

**Full Council**  
**5<sup>th</sup> December 2024**  
**Public Participation**

**Question 1 – submitted by Nicola Harper**

**Background:**

- In the last 20 years it has been recognised the importance that trees play for biodiversity and for mitigation, adaption and resilience regarding the Climate Emergency.
- Further the importance of trees in these roles is of equal, if different, in the urban realm as well as the countryside.
- It is now widely recognised that trees play an important role in people’s health and wellbeing at all ages, this is reflected in house prices with greener areas fetching a higher house price than their equivalent in less leafy areas.
- The Council has also generously put in place a grant scheme to facilitate tree planting by communities.
- Yet for all this there seems to be a reluctance to plant in existing urban areas, particularly on streets. There is very little evidence of new tree planting on streets and roads.
- Tree planting and management relies in Dorset on 2 policies.
  - *Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology Strategy 2023*- this document has links which seem to encourage tree planting. But does not contain a policy or strategy for trees in the urban realm.
  - *A Tree Maintenance Policy Document* – which pertains purely to maintenance but promises to replace 2 trees for every tree removed.

However, there is no Tree Strategy or a section pertaining to trees within *a Green Infrastructure Strategy: Investing in Green People*, despite many other authorities having such a document and their being ample guidance of how to create a strategy.

Communities are being encouraged to find places and plant trees this can be difficult especially when most of the land where people live is owned by Dorset Council. Communities, Parish and Town Councils are operating within a vacuum.

Without policy I suggest that trees will continue to be seen as a maintenance problem in the urban setting. Decisions on whether trees can be planted will be taken with the dis-benefits

of trees dominating their far more important and numerous benefits. I believe that like other authorities a strategy is urgently required which gives weight to the Biodiversity, Climate Change and the needs of the people living in Dorset.

#### Question

1. Should Dorset Council not be prioritising the development of a Tree Strategy to ensure good tree canopy cover in its towns and villages, its routes between centres, as well as its rural areas.

#### **Question 2 – submitted by Giles Watts on behalf of Dorset Climate Action Network**

To Dorset Council's credit, it has consistently been against the proposed PowerFuel Incinerator on Portland Island. We thank the former Dorset Council administration that refused planning permission and the new administration for having written to the deputy prime minister making it clear their opposition to this dreadful scheme. The Portland Incinerator has been dressed up as a low-carbon, job-creating asset when in fact this highly polluting, high-carbon blight on the landscape will impact the health of our citizens, increase our carbon footprint, threaten our tourist industry and could lose the world-class status of our Jurassic coastline. It is a disgrace that the Secretary of State's representative approved the planning permission without properly considering the counter arguments or the truthfulness of Power Fuel's case.

In addition to fighting this ruling, we need to undermine the economic case for an incinerator on Portland. Certainly, the economics would definitely fail if Carbon Capture and Storage had been required as a compulsory condition to the planning consent under the principle that the polluter should pay.

Refuse from a variety of sources will be required to make it work. Ironically, the most cost-effective source of fuel for the incinerator comes from the very people who want it least – the people of Dorset. So, will Dorset Council state openly that, if built, they will never send any of Dorset's future refuse to the Portland Incinerator either directly or via their subcontractors? Even better, will Dorset Council commit to phasing out incineration as quickly as possible to concentrate on anaerobic digestion of food waste and better recycling of non-food waste? If so, you would have the full support of many people in Dorset.

#### **Question 3 - submitted by Giles Watts on behalf of Dorset Deserves Better**

The Labour government's new housing target requires Dorset to build 3,230 new houses per year – up from the prior target of 1,788 which was already an unrealistically high number. With the reinstatement of the duty to cooperate this could add a further 800 houses pushing the annual target to about 4,000 per year. Over the 15-year period of the Local Plan this means Dorset Council will have to find space to build 60,000 houses. There is no evidence that the Dorset Council area needs anything close to this level of housing development. The real housing crisis is the lack of genuinely affordable and low-cost social housing and this new target would do little to address that.

None of this is of the Council's making, but if implemented, such high numbers of new housing could be deeply damaging to Dorset's unique environment and countryside, put further pressure on our constrained infrastructure and services, and, ultimately, degrade Dorset's economy which is largely based on agriculture and tourism.

Such high numbers are completely unrealistic. Developers have never built more than 1350 homes per year – barely a third of the required new target. Failing to meet the target would mean defaulting on the five-year housing supply, handing back planning control to the developers who would pick and choose those greenfield developments with the highest profit.

Of course there are ways in which such high housing numbers could, theoretically be met. We could add to the endless urban sprawl around our larger towns with horrible consequences for services and infrastructure; we could force every village to double their size and clog up our rural road system, we could even develop some new towns, but where would they be located, who would buy the houses, where are the jobs and what about the investment required?

Instead, we urge Dorset Council to submit a local plan that puts the people of Dorset first and insist that the 10,000 building plots with existing planning permission are actually built, prioritises the use of brownfield sites along with Dorset Council's own land, and sets local targets for affordable and low-cost social housing.

Such a plan would not meet the government's new housing target but it would address the core housing issues in Dorset, be environmentally sustainable and preserve what makes this county so special. It would also prevent resistance from almost every environmental and social organisation and almost every community, town and parish council.

So, the question for Cllr Shane Bartlett is: are you prepared to put Dorset first and push back against the Government's damaging, unnecessary and downright absurd housing targets?