

## **Full Council**

**11<sup>th</sup> February 2025**

### **Questions submitted by Councillors**

#### **Question 1 – submitted by Cllr C Lugg (on behalf herself, Cllr Julie Robinson, Cllr Mike Parkes and Cllr Andrew Parry)**

The A348, Ringwood Road runs through Longham, the centre of Ferndown, and on to Tricketts Cross where it joins the A31. Residents constantly complain about the large number of HGVs travelling through the town, many coming from the port of Poole, and going on to other routes upcountry. After years of trying, last year Cllr Parkes and I persuaded Dorset Council to reduce the speed on this road to 30mph, thanks to Cllr Ray Bryan and the TCF team. A resident who lives along Ringwood Road at Longham, tells me this has had some impact on HGV traffic, as during busy times, it no longer shows as the fastest route.

When the A31 bypass was built, the opportunity to direct traffic away from Ferndown Town Centre was missed. More recently Dorset LEP funded an upgrade to Gravel Hill which was again meant to address the issue. Again, Ferndown were let down.

As well as travelling through the Town Centre traffic has to negotiate Longham Bridge. This bridge is unsuitable for HGVS as only one can traverse the bridge at a time, and there have been collisions, vehicles stuck and frequent damage to the bridge. It needs a weight restriction but as an A road this isn't possible.

I believe that Cllr Bryan, when he was cabinet member for Highways, had conversations with Highways England about downgrading the A348 to a B road, to facilitate a weight restriction.

Will Dorset Council commit to working with National Highways to make this a reality?

#### **Response by Cllr J Andrews**

The current arrangement is that freight traffic travelling to the Port of Poole is signed along the A349 Gravel Hill and traffic leaving the port is signed along the A348 Ringwood Road. Any change to this arrangement would require a joint agreement with National Highways, and BCP Council to sign all port related traffic along the A31 and A349 rather than the A348. However, not all freight traffic is going to the Port and there are other significant industrial estates in the North Poole and Bournemouth area that are more easily accessed via the A348. With limited numbers of river crossings and associated primary routes to and from the BCP area, the impact of any new weight limit on one corridor on the others must be carefully considered.

While we have no intention of downgrading the route at the current time, we will continue to work to deliver highway improvement schemes on Ringwood Road and through

Ferndown town centre that will help to reduce vehicle speeds, improve the public realm and dissuade HGV's from using the A348 in future. We are also investigating what minor improvements could be made to the approach to Longham Bridge to help reduce bridge strikes.

I will ask officers to advance discussions with National Highways and BCP regarding changing the signed freight route and report back to me.

## **Question 2 – Submitted by Cllr M Parkes**

As local ward councillors Cathy Lugg and I would like to fully understand what Dorset Council's intentions are for Victoria Road in Ferndown.

Following our ward member work with the excellent team from Litter Free Dorset we welcome the funds that have been made available to make some improvements with regards to the seating and planters adjacent to the library which has acted as a catalyst for the Town Council to fund the removal of all the trees and replace street furniture in the road.

Many shop keepers and local residents have asked us why the planters and trees have been removed when no consideration is being given to the issues of people parking on the pavements as on street parking was very much a fundamental to any regeneration of the street scene.

Without the planters we are left with a lifeless concrete street which has given the even wider pavements exacerbating the existing inappropriate parking issues.

When Dorset Council publicly committed to the regeneration project in early 2024, officers were actively seeking pots of money they believed could fund the much needed improvements and we are saddened that this activity has ceased to the detriment of our residents however we understand that the Town Council has been promised £89,000 as part of the Capital Leverage Fund to carry out works in Victoria Road which we welcome, although it seems strange that Dorset Council would give money to the Town Council to carry out work on Dorset Council land rather than retaining the project itself.

We now understand that Dorset Council Officers have been tasked with designing the new streetscape. We would like to know what the timescales for the design and implementation and how this is going to be funded by Dorset Council. We'd also like to understand when we will be involved as ward members in a project that we were previously leading on at a local level rather than finding out through third parties as is currently the situation. It does seem like for some inexplicable reason we are currently being excluded from something that sits in

the heart of our ward and that we have both been actively campaigning about for at least the past ten years.

Ferndown's town centre not only serves the residents of the largest inland town in Dorset but also used regularly by its surrounding communities of West Parley, West Moors, St Leonards & St Ives and Verwood. The residents of Ferndown and the wider East Dorset deserve commitment and project ownership from Dorset Council.

