

**Full Council – 10 October 2024**  
**Questions submitted by Councillors**

**Question 1 – submitted by Cllr Hannah Hobbs-Chell**

I am grateful to the new cabinet for the commitment to Ferndown and to Ferndown Town Council to assist with a regeneration plan, and resolving the ongoing Barrington Centre lease situation, and appreciate that you are currently working from the previous administration's budgetary constraints and directions until the next financial year, especially for any capital works. I would however like to ask where the new leisure strategy is in progress? Along with a town centre that has been neglected over the past decade, Ferndown Leisure centre is also at the end of its life, and requires considerable consideration not just for Ferndown residents but for residents in the east of the county especially given changes in the leisure facilities in East Dorset. The land surrounding the leisure centre is under charitable ownership via the Town Council, and leased to Dorset Council, and I would like to ask if the cabinet could commit to investing in leisure in the east to support the huge health and wellbeing benefits of leisure. There is a very exciting collaborative opportunity to significantly enhance and invest in the health and wellbeing of the east of Dorset.

**Response from Cllr Ryan Hope**

The Council is excited to be developing a new leisure strategy aimed at enhancing the operation of leisure facilities across all of Dorset. This strategy will ensure that these facilities are accessible, affordable, and sustainable, with a strong focus on equity and addressing health inequalities. In September, the Cabinet approved the acceleration of this initiative, and consultants are being appointed to advance the project. This comprehensive approach will strengthen and support healthier communities throughout the region

**Question 2 – submitted by Cllr Matt Bell**

Prior to becoming one of the Dorset Council Members for Radipole I began a campaign to highlight issues at Radipole Lake. This was in the form of a petition which remains open but already has roughly 2500 signatures including those online and on paper. The issue has also been highlighted on several occasions in the local media since the petition began. I thank the members of the public who took the time to sign the petition and shared their concerns and knowledge about the lake. The petition calls for all stakeholders to prioritise silt removal from the lake and river to increase flood water capacity and to reduce flooding in surrounding areas such as Radipole Park and Gardens where outfalls are believed to be hampered by the high silt level. The petition also calls for the creation of a consistent and effective management programme to be followed moving forward.

The lake is a prominent feature of both Radipole and Weymouth as a whole. Unfortunately, Radipole Lake has been neglected for many years and is no longer the prized asset it once was. The petition and media coverage prompted the involvement of key stakeholders including Dorset Council and initial discussions

added significantly to the list of concerns I originally highlighted. There are concerns regarding potential risks to the SSSI status held by the nature reserve, flooding of the adjacent road, park, gardens and businesses, algae growth as well as the loss of a high-quality and treasured angling venue. The recently rejuvenated amenities at Radipole Park and Gardens spent much of the last autumn and winter flooded.

I was delighted when meetings were arranged involving all key stakeholders and some early progress was made, including improvements at Westham Bridge. However, things have not progressed in a timely fashion on other aspects. Previous meeting notes about the lake from May stated that Wessex Water would clear outfalls along Radipole Park Drive, which are crucial to drain the park and gardens, by the end of August 2024 but this has not happened. This is due to issues accessing and inspecting some of the outfalls due to vegetation growth. There are also investigations ongoing into potential grants for silt removal and habitat restoration and I hope these can be expedited working closely with our colleagues at Natural England and RSPB. Every element of decision making and action at the lake seems to involve multiple organisations, it is crucial that Dorset Council drives this forward effectively. However, the planned September meeting regarding the lake was cancelled due to other officer commitments. What assurances can the Cabinet Member for Place Services give me that Radipole Park and Gardens will not spend another winter submerged and that the maintenance of a prized Weymouth asset will be prioritised in the future?

### **Response from Cllr Nick Ireland**

The issues surrounding the management of the Radipole lake water levels spans many years. The Water Level Management Plan was completed by consultants in December 2009 on behalf of Weymouth and Portland Borough Council. Around the same period, an application by the RSPB under an EU initiative to protect Bittern habitat was being considered. The proposal was to remove 54,000 cubic metres of silt and reposition at higher levels forming a bund (noise barrier) at higher, more critical (floodplain) levels in the floodplain. The works, involving extensive relocation of dredged silts within the lake were submitted to the Environment Agency who objected to this specific proposal. The relocation of dredged silts off site were also considered at the time but discounted on cost / practicality grounds.

A Water Level Management Plan working group was established in February 2024 to review the issues and develop a sustainable approach going forward. Several key partners are involved, including Natural England, RSPB, Dorset Council and the Environment Agency. Partner organisations are of the view that local interventions on their own are not sustainable or cost effective. A more strategic approach is required considering impacts from the wider river catchment, and management of reed growth. Actions developed to date include:

The Environment Agency is proposing to look at the main River Wey catchment upstream to determine if farming practises can be modified to reduce siltation and chemical loading within the catchment (including Radipole Lake) into the future.

A Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) condition assessment is currently ongoing for the lake to meet HM Government target of 31st Jan 2028. In tandem, Natural England and the RSPB via the Water Level Management Group are progressing a habitat restoration bid for Countryside Stewardship funding. The current stage of the bid is a feasibility study that will inform the grant required for capital works.

As an interim measure, Wessex Water have been requested to arrange inspection of the public surface water outfalls into the lake to ensure they are blockage free. This has been delayed due to access issues, but they are looking to meet in early October to review their programme of works. They were chased on this earlier this week and have yet to respond. We

The Water Level Management Plan working group will continue to meet regularly to take this agenda forward.

Unfortunately, the risk of flooding to the low-lying areas adjacent to the lake (including Radipole Lake Drive and Gardens) are likely to increase because of climate change impacts. The area is already at risk of main River Wey flooding (1 in 100 year return period floodplain envelope) as identified by the EA and this will increase in future years. However, we will do what we can to manage flood risk proportionately by adopting sustainable interventions which offset the effects of climate change, and the partnership approach we are taking will be beneficial in this regard.

### **Question 3 – submitted by Cllr Spencer Flower**

#### **Unrealistic housing targets set by the new Government**

The Government has announced intentions to build 1.5m new dwellings during the next five years. This will require a near doubling of the build rate threatening our green belt, AONB and other undeveloped land. This will hit Dorset particularly hard as we have little in the way of so-called brown field sites.

Legacy Local Plans and the emerging Dorset Local Plan includes policy which seeks a proportion of affordable housing when development schemes reach a certain size.

The new Liberal Democrat administration has indicated that it wishes to build more affordable housing for local people, which is a commendable ambition given the local demand, but this will be a serious challenge to achieve. The biggest barrier to achieving this aim will be the retention of viability as a material planning consideration.

There are several examples where permission has been granted and the developer has subsequently come back to the Council, claiming for whatever reason, that the

schemes are no longer viable. This has resulted in a loss of the affordable housing allocations.

Can members be reassured that every effort is being made by the administration to lobby Government for the removal of viability as a material planning consideration or seek a reform of the current guidance, such that a fair proportion of new housing development in the Dorset Council area is affordable housing for rent or shared equity.

**So my question is, what action is being taken by the Liberal Democrat administration to safeguard the provision of vitally important affordable housing in the Dorset Council area in the context of the emerging Dorset Local Plan and the anticipated amended standard methodology?**

#### **Response from Cllr Shane Bartlett**

The Council's response to the Government consultation was agreed by Cabinet on 10 September and submitted in time for the 24 September deadline.

In that response, we have objected to the proposed housing numbers on the grounds that they are unrealistic and unachievable.

We have supported the changes that allow local councils to give greater priority to social rented housing in their planning policies, but have said in our response that this would require additional funding because of the greater cost.

We have also, separately, written to Government to stress a number of points including the need for action to ensure that developers build out their sites, and the need for a stronger stance on viability negotiations in order to enable affordable housing to be provided.

In preparing the local plan, we will be ensuring that we have robust evidence to support our affordable housing policies, and taking the costs of development into account. While we are objecting to the scale of increased numbers suggested in the consultation, if we can deliver a greater level of housing in total, this will enable greater provision of affordable housing.

#### **Question 4 – submitted by Cllr James Vitali**

Since 2011, some 2771 new homes have been delivered in the North Dorset area. According to the latest Annual Position Statement published this month, there will be additional housing demand for over 2500 households in the North up to the year 2034.

We know there is a national shortage of homes, and North Dorset is more than playing its part to address that shortage. But for development to be legitimate in the eyes of local residents, they must believe that it will add to their communities, not take away from them or tarnish them. An important part of this is ensuring that

developers contribute meaningfully to investment in local services and community facilities.

For some time, however, the North has been an outlier in Dorset, because it hasn't operated the Community Infrastructure Levy, and has relied solely on Section 106 contributions. Speaking to my parish and town councils, they worry that they are not seeing their fair share of Section 106 monies, and believe that CIL would help ensure our communities meaningfully gain from new housing.

I understand that CIL was going to be introduced in the North as part of the new Local Plan, but delays to its drafting and adoption have set that process back, and I am concerned that our residents are losing out as a result.

To this end, how does the Council intend to ensure that local residents in the North receive the investment they need in infrastructure and services to support new housing supply? Could I receive in writing a report on the status of Section 106 funding in the North? And would the Council now consider bringing the North into line with the rest of Dorset by introducing CIL in our area?

