

Full Council
5th 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.

Response by Cllr J Andrews

Dorset Council Greenspace and National Landscape team planted over 8,000 trees across Dorset last year.

We now have 20 volunteer tree wardens across Dorset and 5 community projects are underway using the Dorset Community tree fund.

Plus, we have a Dorset Council tree policy and the Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology Strategy 2023 which promote the planting of trees.

Therefore, there are numerous examples of excellent work already being done.

I will be asking relevant officers to investigate how an overarching “Dorset tree strategy” could bring all of this good work together.

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.

Response by Cllr N Ireland

Dorset Council follows the waste hierarchy to reduce, reuse and recycle as much waste as possible, because this is how we will successfully tackle the climate implications of waste and reduce the amount of money we spend on waste disposal. I'm proud to say we are the best performing unitary council in England, so our strategy is working; however, we know there's still more we can do.

Energy from Waste is a waste treatment option that's arguably better than landfilling given that it does produce some power from what is a fairly low calorific 'fuel', but it is also now consequently the UK's dirtiest form of energy production as recently highlighted by the BBC. Giving planning permission and environmental permitting to new incineration plants without requiring carbon capture is contrary to every environmental policy and climate commitment this new Labour government has, and in my opinion is a tantamount to crime against humanity. Dorset Council's efforts to stop the Portland incinerator being built are still ongoing.

Consumption is at the heart of the significant issue of the 66 million tonnes of waste produced in the UK, as well as the climate emergency. Reducing our consumption, and moving to a circular economy, where resources are designed to be re-used and recycled will eliminate waste and the need for waste disposal facilities and their emissions. Upcoming national policy and legislation such as Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) for packaging and Simpler Recycling will help towards this goal.

Notwithstanding, whilst residents continue to produce waste, we have a legal obligation to dispose of that waste, and there are few alternative options available to us. Our black bag (i.e. non-food) waste currently goes to a mechanical biological treatment plant in Canford where it produces refuse derived fuel that is burnt in incinerators. We will absolutely continue to work with our residents to reduce the amount of waste we collect to minimise the impact of incinerating waste in the future.

However, while there is an ongoing need to dispose of black bag waste, we wouldn't want to limit ourselves in disposal treatment options going forward. Furthermore, from a carbon perspective, the proximity principal should be considered in further tendering exercises, where local facilities will have a lesser impact on our service.

In relation to food waste, we have a very successful weekly food waste collection across the council's area and that goes to anaerobic digestion facilities. Unfortunately, not all councils collect food waste; I was in Manchester two weeks ago staying at my daughter's and she has no food waste collection – it goes into the black bag.

Dorset Council has already committed to reducing waste and increasing recycling rates further through our waste strategy. We fully support residents in reducing, reusing and recycling their waste, and work closely with communities to try and deliver this.

If all residents in Dorset simply put the right stuff in the right bins, then we could save over £1m in disposal costs alone, not to mention the benefit this would have to the environment.

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 ?

Response by Cllr S Bartlett

The Government's revised housing targets were published as part of a wide-ranging planning consultation this year and Cabinet agreed this council's response in September. We objected to the proposed housing targets, which would increase the Dorset target to 3,230 homes a year, on the grounds that they were undeliverable and would cause harm to Dorset's environment. The consultation period has now closed and we await the Government's conclusions.