

Dorset Council March 2022 Report Final

Dorset Council's budget proposals for next financial year

The budget was approved at Full Council and was not changed from that described in last month's report.

Purbeck Gate - Wool

I am delighted to report that after many years Purbeck Gate has now been formally adopted by Dorset Council. The reason that it has taken this long is because the developers did not meet their obligations in completing the development to the specification that they agreed. They have finally done so, and they have compensated the Council (and therefore you the Council Tax payers) for the uncompleted works.

Community Centre 21 Cologne Road - 6.00 pm 19th April

The Cologne Road Community Group is hosting an evening to enable residents across Wool and Bovington to come along and have a look at the excellent Community Centre facilities which are available to hire at very reasonable cost. There are two rooms suitable for small and medium gatherings together with kitchens and inclusive toilet facilities. There is onsite parking. We look forward to meeting you and having a chat about your requirements over refreshments. Do please consider coming along. We very much look forward to seeing you. Cologne Road Community Group Enquiries tel: 01305 759548

Land searches (When moving House)

The number of working days to respond to land search requests shot up during the pandemic due to a variety of reasons including a massive increase in the number requested and a major shortage of skilled staff who were also being poached from Local government. The response rate is now down to 28 days from 63 last October. It is still some way off the target of 10 days, but we hope to achieve that soon.

Dorset to host first ever Tour of Britain stage in 2022

Dorset will play a starring role when the Tour of Britain, the UK's most prestigious cycle race, heads there for the first time in 2022. The historic county will host the penultimate stage of the race on Saturday 10 September, as the eight-stage event works its way down from Aberdeenshire to the Isle of Wight. Over 100 of the world's best riders will compete in the 18th edition of the race, with a large crowd comprising both local residents and cycling fans expected to turn out for this unforgettable, free-to-watch spectacle. While it may be the modern race's first visit to Dorset, the county welcomed the Milk Race – a semi-professional forerunner of the Tour of Britain – on multiple occasions during the 1970s and 1980s. The full route for stage seven, including the start and finish locations, will be revealed in due course

So please put September 10th in your diaries and expect some roads to be closed. More information as and when it becomes available.

Maintenance of highway verges

Maintenance of highway verges is an important but costly undertaking for Local Authorities. It is necessary for safety as well as aesthetic reasons. With the squeeze on public finance we have much less money to satisfy this demand. Dorset Council are taking an innovative

ecological approach to managing our verges, reducing soil fertility through the collection of grass cuttings, introducing species of flowering plant which restrict grass growth and ensuring low nutrient soils are used in road construction. The result, slow growing, beautiful wildflower verges which attract and sustain pollinating insects, and lower costs as the need to cut verges is reduced.

Maintenance of highway verges is necessary to provide safe passage on our roads ensuring good visibility for drivers and pedestrians. The need to cut verges is linked to the underlying fertility of the soils in which the grass grows. The milder autumns and springs have led to extended growing seasons, and with it, greater public pressure to cut more frequently. Starting from the principle that if we can reduce the amount that grass grows in the first place, we will have less to cut, and this should cost us less, whilst not compromising public safety. Of the four main components of the ecosystem that make grass grow – light, water, temperature and soil nutrients – it is only the soil nutrients we have some control over.

There are two main ways we can reduce soil fertility:

On existing road verges, we can collect the grass cuttings and remove them, gradually reducing the amount of nutrient which fuels grass growth. We can also add plant species such as Yellow Rattle which naturally reduce the amount that grass grows by sucking the life out of the roots.