### **Response by Cllr J Andrews**

All the trees in Victoria Road were subject to a full tree survey. This confirmed that the health of all trees was deteriorating, and they would all need to be removed within the short to medium term. In addition, all the planters which contained trees were a health and safety risk. As a result of these two facts, it was decided that the safest and most cost-effective decision was to remove all trees and planters immediately.

Dorset Council are currently working with Ferndown Town Council on producing a variety of options for Victoria Road. These will be fully costed and will take account of the current pavement parking. The two councils will work together to identify an appropriate and suitable budget for the work. As soon as plans are available, there will be a consultation exercise with residents and business owners.

Design and delivery is being managed by the Strategic Projects Team within Highway Improvements. Their work being funded by the Local Transport Plan. The design team was briefed in late Jan '25 and are developing the project plan. They intend to contact the Town Council and ward members for detailed scoping discussions to establish aspirations for the area such as holding a Christmas market. This more detailed scoping discussion will help to ensure the proposals meet and accommodate these aspirations. The project programme is in development and it is not possible to give an implementation date at this stage. However, the team will undertake the detailed scoping discussion in late February. The team, in consultation with local members, will approach the FTC in late March to discuss and refine emerging options. It is expected that the feasibility design options will be ready for further public engagement in May 2025 which is to be led by Ferndown Town Council.

This is a joint project between FTC and DC. The infrastructure going in will be owned and managed by FTC and not by DC, therefore it is important that FTC take a leading role in this and involve the DC councillors. The design team will contact the ward members for the more detailed scoping discussions. Joseph Rose also informed Cllr. Lugg that his team were looking at the project on 31 January 2025.

### **Question 3 – Submitted by Cllr M Parkes**

Whilst I appreciate there may be commercial sensitives please can I have an update on the sale of the former East Dorset District Council site at Furzehill which has been ongoing for over five years.

Like most of the elected members in the East of Dorset we would like to understand if this money will be ringfenced for capital projects that would be of benefit to residents in the former local authority's geographical area or whether we will see this money propping up funding shortfalls in places such as Weymouth and Dorchester.

**Response by Cllr R Biggs**

Following a marketing campaign in 2024 the Council appointed a preferred bidder for the site. The bidder is proposing a residential development. Formal approval will be required from Dorset Council Cabinet to proceed with the transaction. Before seeking Cabinet approval and before the transaction can proceed, Council officers are working with the preferred bidder to resolve a public right-of-way claim across the site to the satisfaction of the applicant and the prospective purchaser.

Capital receipts from property disposals are not ringfenced for the benefit of specific geographical areas within the County.

**Question 4 - Submitted by Cllr B Quayle**

**The Blandford Youth and Community Centre**

Will the Cabinet Member for Children's Services formally launch an investigation into the recent collapse of the Blandford Youth and Community Centre? This facility has been an integral part of the community, providing essential services and support to local youth and residents. The abrupt closure has caused significant concern among community members, who are keen to understand the circumstances leading to this decision.

As one of the local members, I ask that you investigate the matter thoroughly and provide a detailed report on the reasons behind the closure, any contributing factors, the steps being taken to address the situation, and how previous Dorset Council funding was used to support the Blandford Youth and Community Centre.

**Response by Cllr C Sutton**

Thank you Cllr Quayle for your question, and I share the concern of community members at the closure of youth club delivered by Blandford Youth Centre Charity. The final decision to close the provision was taken by the trustees, which is their right. As the centre was not run or managed by Dorset Council it would not be appropriate for us to undertake an investigation.

I know considerable efforts were made during the autumn to keep the club open, which you and Cllr Lacey-Clarke were involved in, alongside the then Service Manager for Young and Thriving and the CEO of Dorset Youth Association, which is grant funded by the council to provide support and advice to VCS organisations. Several actions were considered, including how new trustees could be recruited, negotiation with the school about the building costs, and whether the building could be used as a Family Hub - which under the DfE Guidance was not possible.

I can also confirm that the Youth and Community Centre received grants from our Youth Fund in 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024.

I absolutely recognise the impact that this will have on the Blandford community and will be meeting with trustees from the Treads Youth Advice and Information Centre, alongside officers from Children's Services and Dorset Youth Association, on 20<sup>th</sup> February.

This meeting will look to identify how we can work with community partners to mitigate the loss of the youth centre and ensure local young people have access to a trusted adult and a safe place to go, and I welcome your support and involvement in how we address these challenges. The Head of Commissioning for Family Help would also be happy to meet with you to discuss.