### **Response from Cllr Shane Bartlett**

The approach to securing developer contributions in North Dorset is through the use of section 106 legal agreements for major development, i.e. development involving 10 or more dwellings. Evidence supporting the North Dorset Adopted Local Plan is used in a case-by-case basis to secure infrastructure necessary to help make development acceptable in planning terms. Officers work with town and parish councils to establish their needs and apply this evidence when planning applications are being considered. This process has resulted in monies being secured for a wide range of community infrastructure.

Dorset Council report on the performance of developer contributions through an Annual Monitoring Statement which is published online.

Government regulations around the use of developer contributions does allow section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy to be secured together in situations where CIL applies, though ultimately, there will be a limit to what development can viably contribute toward these mechanisms. While the introduction of CIL in North Dorset would generate a neighbourhood contribution which would be passed automatically to town and parish councils where development takes place, it should be noted that this in turn would most likely reduce the extent of s106 obligations secured, which in the absence of CIL is currently the main mechanism for supporting local measures such as community halls, playing pitches and play areas.

Dorset Council will continue to review the position with Community Infrastructure Levy and the Local Plan.

### **Question 5 submitted by Cllr Byron Quayle**

At the most recent Schools Forum meeting, senior education leaders from Dorset suggested that BCP Council are actively seeking families to request their child's needs are met in a Dorset Council area educational setting.

Can the portfolio holder confirm how many children with an Education Health and Care Plan from other areas including BCP, have been enrolled at Educational settings in Dorset this academic year and how has this impacted on children in the Dorset Council area accessing these educational settings?

### **Response from Cllr Clare Sutton**

As we know there is pressure on appropriate educational provision for children with an EHCP nationally, and therefore some movement of children across borders. Our team has a comprehensive plan, working with partners and schools, and our overarching strategy is that, wherever possible, children's needs are met locally so they can attend along with their neighbours and friends.

Our Corporate Director for Education chairs the regional Education and Inclusion group and Dorset hosts the regional lead for SEND, Dr Vikki Jervis. This enables us to ensure that regional education leaders proactively discuss pupil intake across borders and work towards equity.

There is also an element of parental choice when a child has special educational needs.

The most reliable data source is school census data, collated in May each year.

According to census data, between May 21 and May 24 we saw a 5% drop in BCP children being educated in Dorset but, consistent with the local and national picture, the proportion of those that are EHCP has risen slightly, from 4.1% to 4.4%.

In May 24 a total of 225 children from other local authorities with an EHCP were being educated in Dorset, of which 120 were from BCP. Pupil Census data will be collated again in May and will give us the most accurate picture of numbers of pupils this academic year, but we do not anticipate a significant increase in this number.

We currently fund 675 Dorset children with an EHCP in other LAs, including 339 in BCP settings.

As there is movement of children in both directions, we do not feel there is a particularly adverse impact on Dorset children, but as per our strategy we continue to work towards keeping more of our children close to home.

### **Question 6 submitted by Cllr Byron Quayle**

Following a Freedom of Information (FOI) request dated October 16, 2023, Dorset Council confirmed that approximately £22.8 million had been paid by developers for educational purposes since 2019, but had not yet been allocated to specific projects.

Could the portfolio holder provide an update on how much of the £22.8 million has been allocated to educational projects since the FOI request in October 2023? Additionally, has a Dorset-wide policy been implemented to ensure that projects are identified promptly and funds are allocated efficiently, preventing developer contributions from remaining unused in Dorset Council accounts instead of being spent on educational needs?

### **Response from Cllr Clare Sutton**

In respect of s.106 of the Town and Country Planning Act secured funding we must bear in mind issues which include:

- Many of the contributions are linked to specific schemes and cannot be transferred
- The contributions are linked to the timing of the delivery of houses, which is out of our control, and
- Some contributions cannot be spent until the need is there, for example, in terms of admissions to local schools.

I don't think the previous administration managed this well, but S.106 is not a 'magic bullet' to improving the education landscape, and we have to ensure we invest in relation to likely developments in the longer term. Neither is the allocation "unused" - it is responsibly held to ensure that longer term projects to support our sufficiency duties in education can be realised.

We can report on education spend that has been committed or is profiled. £29k has been allocated to Pimperne school to support an increase in admissions, £47k is in the pipeline for Hazelbury Bryan for the same reason, and £540k for the Leigh Road School site project to secure the land.

As things stand the £22m is held against 57 specific developments across the county with the terms and conditions being applied.

In relation to the second part of the question, from a Children's Services point of view we've made significant progress. Our Corporate Director for Education brought the Best Education For All Board into the cross-Council programme delivered by Assets and Regeneration in July 2024, to ensure robust oversight, and we have initiated a mainstream school estate review through BEFA . This enables responsible and timely spend within the terms and the conditions applied to this funding stream.