When designing a new road scheme, or as part of works to existing roads, we make sure the finishing layer of soil is as low in nutrients as possible - or leave it as bare mineral and add some wildflower seed. The ecosystem established will never require high levels of maintenance. This methodology has been introduced successfully on the Weymouth relief road and on the Blandford bypass with fantastic results where verge cutting is required only twice a year compared to the seven cuts previously carried out. Wildflower coverage has increased significantly along with the associated pollinating insects. Since these pilot studies this method of highway verge maintenance has been rolled out across many of our urban verges. It does take a couple of seasons for the results to start to be seen which can make it difficult for members of the public to accept the change particularly where they are used to numerous cuts happening over the summer months. However, the long-term results are aesthetically pleasing, great for the environment and significantly reduce costs.

<https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/countryside-coast-parks/countryside-management/verge-cutting/verge-cutting-information-dorset>

Climate Change

Dorset Council is delighted to welcome Steven Ford as our new Corporate Director for Climate and Ecological Sustainability. Steven has over 18 years' experience of working in public policy related fields and joins us from Cornwall Council where he is currently Head of Environmental Growth, Climate Change and Heritage. In this role, he was tasked with delivering their carbon neutral action plan as well as the wider environmental growth and landscape management agenda, working with a multitude of partners.

Steven's primary objective at Dorset Council will be the successful delivery of our vital Climate and Ecological Emergency (CEE) Strategy, ensuring that ecology and sustainability are placed at the centre of shaping and influencing the climate debate. He will play a leading role in developing natural solutions to address climate change and ensure our ambitious plans for reducing our carbon footprint are fully developed and kept on track by working closely with councillors, senior officers and services across the entire organisation.

I hope that residents see the creation of this role and Steven's appointment as further proof of how seriously we are taking our commitment to tackling the CEE, which will help secure a better future for everyone, especially younger people, in Dorset. I'm excited to see what Steven brings to the table when he arrives in May.

Enforcement

There is little publicity given to enforcement. An East Dorset resident was recently successfully prosecuted for ignoring Planning Enforcement Notice for putting a building on the Green Belt. This followed repeated requests to remove it and was only done as a last resort. Hopefully this will dispel the myth that the Council do not prosecute people who break planning laws.

What can you do to help people who need to leave Hospital?

A huge thank you is being sent to relatives who are playing a valued role in helping loved ones to leave hospital. As health and social care services continue to be stretched due to the exceptional pressures of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and seasonal impact of winter, the role of relatives in supporting patients is key. Relatives play a key role in enabling patients who are medically ready to leave hospital to do so, helping them to recover more quickly in the comfort of their own home. This could include providing some personal care for their relatives in their home, including looking after them during the initial period after they have left hospital. People are making a real difference by supporting with shopping, administering medication, changing dressings, meal preparation, checking on their welfare and wellbeing and having regular contact with them particularly following discharge from hospital.

Cllr Peter Wharf, Dorset Council's portfolio holder for adult social care, said: "When residents are well enough to leave hospital and cannot leave, it can have such a detrimental effect on their wellbeing. "This is compared to recovering in their own homes where with a little help from family and friends, they can feel so much better and can lead to a successful recovery. "Residents have done amazing things for each other over the last few years and such help is invaluable, not only to those coming out of hospital but it then allows a bed to be used by the next patient, which helps everyone. All Councillors are supporting this initiative.

Dorset Tourism Award - Moors Valley

Moors Valley in Ashley Heath won the Dorset Tourism Awards Large Visitor Attraction of the Year <https://www.dorsettourismawards.org.uk/winners> This is a fantastic achievement for the team and great recognition for the work Dorset Council have undertaken with regards to large open spaces / visitor provisions throughout the pandemic. One of our daytime cleaners, Christine, also won the Unsung Hero Award for her efforts throughout the pandemic in ensuring our facilities were clean and hygienic. Christine isn't actually employed by Dorset Council and works for Churchills, who are contracted for our cleaning provisions, but was nominated by our ranger team for her exceptional efforts and attitude over the last 2 years.

