

Dorset Council, West Purbeck, September 2020 Report v5

Draft Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy

This has now been published, and a target date for carbon neutrality set at 2040. Dorset Council (DC) has published the first draft of their Climate and Ecological Emergency strategy which is available online.

Since the Council declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency back in May 2019, teams of councillors and officers have been working hard via dedicated sector Task & Finish groups to devise this strategy, which will provide the direction, scope and ambition of the Council's action plan to address climate change across Dorset. This strategy brings together a considerable amount of work and recommends areas for action that will deliver a realistic and achievable approach to ensuring Dorset Council (DC) is carbon-neutral by 2040, a full decade ahead of the UK government's 2050 target for the whole country.

Recommendations from the strategy document include (but are not limited to):

Maximise renewable energy opportunities of all DC buildings; convert all off-grid DC buildings to heat pumps or biomass, convert heating of all on-grid buildings to hydrogen-ready hybrid heat pumps, install largest possible capacity solar arrays on every building.

Construct large renewable energy installation on Council-owned land to meet Council's demand.

Ensure Dorset Council supports sustainable development by prioritising social and environmental well-being as well as economic value.

Carry out internal waste audits across our operations and create waste reduction plans.

Increase biodiversity on identified areas of Council land and increase area of Council owned or managed land for ecological & carbon sequestration outcomes.

Change as many vehicles within Council fleet as possible to ultra-low-carbon replacements. Provide electric vehicle charging points and other ultra-low-emission fuel alternatives across the Council property estate.

Look at new ways of working to reduce carbon emissions as people move from home to work.

Encourage green business growth and tourism as Dorset becomes *the clean air place to live and visit.*

Tackling the climate emergency will require significant investment at all levels of society, with Dorset Council needing to invest large sums of money over the next 20 years to become a Carbon Neutral Council. The Council has a key role in lobbying government for clear policy and the financial support needed as we look to a zero-carbon future. We will work with partners to look for support and opportunities for external funding, making sure Dorset gets its fair share.

We will consult the public and key stakeholders in order to gather views on our proposed approach as set out in the strategy. We want to know if residents think we have this strategy right, have identified the correct areas for action, or whether any points are missing or need further consideration.

We intend to do this later in the year following the development of a costed delivery plan. The details within this strategy will be further developed into a set of clear actions to be undertaken by Dorset Council. We will use the 'Areas for action' within the document as a basis for this but will also continue to draw upon the actions raised through our 'Call for ideas' and 'Inquiry Day' sessions earlier this year.

This Action Plan will set out our objectives, specific detailed actions, responsibilities, timescales and performance measures. We will also include details of other key partners required to help deliver these actions, the scale of potential carbon savings and the associated co-benefits.

It is vital to recognise that the world has changed dramatically since we declared a climate emergency over a year ago. The COVID-19 pandemic has left Dorset Council with huge financial challenges that need to be

urgently addressed. Balancing what we need to do to address climate change with our legal requirement to provide statutory services will be a challenge but is key.

Financial Situation

Dorset Council recently outlined its latest financial position, including the impact of the COVID-19 response on budgets. In summary the total cost of the financial impact of COVID-19 to Dorset Council is £60m. This is as a result of additional spending and lost income due to COVID-19:

- Additional expenditure responding to increased demand for social care for adults and children, extra PPE for employees, support for people who were shielding, etc.
- Lost income from suspension of car parking charges, closure of leisure centres and other commercial services, and lower than anticipated income from business rates and council tax.
- COVID-19 has had a very significant impact on Dorset Council. The Government urged councils across the country to do “whatever it takes” in response to the pandemic and Dorset Council acted appropriately, supporting residents, communities and businesses through the crisis.

Dorset Council has so far received two rounds of funding totaling £21m from Government to support the council’s budget pressures as a result of COVID-19. The Government recently announced a third round of £500m funding for local government in England, but Dorset Council has not yet received the full detail of its share of this financial support. It will consist of grant funding (Dorset Council will receive £2.7m), an income support scheme (details to be confirmed), and support for collection funds. However, it is highly unlikely that this will fully address the current year’s budget gap which is now forecast at £43.1m.

Unless additional Government funding becomes available, Dorset Council will have to manage this forecast budget gap using its reserves. The General Fund reserve of £28m combined with other previously earmarked reserves are sufficient to enable the council to continue to operate throughout 2020/21.

While Dorset Council has sufficient reserves to survive this financial year, our overall financial position as a result of COVID-19 is of real concern. It will be unsustainable to take this continued level of expenditure into the next financial year, 2021-22. However, we will continue to explain the financial reality of the situation to government and our local MPs and thereby seek additional funding to reduce the impact.

We will also need to enter into a really challenging budget setting round for next year and future years. This will identify tactical savings and will involve developing a transformation programme which enables the council to meet the needs of Dorset’s residents within the funding available.

Ironman

The following statement was recently issued regarding the IRONMAN 70.3 Weymouth event: -

With the health and safety of our community being an utmost priority, and after further discussions with and direction from Weymouth Town Council and Dorset Council in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, we regret to confirm that the IRONMAN 70.3 Weymouth triathlon originally scheduled for Sunday 20 September cannot take place in 2020 and will return in September 2021.

In a meeting earlier this week, Dorset’s multi-agency Safety Advisory Group was satisfied that IRONMAN’s proposed health and safety measures were well thought through and that participants, staff and the wider public would have been sufficiently protected from potential COVID-19 infection.

However, following discussions at both Dorset Council and Weymouth Town Council yesterday, councillors have requested that IRONMAN reschedule the race to 2021, citing local community concerns around such a large event taking place during the pandemic and their feeling that the timing just isn't right at the moment.

Athletes that are registered for the event are receiving an email with further details. While we are prevented from holding the event in 2020, we are looking forward to providing athletes with an exceptional event experience in the future.

Surgery

We are not holding face to face meetings now. However, we would be delighted to ring and talk to you. Please ring or email us with the subject matter so that we can prepare ourselves. Peter's email address is peterwharf@hotmail.com telephone 07986600799 and Laura's is clllaura.miller@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk telephone 07814 569563.

Peter Wharf & Laura Miller, Dorset Councillors for West Purbeck