



Dorset Deserves Better

Campaign for Re-think of Dorset Local Plan

Newsletter 3 : 9 February 2022

Highlights

- Surge in support for DDB Campaign – now with 50 partners and 60,000 people
- Interview with Cllr Spencer Flower on “Ask Alfred” – Shaftesbury local radio
- Date for next Alliance Meeting: Tuesday 22 Feb. Put it in your diaries !
- Michael Gove announces Levelling up White Paper
- Meeting planned with Dorset Council Planning department
- Dorset Capital Leverage Fund
- Saving the pub in Broadwindsor

Surge in Support for the Campaign

Last week saw a surge of support for the “Dorset Deserves Better” Campaign. Four new councils – Beaminster, Worth Matravers, Dorchester and Broadmayne – now support the campaign and have co-signed the Open Letter to Dorset Council. This brings us up to 50 organisations and 77 Affiliates, together representing over 60,000 people - treble what we started off with 3 weeks ago !

We are especially pleased to get the support of Dorchester, the County Town for Dorset. The Town Council is strongly opposed to the giant DOR13 development of 3,750 dwellings on a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) just beyond the water meadows to the North of Dorchester.

Site of DOR13 development (foreground), Dorchester in the background



This site has already been turned down twice on viability grounds but has been rehashed by Dorset Council as a potential “Garden Town” site. The location is an especially sensitive area of greenfield farmland with importance for its archaeology and a historical link to some of Thomas Hardy’s novels. There are significant drawbacks to the site from a development perspective, with a lack of existing infrastructure, difficulty of transport provision other than using private cars, impact on the ecology of the area, increase in carbon emissions and concerns re water access plus sewerage run-off into the Frome. The site is not in the AONB or Green Belt but is a “Locally Valued” Greenfield site. There was unanimous support for our campaign at the Town Council’s Planning and Environment Committee Meeting on Monday evening. We hope Dorchester Town Council’s example will spur other parish and town councils to join our campaign.

Spencer Flower Interview

On 26 Jan, Cllr Spencer Flower (leader of Dorset Council) gave a very interesting interview on Ask Alfred (the local Radio Station for Shaftesbury). In it he referred back to an earlier interview on 17 Jan given by Giles Watts of the Dorset Deserves Better Campaign. Cllr Spencer Flower expanded on the [announcement](#) he made on the Council website on 26th Jan and reported in last week's [Newsletter](#).

- [Interview with Cllr Spencer Flower 26 Jan](#)
- [Interview with Giles Watts \(DDB Campaign\) and Peter Bowyer \(CPRE\) 17 Jan](#)

Cllr Spencer Flower said he favoured sustainable developments that serve the people of Dorset rather than chasing housing targets. He talked about how Dorset Council have strong contacts in Central Government and how they want Dorset to become the pilot for developing of a “new type of Local Plan”. The Council has asked the government for an extra two years to prepare the Local Plan and for an exception from the 5-year land supply rule so that they do not get harassed by developers wanting to exploit the delay for their own gain. Spencer Flower expects an early indication of whether their requests will be accepted.



Spencer Flower also talked about reducing housing target numbers but only by the c. 9000 houses they may be asked to build by BCP Council under the “Duty to Cooperate”. He was silent about other problems with the “Standard Method”, such as the ridiculous “affordability index” that forces the Council to multiple its housing target by a factor of 1.38 just because house prices in Dorset are high. He also does not accept that exceptional environmental circumstances should be a consideration in setting the number and siting of new houses.

Of greatest interest was Spencer Flower’s contention that we would be better off having a single large new town of “at least 5-10,000” houses rather than what he calls “pepper-pot” development of smaller schemes dotted around on the edge of towns and villages. His reasoning is that the larger the development, the better the economies of scale and so the developer will be able to afford to provide infrastructure improvements, “affordable” housing, and build more “sustainable” developments. We go some way towards agreeing with him that out-of-town developments such as DOR13 on locally-valued greenfield sites are generally poor value and lead to all sorts of infrastructure issues and high carbon emissions. However, some development on the edge of towns and villages can be very good as it can help to provide housing for local people and maintain the viability of rural communities. Our main contention is that a smaller housing target (22,000 rather than 39,000), combined with more uses of brownfield sites close to existing transport hubs with a good percentage of truly affordable housing, is much more likely to serve the needs of the people of Dorset rather than greenfield developments of executive homes that merely fuel inward migration.

