

## **Full Council – 14 May 2026**

### **Questions submitted by Councillors**

#### **Question 1 – submitted by Cllr A Brenton on behalf of the Local Access Forum**

Under the provisions of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, local highway authorities are required to prepare and publish rights of way improvement plans (RoWIPs). These are the prime means for an authority to identify and prioritise actions to bring outdoor access up-to-date, addressing a range of issues such as recreation, sport, transport, health, economy, land-management, tourism and planning.

A new assessment of the matters set out in these plans must be undertaken every ten years, and the plans reviewed and amended as necessary. The most recent plan for Dorset covered the period 2011 - 2021, meaning that it was prepared long before local government reorganisation. Dorset Council officers carried out the initial consultation on the production of the new plan in 2021 but, five years later, the draft of the new plan has yet to appear for formal consultation. Comments made in 2021 will now be out of date. The timetable has slipped on numerous occasions and the deadlines shown on the website have, yet again, been missed.

The Local Access Forum, was established under the same legislation to advise Dorset Council on the improvement of public access to land and related matters, has been monitoring the situation, has offered its services in assisting with the preparation of the plan, and has regularly asked officers for updates. Given that a well-maintained rights of way network has been recognised as part of Dorset Council's Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology Strategy and that the renewal of the RoWIP is specifically mentioned in the Dorset Council Plan as a key action in responding to the climate and nature crisis,

my question is this: Please can the Cabinet Member for Roads and ROW

1. explain the lengthy delays with the production of the ROWIP; and
2. provide a new timetable for its expedient production; and
3. assure members of the Council and members of the Local Access Forum that there will be no further slippages; and keep the Local Access Forum fully apprised of the process.

#### **Response from Cllr Jon Andrews**

Thank you, Cllr Brenton for asking this question on behalf of the Local Access Forum.

A Rights of Way Improvement Plan is our practical plan for improving and maintaining Dorset's footpaths and bridleways, so more people can use them safely and confidently.

The Council recognises that there has been an unacceptable delay in producing the updated plan dating back to 2021, and I apologise to members and to the Local Access Forum.

The work has taken longer than it should because we have had to pull together evidence and priorities across the whole council new unitary council area and update the assessments and action plan, so they are robust and usable.

We have now reset the timetable.

A draft ROWIP will be ready for consideration by the Place and Resources Overview Committee on 9 July 2026.

Before that meeting, officers will share a working draft with the Local Access Forum for early input and comment.

On preventing further drift: it would not be responsible to give an absolute guarantee, but this timetable is deliverable and is being actively managed.

The Local Access Forum will receive regular updates and sight of drafts as they develop, and if any risk to the timetable emerges, the Forum and members will be told promptly with clear reasons and the next steps.

We will also ensure the public timetable on the council website reflects these milestones.

## **Question 2 – submitted by Cllr R Legg**

Following the devastating fire at Newell House, Sherborne on the 26<sup>th</sup> April can you explain why Dorset Council paid no heed to the warning given by the police and the fire service in September 2025 that the building was at high risk of arson attack? Will you now make a commitment to the people of Sherborne that you will do everything necessary to ensure this uninsured building does not remain as a burned-out wreck for years to come?

## **Response from Cllr S Bartlett**

Thank you for setting out your concerns so clearly and candidly. I fully recognise the strength of feeling within the community and the distress caused by the loss of such a prominent and valued historic building.

After the warnings about the vulnerability of this building last year, council officers in planning and building control worked with the owner of the property and the police to board up the doors and windows on the lower parts of the building to prevent access. Other steps were also taken but these may have a bearing on the ongoing police investigation, so there is a limit to what I can say at this time. Unfortunately, these steps proved insufficient. It is extremely difficult to completely secure a vacant building, particularly when that building is surrounded by a wall and not wholly visible from the public street.

I note your concerns about what you feel may have gone wrong in this instance, but we must remember that the building is private property, and however much we might wish to, the Council is not in a position to step in and take over every poorly maintained building at risk in Dorset.

Council officers are in discussions with the owner of the building and we will continue to work with the owner, the town council and others in the local community who want to help secure a long term, sustainable future use for this building.

Finally, can I say thank you to the emergency services and council employees who responded to this tragic fire. In the hours and days after the fire, council officers from the building control section worked to secure the safety of the building and re-open the road as quickly as possible; planning and conservation officers advised on the best way to maintain what could be saved of the building's heritage value; and employees in the highways team managed the road closure and extensive diversions. In circumstances that we would all have preferred had not happened, our employees responded quickly and effectively alongside the emergency services.