Vulnerable women – help available

Vulnerable women in Dorset will benefit from a new scheme which supports them to develop new skills and responses that can help them create a more positive future. Dorset Council has committed to a nationally evaluated programme, called Pause, which works with women who have experienced, or are at risk of, repeated pregnancies that result in their children needing to be removed from their care. The programme aims to give women the opportunity to pause and take control of their lives, breaking a destructive cycle that causes both them and their children deep trauma. There are women in every local authority in the UK with complex and challenging needs to whom many children are born but who are unfortunately subsequently removed into care. Dorset is no different. The mothers are typically disadvantaged and living with social, emotional, environmental and health related challenges. In Dorset, most

shockingly, women who are eligible for Pause support are 36 times more likely to die earlier compared to women of the same age. This includes death because of suicide or domestic violence but also preventable or treatable physical illnesses. Children who are removed into care are more likely to experience outcomes significantly poorer than their peers

Beacon Lighting Event

The Chairman, Cllr Val Potheary, will be hosting a Beacon Lighting event on the evening of 2nd June 2022 at Durlston Country Park to celebrate Her Majesty The Queen's Platinum Jubilee. Town and Parish Councils have been sent the below information and asked if they will participate by registering and lighting their own beacons on this date at the same time, 9.15pm, in their respective areas. The Guide To Taking Part in this event is available to view and download from - www.queensjubileebeacons.com and will be updated on this site at the end of each month as more and more communities, individuals and organisations etc., join the event over the forthcoming months. The beacon lighting and associated activities will take place throughout the United Kingdom, the Channel Islands, Isle of Man, UK Overseas Territories and, for the first time, in each of the Capital Cities of all the Commonwealth Countries on 2nd June 2022. The Chairman would be very grateful if you can promote this in your areas, so that as many people participate as possible.

New Government resource to help keep children safe from sexual abuse

All children have a right to be safe from sexual abuse, and we all have a role to play in keeping them safe. It's estimated that one in ten children in England and Wales will experience sexual abuse before they turn sixteen. That is equivalent to three in every classroom. Most children won't tell anyone at the time of their abuse. That's why it's important for everyone to know how to spot the potential signs of child sexual abuse and where to go to go for support if they are concerned. The Government's new Stop Abuse Together website can help you learn to spot the signs and have regular conversations with your child which can help keep them safe and know when it's right to reach out for more support. If you feel something isn't right, then you can call the NSPCC hotline (0808 800 5000). No matter what's happened, there is always someone who will listen to you and take what you say seriously.

A Local Plan that is right for Dorset – Statement from Cllr Spencer Flower, Leader of Dorset Council

Local Plans are a key component of the planning system. They shape how land use and places will change and develop in the future. This is why I have been, and continue to be, in a dialogue with the Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and his officials, offering a constructive, bold and ambitious alternative for the way we develop our new Local Plan – one that is right for Dorset. In my dialogue with Michael Gove, I have been arguing that the current national planning framework is not providing councils with the means to promote sustainable development through their Local Plans but is instead about chasing housing targets. I am seeking reform of this framework and proposing that Dorset could be a pilot for a new way of creating Local Plans, based on sustainability and local needs over the next 30 years, that also recognises the ambitions of our Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy. We must have a Local Plan in place: without one we face the risk of unmanaged development in Dorset, but it has to be the right plan. Our hard-working and innovative planning officers have ensured the draft Local Plan is the best it can be, but it is constrained by current planning legislation.

As a result, of the unprecedented 9,000 responses our public consultation received, many residents share my view that the draft Local Plan chases housing numbers rather than prioritises local needs. I also believe it is better to have fewer bigger-scale new developments in Dorset which bring in the necessary funding and infrastructure, rather than lots of small

developments which put further pressure on already-stretched community resources. I have asked Mr. Gove to consider several radical alternatives:

- allow Dorset to pilot a radically different approach to Local Plan making break the link between the housing land supply numbers and the Duty to Cooperate – i.e., the requirement for Dorset Council to accept unmet housing need from neighbouring councils
- allow Dorset an extension of two years until April 2026 to give more time for the new Dorset Local Plan to be developed and approved. During this extended period of plan preparation, Dorset should be protected against speculative housing development by suspending the five-year land supply requirement or by other means necessary
- fully recognise the climate and ecological emergency in the planning system, including new building regulations.

