

Full Council – 16 April 2026

Questions submitted by the Public

Question 1 – submitted by Geoffrey Chopping

In January 2018, before the East Dorset District Council Offices closed, I submitted a Definitive Map Modification Order Application for a public footpath across Woodleaze Copse and through the offices site to Furzehill Wood. Many witnesses supported the application, several of which are dogwalkers and still use the application route daily. Furzehill Wood is owned by the Woodland Trust and is open to the public.

Since then, I have become a Holt Parish Councillor and Biodiversity Net Gain has become a requirement. Consequently, I am keen to support: the current users of the Application footpath; the interests of the future residents of the new estate; and to protect the considerable wild life which uses the site as a wide wildlife corridor linking the green spaces, which almost totally surround the development site. Although there is some fencing it is mainly fairly porous fencing so that most Wildlife can find a way through, including large mammals.

Over a year ago, when I learnt that the DMMO Application was being claimed by Dorset Council as the reason the current preferred developer had not agreed to formally proceed, I explained that Dorset Council could legally declare the current walkable DMMO application route as a Public Footpath (precisely fulfilling the Application Route), or if they would create a walkable route and declare it along or near the boundaries of the 5 adjacent dwellings and declare it as a public footpath then I would be delighted to withdraw my DMMO Application.

Dorset Council have done neither, even though the Senior Ranger - Green space team East confirmed that the route along the fences was possible.

In the last year, the quantity of vandalization has increased enormously and the police have been repeatedly called.

So far Dorset Council have failed to implement any effective security measures and the vandalization continues unchecked. A manhole cover was missing for a month leaving a deep water filled chamber as a considerable safety hazard.

The Leader of Dorset Council was invited to issue a statement to the Holt Annual Parish meeting, held on 19 March 2026, with an update of the situation including: the DMMO footpath Application;

the position with the preferred developer, who is the Whitelock Group;

when effective security would be undertaken;

and whether Dorset Council has accepted yet that Furzehill is really not suitable for having an enormous quantity of further dwellings dumped in its midst, when there is a complete lack of sustainable public transport and limited local shopping facilities.

No statement was received then, nor has one be received since.

QUESTION: Will Dorset Council explain why it neither attempted to answer any of the questions, nor comment on any of the criticisms?

Response by Cllr S Bartlett

The request for a statement to the parish council meeting was not acted on because it did not come from the parish council itself.

The Definitive Map Modification Order application is still in the queue, and it will take time to work through. We have held several site meetings to look at alternative routes suggested by Cllr Chopping, but we have not been able to agree to these. The proposed alternatives would cause significant disruption to wildlife, vegetation, mature trees and nearby residents. There is also no evidence that these routes have been used as paths, and they would be narrow and difficult to access.

For those reasons, the council now intends to proceed with declaring the original DMMO application route before the land is sold. Discussions about the sale of the site are ongoing.

On site security, regular inspections are already taking place. Because of the high number of break-ins, security patrols have been increased to several visits every 24 hours. We have also approved the installation of five CCTV and alarm units to improve monitoring and deter further vandalism.

Decisions about future housing in the area are part of the Local Plan process. Possible sites are still being assessed alongside public consultation responses and supporting evidence. A draft plan is expected to be considered by Cabinet and Full Council later this year.

Question 2 – submitted by Jenny Murray

On the 16h April 2026 it will be exactly one year since the UK Supreme Court ruled unanimously in the For Women Scotland Ltd v The Scottish Ministers that the terms “sex” “man” and “woman” in the Equality Act 2010 refer to biological sex. (a link to the ruling is here <https://supremecourt.uk/cases/press-summary/uksc-2024-0042>).

The Government has confirmed that organisations should not wait for "EHRC guidance" as the FWS Supreme Court ruling was "crystal clear". The EHRC said the guidance "is just a navigation tool" and the law of the land was determined on 16 April 2025.

We are aware that Dorset Council has established a "A Task and Finish Working Group" for action across this area. Can Dorset Council confirm it is now compliant with the FWS Supreme Court Ruling across all its internal and external policies, internal/external training, data collection, equality impact assessments and is also ensuring that all 3rd party service providers/supply base are compliant.

Response by Cllr N Ireland

Thank you for your question.

Dorset Council recognises the Supreme Court's judgment in *For Women Scotland Ltd v The Scottish Ministers*, delivered on 16 April 2025, which clarified that, for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010, the terms "sex", "man" and "woman" refer to biological sex. We also recognise that gender reassignment remains a separate protected characteristic under the Act.

Following the judgment, the council established a task-and-finish approach to review relevant policies, practices and guidance. This work has included internal communications, reviews of documentation, and actions across our workplaces to ensure facilities and arrangements remain lawful and appropriate.

The council continues to keep its policies and practices under review to ensure compliance with the Equality Act 2010 as interpreted by the Supreme Court, alongside our ongoing duties under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

In relation to external providers, Dorset Council requires all suppliers and contractors to comply with equality legislation as a condition of working with the authority and to keep their practices up to date with relevant legal requirements.

This is an ongoing process, and the council will continue to review and update its arrangements as required.