### **Question 3 – submitted by Cllr R Legg**

The Local Plan Executive Advisory Panel last met in December for a briefing on the early messages from the public consultation. Prior to that the last meeting was in May 2025. With the next public stage of the plan process only 3 months away when will members have an opportunity to contribute to the development of plan policies and the CIL charging regime?

### **Response by Cllr S Bartlett**

Thank you for your question. I have always made it clear my advocacy for members across the Council to work together on the emerging local plan to get the best outcome for Dorset, and the Executive Advisory Panel was set up in this spirit. Officers are currently assessing the consultation responses (around 9,000 representations) and finalising the supporting evidence, which is needed to test the suitability of sites, including any infrastructure requirements, mitigation measures, viability and affordable housing targets. We are also considering new and emerging government policies which will have implications for the content of our local plan. This is all essential work that needs to take place in preparing the emerging plan. I will arrange another meeting of the Executive Advisory Panel over the coming weeks, together with an all-member briefing, when we will have a suitably clear and evidenced position to share.

### **Question 4 – submitted by Cllr B Bawden**

I'd like to thank the Cabinet on behalf of residents, businesses, visitors and online admirers to Lyme Regis for the decision to allocate £6.2 million from Community Infrastructure Levy contributions towards the funding of the Cobb stabilisation project, to protect our beautiful town for future generations.

I'd also like to thank the Parking Services team for working constructively with Lyme's business representatives to assess whether reducing parking fees in winter might increase revenue by encouraging more use during less busy months.

Could I ask the Portfolio Holder for Place Services whether he would visit Charmouth and Lyme to see whether we could develop a properly holistic approach to parking enforcement, including:

- preventing the loophole used by holiday lets and Air B&B owners to enable multiple cars to use one residential parking permit
- considering how best to deter people parking all day in 1- or 2-hour short term on-street bays
- prioritising the repainting and installation of double yellow lines to deter thoughtless and dangerous parking on residential streets, posing serious risks to drivers and pedestrians, and
- mitigating the impact of delivery vehicles which ignore the seasonal loading restrictions?

The flip side to trying to resolve parking problems is, of course, to support well-connected public transport services.

The new community weekend night-bus LB1 between Bridport and Lyme Regis, conceived and developed by West Dorset Commons, funded by the

Western Gateway Transport Body and operated by First Bus in collaboration with Lyme Regis and Bridport town councils, launched on 1st May to great excitement.

Would it be possible to work with Devon County Council and Axminster Town Council to extend this service to Axminster town centre and railway station, to enable evening bus connections for rail passengers and ultimately reduce the volumes of car traffic descending on Charmouth and Lyme?

### **Response from Cllr Jon Andrews**

Can I thank Cllr Bawden for her invitation to visit Charmouth and Lyme. I would be very pleased to meet her to discuss the various parking issues she has raised. Mister Britton, the Executive Director for Regeneration, Infrastructure and Growth and the Parking Manager, Mr. Michael Westwood, have agreed to join me when we visit Charmouth and Lyme. (I suspect they think I will buy them an ice cream).

To cover the last part of your question regarding the LB1 weekend evening bus. Dorset Council is very interested in this pilot scheme and will be keen to understand passenger usage in order to assess the longer-term sustainability of this type of service. It is therefore important that the performance of the pilot is closely monitored to build a robust evidence base around demand, usage patterns and financial viability. A clear understanding of these factors would be essential, before any changes or extensions could be considered.

Should the pilot prove successful, we would welcome the opportunity to explore a potential extension of the service in partnership with Devon County Council, local councillors and relevant communities, alongside the bus operator, subject to the availability of funding.

### **Question 5 – submitted by Cllr J Haynes**

In February 2024 I presented to Full Council a paper proposing to charge a double premium on council tax for second homes. The proposal was agreed with some specific changes in an amendment proposed by Cllr Ireland. The details are below:

1. 40% of the additional income from the council tax on second homes in Dorset is allocated to the Housing budget annually.
2. Any unused or unallocated funds from this budget are transferred to Housing reserves at the end of the financial year and ring-fenced for new supply.
3. Any income clearly generated from this budget to be transferred to Housing reserves.

The budget to be used for the following purposes:

- In support of new build, on site, affordable housing from s106 agreements. These properties should be viable however there are occasions when they are not and s106 off site contributions are required to deliver them. In the absence of sufficient off site s106 funding, this budget may be used.
- To spot purchase properties as required for temporary accommodation for homeless residents.
- To be available for matched funding for government grants, as and when they become available, to increase the amount of affordable housing in Dorset.
- To be used in support of increasing the amount of affordable homes owned by Dorset Council with due regard to the need for a Housing Revenue Account.