### **Question 7 submitted by Cllr Bill Trite**

I'm pleased to be able to point to:

1. Much co-operative, joint working between Dorset Council and Swanage Town Council in recent years, all to the public good and particularly in respect of cliff stability, beach recharge, flood defence and options for seafront traffic management. Another example of this constructive relationship is the Town Council's routine cutting of a large area of Dorset Council grassland at one entrance to the town, without charge to Dorset Council, as well as supplementing weed clearance work.
2. Long-time acknowledgment by the former Purbeck District Council and Dorset Council (as emergency planning authority, highway authority and coastal defence authority) that certain roads and drains near Swanage seafront are prone to widespread coverage by shingle and other debris as a result of wave overtopping during stormy conditions, and that the resultant hazard will be cleared by the authority in a timely manner with public rights of way reopened. (Where it could, the Town Council has always assisted this process in terms of supplying manual labour and co-ordinating clear-up operations - and is happy to continue to do so.)
3. Assurances by the new administration at County Hall that Dorset people are not about to experience any deterioration in service standards.

Why, therefore, with the present overspill of debris from the sea into the Lower High Street, has the Town Council now been informed that the Unitary authority has unilaterally decided no longer to accept any obligation to undertake this vital clearance and reopening work, unless Dorset Council is paid to do so by Swanage Town Council?

### **Response from Cllr Nick Ireland**

Dorset Council manages more than 2,400 miles of roads and 2,800 miles of countryside rights of way, along with all associated infrastructure, including bridges, cycleways, footways, drainage, street lighting, road signs and markings, traffic signals, car parks, trees, and verges.

As the local highway authority, the Council has a statutory obligation to maintain the safety and accessibility of highways. To fulfil this duty, it may require adjacent landowners to undertake necessary measures to prevent soil and debris from encroaching onto the roadway. This includes areas of land owned and managed by Town and Parish Councils.

Historically, Dorset Council (and DCC before it) has collaborated closely and successfully with Swanage Town Council across various service areas and projects. This partnership will be further enhanced by a forthcoming transformative programme, Hedge to Hedge. This initiative aims to facilitate integrated service delivery between Dorset Council and Town and Parish Councils, enabling them to work together as service delivery partners. Through this collaboration, it is intended that Town and Parish Councils will be able to benefit from increased levels of service



over and above those provided just by Dorset Council. You have my assurance that Officers will be in touch with the clerk of Swanage to discuss this specific issue.

**Question 8 submitted by Cllr Simon Gibson**

There is widespread concern following recent proposals from Hampshire County Council to close a number of Household Recycling Centres, including Somerley, which serves many Dorset residents including residents in Verwood, Alderholt, St Leonards & St Ives & West Moors. It has been long understood that Dorset Council does not have adequate provision in the East of our County and the partnership working with Hampshire County Council has enabled our residents to maintain good and fair access. The Universal Services Select Committee of HCC has asked Cabinet to reconsider these proposals at their Cabinet meeting next week.

**Q: Will the Portfolio Holder and officers seek an urgent meeting with Hampshire County Council ahead of their Cabinet meeting to encourage them to keep Somerley HRC open and to restate Dorset Council's commitment to working together to ensure that residents in the East have fair access to a suitable HRC?**

**Response from Cllr Nick Ireland**

Yes, we will seek a meeting with Hampshire County Council to discuss their position regarding the Somerley household waste and recycling centre. As we pay a substantial sum for our residents to be able to access the site (we make up 45% of the usage), you can be assured that HCC understand the impact of a closure on Dorset Council, but naturally they also have other considerations in reaching their final decision. If we are notified that the site will close (our contract requires six months' notice), then we will of course consider all available options.

**Question 9 – submitted by Cllr Craig Monks**

Madam Chairman,

Could the Council please provide some clarity in the recent position concerning funding for clearing the Councils ditches and Gullys that provide drainage?

I was made aware that funding had been removed for this vital service so asked the question of my local community highways officers. The reply I received was "At present we have no budget allocated to this function as it has been removed. The Service Manager Neil Turner and the newly appointed Asset Manager Ian Newport are currently in discussion on this issue"

So my question is, Can the Council please confirm that the funding been cut in relation to clearing ditches and gully's.

**Response from Nick Ireland**

The highways drainage budget has not been cut. During the summer, the Highway Service reassessed the upcoming ditching and drainage work to ensure it could be delivered within the available budget. The work can be delivered within the existing budget and will be carried out during this financial year. As mentioned earlier tonight, we are looking at a transformative programme, Hedge to Hedge, which will have a positive impact on how we carry out such work in the future.