

Cabinet – 19th November 2024

Public Participation – Questions from the public

1. Question from David Redgewell Southwest Transport Network, Dorset catch the bus campaign

With the Dorset bus service improvement plan and the need to improve bus and coach services.

With the start of the school term

The Charmouth Primary school. School bus contract was awarded from Go ahead group South coast buses Damory coaches to ECT group of London Dorset community transport company.

But with no provision to provide the linked service 71 Lyme Regis Town service funded by Lyme Regis Town Council.

With a 16 seater bus by DCT why was this Tender not discussed with Lyme Regis Town Council and the stakeholders and passengers groups or at the public Transport forum of West Dorset Transport action Group.

and also With the Tupe arrangement RMT bus drivers were not transferred to Dorset community transport company.

So as the Lyme Regis Town Council want to continue this service especially passengers who have difficulties climbing the hills in Lyme Regis and those with reduced mobility and partly sighted passengers.

What discussions are now taking place with Lyme Regis Town Council and ECT GROUP Dorset community transport company to provide a bus for the Lyme Regis Town service for community of Lyme Regis.

2. Question submitted by Wareham Town Trust

Wareham Level Crossing

The proposed closure of Wareham Level Crossing is probably one of the most significant issues faced by Wareham in many years. Clearly public safety is of great concern and so too is the severance of the local community. Half of the town's population of almost 6,000 live on the north side of the railway yet all schools, shops, recreation and health facilities are on the south side. There is only one pedestrian route between the two and this involves the level crossing. The closure of this crossing is therefore an issue which will directly affect the lives of thousands of the town residents on a daily basis.

Three planning applications have already been made for the building of a ramped bridge to replace the crossing, one of which could not be implemented and two of which were refused because

- their excessive scale and materials of construction will be harmful in the street scene;
- their excessive scale, bulk and massing fail to preserve the setting of the historic asset of the bridge itself and the wider station area and
- due to the increased length of travel for pedestrians which make it more likely to increase the use of motor vehicles by residents for short journeys, fails to promote sustainable transport.

It is also worth noting that despite the length of the ramps they would still have been too steep for manually powered wheelchair users and some pushchairs.

There would have been the opportunity to appeal at the time but this was not done.

This issue was raised by local residents when Wareham's Neighbourhood Plan was being developed. The independent Examiner recognised the importance of the ground level crossing concluding in his report *"It is clear from the evidence submitted that the retention of the pedestrian crossing over the railway has widespread community support and it is reasonable in every respect for the Town Council to reflect this support in the WNP."* Wareham Neighbourhood Plan, which includes a policy for retention of the ground level crossing, was adopted by Dorset Council on 8th November 2021 and now forms part of Dorset Council's Development Plan.

Given the extremely restricted size of the site with flats having been built on immediately adjoining land, the presence of the Listed Footbridge and Station building, and the additional reason for refusal – the fact that this would be contrary to Wareham Neighbourhood Plan which is part of the Council's Development Plan, why does the Council consider that a further application could be granted planning consent?

3. Question submitted by Cllr Marian Cotton, Mayor of Wareham

Wareham Pedestrian Level Crossing

As Mayor of Wareham I was surprised and disappointed to find out at late notice that Dorset Council Cabinet is being recommended to collaborate with Network Rail in designing a ramped bridge or lifts to replace the existing ground level crossing.

Dorset Council will be well aware of the importance of this decision to the people of Wareham, and I would have expected that you would wish to first discuss any proposals with Wareham Town Council.

As you know the railway crossing is the only pedestrian route between the two halves of the town and as such is of vital importance to the many people who use this route every day to access jobs, shops, schools, doctor's surgery, hospital, library, cinema and much more.

Three proposals for ramped bridges to replace the crossing have already been considered and discarded. One could not be implemented. The others were refused planning permission due to their excessive scale and impact on the street and the listed station building and footbridge. Also, their excessive length which would encourage people to drive into Wareham rather than walk or cycle. They were also too steep for unpowered wheelchair users and some pushchairs.

Lifts have also been dismissed as impractical due to not having the capacity for the number of users crossing at one time, and the number of bicycles and pushchairs that cross here. An underpass has been dismissed as too costly.

When consulting the community about the Wareham Neighbourhood Plan residents made clear the importance of maintaining the ground level crossing. The Independent Examiner for the Neighbourhood Plan considered representations by all parties including Network Rail and Dorset Council and concluded that a policy should be included in the Plan to keep the ground level crossing. The Neighbourhood Plan has been adopted by Dorset Council as part of the Development Plan.

Wareham Town Council was disappointed to receive the recent report from Network Rail which was a risk assessment going over old ground rather than looking into innovative technical solutions of automating the crossing. We have recently written to Network Rail asking them to carry out a feasibility study into automatic gates linked to the signalling system as had been promised.

The implementation of the Cabinet recommendation would have a devastating effect on the people of Wareham. I therefore ask whether you will join Wareham Town Council in requesting Network Rail to commission an independent feasibility study into the technological solutions to link automatic gates to the signalling system and not to proceed with the officer recommendations?

4. Question submitted by David Evans

From 1847 until 1980 there has been a level crossing for vehicles and pedestrians adjoining Wareham station. With the growth of motor vehicles after the War the queues along the A351 at the crossing stretched back for many miles and it was decided that Wareham should have a bypass with a fly over to avoid motor vehicles having to use the level crossing.

The first Phase of the Wareham bypass included the fly over the railway and was opened in 1980 and Dorset County Council implemented a closure order for vehicles. However, at the same time they removed the pedestrian rights to use the

level crossing, there being no other pedestrian route between the two parts of the Town.

To regularise the use of the crossing by pedestrians and cycles Dorset County Council negotiated with British Rail and agreed a lease for pedestrians and cycles to continue to use the crossing. This was subsequently extended to 2038.

County Cllr Colin Hodge represented the Wareham Ward of the County Council for 25 years and was Leader of the Council between 1987 and 1993. He said in a meeting of Wareham Town Council that "one day this will come back to bite you". Today is that day.

The railway line divides the town into two with roughly 3,000 of the town's population on either side of the tracks. All the town's main facilities are on the South side of the tracks and so there are around 1,000 movements by pedestrians and cyclists a day over the crossing for journeys to schools, shops, health facilities etc. as well as station users crossing between platforms with heavy luggage, wheelchairs etc.

British Rail sold off part of the adjoining goods yard on the south east side for housing leaving a very tight space on the south east side of the crossing. The fine Victorian Station Building and Footbridge are now Listed Grade II.

There have been three attempts to design a ramped bridge in the confined space available. The first design was incapable of construction, and two subsequent planning applications were refused planning and listed building consent due to their harm to the heritage assets, ugliness and increased journey length which would lead to greater car use. The limited space available is such that none could achieve the gradient of 1 in 20. All would have been monstrous carbuncles on the face of our much-loved station.

It is clear that the only option is for electronic gates linked to the signalling system as is used elsewhere. Why have the Council not engaged with the Town Council and local community at this stage over this issue of vital importance?