Following a written response from the Leader to one of my residents it has come to my attention that the sum collected from the second home premium in 2025/26 was £12M. This is great news as only £8M was predicted in the budget and it means some £4.8M of additional funding (being the 40% of the total) should have gone into securing affordable housing for Dorset residents.

As we are now a year into getting this windfall can the portfolio holder inform us how much of this money has been spent yet on actual affordable homes and how many homes have been built/purchased using this money?

How much money has been raised in interest on the £12M and transferred to the housing budget and if the money has not been spent as yet, could we be reminded of the reserves from this windfall in the housing budget?

## **Response from Cllr G Taylor**

Before answering the specifics in your question, I must clarify that of the £12.6m collected from second home council tax, Dorset's share of this was £10m. The remainder is received by the preceptors who are also funded from council tax so; police, fire as well as town and parish Councils. ok

When setting the 2025/26 budget the Cabinet considered how to maximise the impact of further investment into Housing. The approved budget approved at Full Council in February 2025 contained the following investments into supporting housing totalling £3.95m:

1. £1.5m of funding to support Housing transformation resource
2. £1.6m Housing Capital Project Fund
3. £0.75m Capital Funding for Annual Developments (housing)
4. £0.1m of revenue funding to support capital projects

These investments recognise the work required to strengthen resources within the service to maximise the availability of affordable housing across Dorset.

This reflects the anticipated budgeted amount of income and in fact exceeds the 40% commitment on the budgeted £8m.

Your question specifically asks about one element of this, affordable homes and how that budgeted money was spent.

Capital spend was utilised to support the development of a number of successful schemes, including West Farm, Hardy House, The Haven, Penrose and the Bus Shelter.

In total these schemes provided a total of 25 units of Temporary Accommodation, with a combination of shared and self-contained units, for homeless households. These units provided accommodation for Families, Young People, Rough Sleepers and women (only).

Funding was also allocated to bring forward to market, the Extra Care development in Wareham. However, this remains unspent at present but will be carried forward as new proposals are brought forward.

These schemes have cost a total of £3.216m to date.

Looking at the 26/27 budget we have made an additional commitments of £1.4m (in addition to the recurring £3.95m) to reflect our council priority to provide affordable and high-quality housing. This means for 2026/27 the total planned spend exceeds the 40% from February 2024.

We are now reviewing our progress on our council priorities, and we are committed to continue to invest in this vital agenda.

Council tax is billed and collected throughout the year in equal instalments. The Council does not separately identify or accrue interest on any service budgets due to the timing of spend.

### **Question 6 – submitted by Cllr S Gibson**

Verwood has experienced a number of missed bin collections this year with several areas suffering multiple missed collections within a few weeks. One of the reasons that has been repeatedly given is the unreliability of vehicles.

If we want people to use the full range of recycling and refuse services, it is vital that they can trust and depend upon the collection service. The local team do an incredible job but appear to be undermined by multiple break downs of vehicles.

Given that this is a key service for all residents and a service that Dorset Council has typically run incredibly well, what more can be done to support the local team at the Ferndown Depot to improve reliability of the bin fleet?

### **Response from Cllr J Andrews**

Reliable waste and recycling collections are a core service, and where there have been issues in Verwood, I'm keen to address these.

Data for the eastern area shows a modest increase in missed collections earlier this year. This was largely driven by exceptional operational pressures, including flooding, alongside some localised vehicle availability challenges. These were not widespread or persistent, but they were disruptive for some residents.

In particular, the temporary unavailability of the HGV service pit at Nimrod Way has meant some vehicles have had to be taken to alternative workshops across the county for essential inspections and repairs, which has affected turnaround times. Work is underway to reinstate this facility and, in the interim, an additional hire vehicle has been introduced at Ferndown to improve resilience.

More broadly, we are taking decisive action to strengthen reliability. Ferndown has been moved up the Council's route optimisation programme, with work already underway to redesign rounds to ensure they are better balanced and more resilient. These new rounds are planned to go live in early 2027 and will also benefit from the new Blandford transfer station.

Alongside this, we are improving how data is used so that properties affected by disruption are identified early and prioritised, reducing the risk of repeated missed collections.

These measures are about supporting the Ferndown team and ensuring a dependable service for residents.