#### **Question 5 - Submitted by Cllr B Quayle**

##### **The Veteran Friendly Framework (VFF)**

The Veteran Friendly Framework (VFF) is a collaborative initiative spearheaded by the Royal British Legion, Royal Star & Garter, and the Veterans Covenant Healthcare Alliance. Its goal is to enhance the health and wellbeing of veterans residing in care homes across England. Although there is no specific mandate requiring all councils to have their care providers enrol in the VFF, some councils and care providers choose to participate voluntarily to better support veterans.

The VFF comprises eight standards that care providers must meet to gain accreditation. These standards include identifying veterans' wellbeing needs, addressing social isolation, and providing signposting to local support services, among others.

Can the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care confirm whether Dorset Council mandates our care providers to enrol in the Veteran Friendly Framework? If not, could you please explain why?

##### **Response by Cllr S Robinson**

Thank you for the question. It raises an important point about how well our local residential care sector supports the needs of veterans in their later life. Dorset has a strong connection with the armed forces. Nationally, 8% of people in residential care are estimated to be veterans; for Dorset this would be around 250 people – and probably, in reality, more.

All residential care providers are expected to work closely with residents to understand their backgrounds, interests and experiences, and to build a personalised support plan for them. This should include past armed forces service where it is a significant part of a person's life story. The Veteran Friendly Framework would strengthen this.

Nationally, there are 120 care homes signed up to the Framework. There are none in Dorset. It would appear from this that no local authorities mandate the Veteran Friendly Framework as part of contracting.

We don't have the authority to mandate the Veteran Friendly Framework across all of the 100 or so residential and nursing homes in the county. Because of where we are in the award of contracts under the Dorset Care Framework, the timing would be problematic right now to try and mandate the Framework through those contracts. We can look to build this up over time, however.

As a first step we intend to immediately start raising awareness of the Framework amongst our local residential care sector. Prompted by your question, I have asked the Corporate Director for Commissioning & Improvement for adult social care to make contact with the Dorset Care Association to explore how this can be moved forward. Early engagement has been very positive, and there is a shared sense that local homes would be eager to understand more and engage with the Framework.

#### **Question 6 - Submitted by Cllr R Bryan**

Can the Portfolio Holder for Place Services explain why the failed trial of reducing the cost of parking in a select number of tier three car parks is to be continued.

The word failed is not my word but those of the most senior officer in Place Services and was used at the scrutiny meeting when discussing the result of the trial.

The cost of the failure is circa a quarter of a million pounds.

This resulted in a quarter of a million pounds being unavailable to spend on road repairs or other Highways issues such as pot holes, cleaning drains etc.

When the parking review took place on my watch as Portfolio Holder, we spent a year looking at how we could better control the churn of motorists so that spaces would become available to those wishing to visit the areas for a short time to enable them to shop etc.

The result was to introduce three tiers of car parking charges across the Dorset Council area.

Tier 1 was for the smaller type car parks found in villages and rural areas.

Tier 2 was for the larger towns

Tier 3 was for those areas of high demand of both local and visiting motorists where local people found difficulty finding car park spaces and therefore drove around these areas looking for an available space. Hence burning fuel and emitting exhaust gases into the local air.

To help the local residents we also introduced a totally new system of car parking permits. These were only available to residents and people permanently working in the Dorset Council area.

The result of the failed experiment is reduced income.

Highways repairs feature in the top three priorities in the residents survey so a loss of funding created by this failed exercise was a loss of money to repair our roads.

I am proud of the work of our highways team, we have some of the best maintained roads in the country. These are not my words but words of the many visitors who visit the lovely county of Dorset.

To improve our network of roads we need more revenue for Highways not less.

My question is as the experiment failed and cost money what is the thinking behind the decision to repeat this experiment.

### **Response by Cllr J Andrews**

Thank you Cllr Bryan. We've been clear that we will listen to our residents, and act on what they said in a meaningful and positive way. The trial reduction in car parking charges at Swannery in Weymouth, West Bay Road in West Bay, and Charmouth Road in Lyme Regis shows how we are delivering on this commitment. The reduced charges in those car parks will continue as this has been well received by residents and local businesses.

I've looked at the recording from Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 14 November 2024 and note that rather than describing the trial as 'failed', the Executive Director for Place explained that it would be statistically impossible to link any change in behaviour to changes in car park pricing alone. In the upcoming parking review, part of the scope will involve determining if there is available data that can link car parking charges with local economic activity. Retaining the reduced prices again this summer will allow two years of data to be produced, which will help to give a better understanding of the trial's impact and benefits to local businesses.

Increasing parking charges is always a difficult decision, and I thank you for highlighting that the money generated from parking income funds work like clearing drains and keeping our roads safe. Within the overall changes in parking tariffs proposed for this year, there will be a net increase in the amount of money generated, which will go back into providing the essential services you've described.