is effectively a tax of geography. Why are we charged more because we have a beach? Visitors come across Britain and the world to Dorset to see our beaches yes but also our market towns, Goulds Hill, Sherborne Abbey, Wimborne Minster, Corfe Castle, Portland Bill and other non-beach related attractions yet we are to be penalised. Will the cabinet member look to scrap the beach levy and ensure a fairer rate for all across the county and instead re-direct his approach to filling car parks in Winter and maximisation current parking space areas.

#### **Question 2 submitted by Cllr J Orrell**

##### **Weymouth car parking**

Would you consider harmonising the parking rates across Dorset car parks, and using the revenue to support more public buses?

#### **Question 3 – submitted by Cllr Ryan Hope**

##### **Weymouth car parking**

The new pricing structure for Dorset Council Car Park is a complete U-turn from the 2019 manifesto to unify the charging structure across the county which was announced in November 2021. As per Dorset Councils press release dated 29th March “An increase in the cost of parking in Dorset Council’s car parks will be limited to busy tourist areas. The rates will be seasonal, with some only increasing for the spring/summer period.”

Can the cabinet for Highways, Travel and Environment Cllr Ray Bran please explain why this U-turn has taken place?

#### **Question 4 – submitted by Cllr S Jespersen**

##### **HGVs**

From May 31<sup>st</sup> the government has approved the use of longer semi-trailer HGVs on British roads. These vehicles can be 2metres longer than standard size HGVs. The expectation is that these longer vehicles will move the same volume of goods but

make eight percent fewer journeys, saving up to 70,000 tonnes of carbon and other emissions and generating up to £1.4bn in economic benefit.

But many of Dorset's strategic roads will not easily accommodate these longer vehicles and there is a real risk of damage to bridges, private property and verges, causing congestion and disruption to communities. In my own Ward beautiful, old Durweston Bridge, which sits at the junction of the A350 and the A357, is already frequently damaged by HGVs and it will, quite simply, be impossible for the longer vehicles to use this junction as it is currently engineered. Others in the Chamber will have similar examples, I am sure.

Dorset Council must begin planning now for these longer vehicles, mapping potential problem areas and identifying the necessary mitigation measures. We must also work with the Local Government Association to support their work with the haulage industry to make the use of specialist Satnav mandatory for HGV drivers.

Could I ask that this council moves swiftly to bring together the necessary expertise to understand the possible impact on Dorset's roads, to plan for the necessary mitigation measures and to set aside the necessary funding over time. Can I also ask that we communicate with communities to reassure residents that the council is aware of the issue and is planning for the future.

#### **Question 5 submitted by Cllr D Beer**

#### **South Western Railway Consultation**

South Western Railway, under the instructions of the department of transport have launched a public consultation on the closure of railway station ticket offices to reflect the falling number of tickets sold in this way and to improve the service to the travelling public.

In practice though this will result in a massive reduction in staff presence at all of our Dorset stations to in most cases twelve hours a WEEK, spread over four days.

The effects of this proposal, should it be implemented, will mean that the public will not be able to access toilet facilities, waiting rooms, and stations will become far less secure.

Of equal importance, those with disabilities such as visual impairment or mental health issues will not have assistance in planning journeys, what tickets are on offer, or accessing the right train.

In our rural area a large number of people of all ages do not have access to smart phones, the internet or other means of information about travel, and many require help in purchasing railcards etc.

This measure, whilst sounding lovely that staff will not be stuck behind ticket office windows, but will be out assisting passengers would be fine if it were every day, for at least six or more hours, but three hours a day, four days a week will not do

anything to encourage travel mode shift from the car, and obviously is totally against green travel principles.

What response is this council planning, to influence the consultation exercise and robustly defend adequate staffing at our railway stations in Dorset, with staff whilst present able to sell the right ticket at the right price to those who need help in these matters?

### **Question 6 submitted by Cllr P Barrow**

#### **Grass cutting**

I wish to raise my concerns with regard to the significant delays in grass cutting this year.

Dorset Council is ten weeks behind with cutting and this has led to a significant number of complaints from residents. My in box is flooded with complaints as is our local social media.