We recognise that this is national policy and may require changes to primary legislation, which is not in our gift locally. Representing you is a privilege that I take extremely seriously, and my approach to the Government recognises both my and Dorset Council's commitment to the needs and aspirations of the residents of Dorset. I am a strong advocate for Dorset and remain committed to lobbying for a better deal for the communities of Dorset. Here is the link to the statement on the council's newsroom: <https://news.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/2022/01/26/a-local-plan-that-is-right-for-dorset-cllr-spencer-flower-leader-of-dorset-council/>

Capital Leverage Fund - Dorset Council

Dorset Council has recently launched a new grant fund for voluntary and community groups who are looking to secure funding towards the development, improvement or refurbishment of their facilities, spaces, and community buildings. The Capital Leverage Fund will look to provide successful applicants with a grant of up to 20% of their total project costs up to a maximum of £25,000. Not for profit organisations both small and large who meet the funds criteria are welcome to apply. Applicants will need to demonstrate clearly when applying how they plan to secure the remaining project costs and ensure that if awarded a grant that they can secure the remaining funds within two years of any grant offer. Grants will not be released until all funding is in place.

Full details of the fund's priorities, criteria; eligibility and guidance on how to complete the online application form are provided on the Dorset Council webpage. Furthermore, there is also comprehensive information on what questions applicants can expect to be asked when completing their application form along with details of the assessment dates. The Capital Leverage Fund is an 'open access' fund for organisations in the Dorset Council area and applicants can submit their application at any time between 10th January 2022 and early January 2023. There will be three separate assessment dates throughout the year so please ensure you read the guidance fully and understand what supporting information you will be required to provide when applying. Applications will only be accepted on the council's online application form.

The fund is open to a range of different organisations including Cultural themed organisations such as arts, heritage, and accredited museums. Village halls can also apply to the fund to help with capital projects that might include hall repairs, addressing climate change, new build projects, landscaping or improvements to existing facilities including play areas, multi-use games areas and parking. Sports clubs wishing to improve their club facilities can also apply to the fund. For more details on other projects that are eligible click on the link above.

Places of worship (church buildings) are not eligible to apply. However, the panel will consider 'distinct buildings' used for community activities i.e., a community hall but it must be a separate charity or trust and you must be able to demonstrate extensive community use.

We expect interest for this new grant to be very high, so please can you circulate to any local groups you think might be interested. If having read the guidance you still require further information, or wish to discuss your project in more detail before you apply please contact a member of the teams via communities@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk for Voluntary and Community projects (including play) and LeisureWDWP@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk for Cultural projects (arts, accredited museums , heritage, sport and physical activity) and we'll get back to you.

Council Meetings

From the 15th February 2022 we have returned to in-person committee meetings. One of the successes from virtual meetings was the increase in the number of people viewing the committee meetings live or via the recording. To enable this to continue, webcasting equipment has been installed in the council chamber and meetings will continue to be webcasted. Portable webcasting equipment is also available for our meetings which take place at other venues e.g., for planning area committee meetings. For the purposes of our committee meetings, a hybrid meeting is one that is both in-person and has the ability for people to join remotely from another location via Microsoft Teams.

Members of the public, addressing the committee will also have the option to attend remotely or in-person using the same process.

Surgery

We are not (yet) holding face to face meetings for the moment. However, we would be more than delighted to talk to you on the telephone or via Zoom. Please ring or email us with some details so that we can prepare ourselves. Peter's email address is peterwharf@hotmail.com telephone 07986 600799 and Laura's is clrlaura.miller@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk telephone 07814 569563

Peter Wharf & Laura Miller, Dorset Councillors for West Purbeck