The main complaints being that the area is looking incredibly uncared for, there is an increased risk of fire, open spaces are inaccessible, the local primary school has seen an increase in hay fever, dogs are getting seeds in their ears and paws. I could go on, but I'm sure you get the picture.

I understand Dorset Council has changed its mowing practices and will in future be picking up the cuttings. This will reduce soil fertility to slow grass growth in the future as well encouraging wildflowers.

So after making changes to the previous grass cutting plans, to bring in these new practices, Dorset Council has a new plan, which it has failed to deliver.

I understand that the delay is down to mechanical failures and having to wait weeks for spares from Italy.

What I do not understand is why Dorset Council has got into a situation where they are at the mercy of mowers breaking down and slow parts delivery.

Dorset Council must have planned and reactive maintenance regimes in place for the mowers, what is apparent is that they have failed this year. Why were parts not readily available and why were there no spare mowers to use whilst the defective ones were being repaired.

In addition, why did Dorset Council not let the residents know what was going on before it became a real issue. This lack of early information led to residents wondering if the grass was ever going to be cut and much speculation about the cause of the delays.

In conclusion, what lessons have been learnt and what changes have been made to prevent this happening again? Is the grass cutting team under resourced?

## **Question 7 submitted by Cllr K Clayton**

### **Biodiversity**

Since 1<sup>st</sup> January 2023 all public authorities have been under a statutory duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity. Authorities have until 1<sup>st</sup> January 2024 to formulate their compliance plans. When will this council receive a report outlining the actions we will be taking to comply with this duty?

## **Question 8 submitted by Cllr L Fry**

### **Recycling Centre**

Dorchester and the surrounding area has suffered for years with a poor quality recycling centre, nearby residents frequently have to put up with heavy lorries travelling past their houses. For health and Safety reasons the system grinds to a halt, with entry gates closed and all users ejected when containers need moving or full ones taken away. Queues build up and can wait for at least 30 minutes or so whilst staff in the centre make any operational changes necessary. A replacement site has been on the cards now for many years with currently no apparent progress on the issue.

As Dorset council plays its part in helping the environment and works to improve recycling rates across our County to have an outdated and inefficient centre does not help in any way and possibly encourages fly tipping.

There is talk of something happening in North of Dorchester, but this is unacceptable for several reasons, not least that there is a strong swell of opinion against this development happening at all.

Can we please have some positive action for a new recycling centre in Dorchester that will actually encourage more recycling and support our community please?

## **Question 9 submitted by Cllr Les Fry**

### **The Prince of Wales School**

I understand that the shortfall in the funding of the Physical Disabilities Unit at The Prince of Wales School was first raised, formally, with Council Officers at a meeting in December 2018. Minor adjustments were made in July 2022 with the creation of a 'small school allowance' in recognition that underfunding by the Council has a big impact on small schools that pick up the challenge of providing a county-wide provision for children with complex needs. However, despite the school's protests, no action has been taken by the Council to resolve the matter on a longer-term basis.

Discussions were re-started in December 2022 with the arrival of Amanda Davis. I am told that progress has been made and that Officers are of the opinion that the

school's case is accurate and fair.

The school has now submitted a deficit budget for 2023/24. This budget has been accepted by the Council. The school has taken action on matters relating to the mainstream budget, however, the majority of the deficit is agreed to be caused by the underfunding of the PD Unit. This deficit is likely to increase in the Autumn as pay increases associated with staff directly employed to work with Unit children come into effect. Governors of the School have voted to refuse new admissions until the matter is resolved.

What action are Council Officers taking to bring a speedy resolution to this issue and therefore prevent the closure of the Unit to new children as from 1st September 2023?

### **Question 10 submitted by Cllr R Crabb**

#### **Barton Farm Estate Footpath**

The main footway link from the Barton Farm Estate to Sherborne Town Centre is through an area known as the Secret Garden. The route takes pedestrians down to the new light controlled crossing of the A30 at Newell. It is the main pedestrian route to town for nearly 400 households.

When elected members were first shown architects sketches for this route a decade ago it was intended that the route would be accessible by those with disabilities and would be lit at night. It was therefore made a condition of planning that the footway would be built to a design and specification agreed by the planning authority. The planners now say that there is no record on file of approval ever being given for the sub-standard footway which has actually been built by Persimmon. Nor is there any provision for the footway to be adopted as public highway like the rest of the footways on the estate.

How can this failure of planning have happened and will it now be added to the list of outstanding items which are the subject of planning enforcement?

### **Question 11 submitted by Cllr R Crabb**

#### **Platinum Skies Pedestrian Crossing**

Platinum Skies is a quite new development on the junction of Horsecastles Lane, Sherborne and the A30 main road to Yeovil on the west side of Sherborne. Residents need to cross the busy Horsecastles Lane road that has 3 lanes leading up to the traffic lights. Many of the people who live there are well into their 70's and beyond, so therefore find this extremely difficult, intimidating and dangerous.

The original plans showed a pedestrian crossing at the traffic light junction. However, for some reason these were not installed and I have no idea why not. This is so dangerous that it is highly likely that there will be an accident causing injury or worse. I watched an elderly resident cross these three lanes of traffic with a trolley. She was on her way to the bus stop that is on the opposite side of the road from Platinum Skies. She did make it, but I could see just how very dangerous this crossing is.

I met with the resident's association who explained that residents are very concerned indeed about this issue. I assured them that I will present their concerns to Dorset Council and help to identify a solution.

What are the possible solution to ensure that the crossing of this busy and fast road is safe for residents?

I look forward to hear what is proposed to alleviate this issue.

### **Question 12 – submitted by Cllr Robin Legg**

#### **Hummer Railway Bridge**

Work on the reconstruction of Hummer railway bridge was completed in April 2022 but the bridge was immediately closed to vehicular traffic because of an argument between the Council and Network Rail over the specification and design of safety barriers on the bridge approach. The dispute centres on whether this is a repair of the old bridge or an entirely new structure. The bridge reopened to traffic in June of last year but only after the installation of a temporary barrier system and traffic lights for the bridge crossing. The cost of those works fell entirely on Dorset. The Office of Rail and Road were asked to mediate in the dispute but they declined. The Council and Network Rail are now seeking to agree on the terms of reference for an independent legal counsel to finally resolve the issue. The outcome is not academic. I am told that a barrier system for a new bridge, if that is what it is, is of the order of £200,000 and that doesn't include legal fees incurred to reach a final determination. The decision on what constitutes a new bridge or a major reconstruction of an old one in Hummer will set a precedent nationally that Network Rail will use in all their future dealings with highway authorities. In that case should we not seek the support of the Local Government Association, including financial support, since we are fighting this case on behalf of all highway authorities?

### **Question 13 – submitted by Cllr Robin Legg**

#### **Pinford Lane**

Three parish councils, Sherborne, the Yeohead Group and Milborne Port (Somerset) submitted a joint application in March for a Definitive Map Modification Order to establish Pinford Lane as a bridleway. The route lies predominantly in the parishes of Castleton and Goathill which are part of Sherborne Rural Ward. It has been a long-held ambition by the parishes to create a safe pedestrian and cycle route between

Sherborne and Milborne Port avoiding the busy and at Crackmore Rocks dangerous A30 . Thanks to the tenacity and scholarship of Jim Hart, the recently retired Rights of Way Liaison Officer for Castleton parish, a documentary case for this route has been made. It has taken him two years of research in the Parliamentary archives, reading the records of 19th century Parliamentary Committees and examining the terms used in Acts of Parliament to extinguish different categories of rights of way in earlier Turnpike Acts. It is a unique piece of research running to some 120 pages of submission for the DMMO. The authority has recently reviewed the priority to be given to DMMO applications with documentary claims now only ranking fifth. I am told that it may be four or five years at the earliest before this application is even considered by committee. I understand and support the need to bring forward claims based on user evidence so that they are considered at an early date whilst claimants are still alive. However, I think it is important that Mr Hart's unrivalled understanding of this unique and complex application should be treated in the same way as those based on user evidence and given priority 1 status. Do you agree?