The Dorset Deserves Better Team is continuing a dialogue with Spencer Flower and has organised a meeting with the senior Planners (Hilary Jordan and Terry Sneller) next week. Our main concern at the moment is that the existing Local Plans should

continue to be treated as the basis of development control until the new Local Plan is fully approved and accepted by the Inspector. We are concerned that, if the developers think that the proposals in the draft Local Plan carry weight in planning decisions, then there could be a free-for-all with the developers forcing unwanted and sub-optimal developments on us. Although Spencer Flower's initial statement to us supported this position, his later comments seem to backtrack and "muddy the water" with various "ifs" and "buts". Various test cases are in the pipeline, including the Common Mead Lane example we described in last week's [Newsletter](#). So, we are seeking to clarify how this danger can be avoided.

Levelling Up

This week saw the announcement of the Government's first White Paper on Levelling Up. This makes Spencer Flower's approach to Michael Gove, seeking flexibility in the preparation of Local Plans, rather timely. The last two years have seen the shifting of political attitudes towards the location of housing and other development, as shown by three key factors – the Amersham by-election, where voters revolted against the government because of HS2 and excessive proposals for new housing; submissions to government from Home County MPs under pressure from their constituents to reduce the target number of new houses; and pressure on the government from MPs in northern England to deliver investment to their constituencies. These factors underlie the promise of 'levelling up', of which there has been little tangible evidence until now.

On 2 February, Michael Gove unveiled the Levelling Up White Paper, "setting out a plan to transform the UK by spreading opportunity and prosperity to all parts of it". The White Paper embraces a wide range of policies in the fields of governance, employment, education and many others. It does not give direct comfort to those of us – including Spencer Flower and we in the Dorset Deserves Better Campaign Alliance – who are calling for specific changes in the approach to preparing Local Plan and 'chasing' housing numbers, but it does give strong hints that the location of public investment, and the regulations relating to housing, will change.

For example, the '80/20 rule' which means that 80% of government funding for housing is directed at 'maximum affordability areas' (mainly London and the Southeast) will be scrapped. In addition, much of the £1.8 billion brownfield funding will be diverted to transforming brownfield sites in the North and Midlands. The government will legislate to ensure that all homes in the private rented sector will meet a 'Decent Homes Standard'. It will commit to building more genuinely affordable social housing. It will give local authorities the power to require landlords of empty shops to fill them if they have been left vacant for too long. The White Paper pledges that, by 2030, local public transport connectivity across the country will be significantly closer to the standards of London, with improved services, simpler fares and integrated ticketing.

The parts of the White Paper which are closest to our aspirations, as stated in our Open Letter to the leader of Dorset Council, include:

“We will explore what further measures can make high streets and town centres the thriving hearts of our communities again, including ways to incentivise landlords to fill vacant units.”

“Ensuring natural beauty is accessible to all will be central to our planning system, with improved Green Belts around towns and cities, supported by Local Nature Recovery Strategies reflected in plan-making, and woodland creation supported across the UK.”

“Building on this White Paper, we will publish the second report on rural proofing in England this spring. This report will set out how government departments are working to support levelling up in rural areas, through targeted approaches where needed, and how we are strengthening the rural economy, developing rural infrastructure, delivering rural services and managing the natural environment.”

Although these are fine words, we will be watching to see whether the White Paper is followed by policies and actions which meet the aspirations that we have stated.

Dorset Council Capital Leverage Fund

When Dorset CAN, supported by many other organisations, responded a year ago to the draft Climate Strategy and the draft Local Plan, we placed high importance upon sustaining the vitality of local facilities and services in all Dorset settlements. We also urged Dorset Council to bring forward funding support towards the improvement of local facilities and to encourage local communities to pursue green targets in the Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy. So, we are pleased to see the launch of the Capital Leverage Fund described below, and we offer two examples of what the passion and commitment of village communities can achieve to sustain basic services and improve the local environment.

In January, Dorset Council announced the launch of a new Capital Leverage Fund to support community projects throughout the County. Not-for-profit community and cultural organisations can apply for grants to deliver new and improved facilities for their local communities. Grants of 20% of the capital cost are available for enhancing or renovating village halls or community buildings or for new build projects such as car parks, play areas, multi-use games areas, community sports clubs, sports pitches and landscaping. The Fund will also welcome applications for projects that help to address climate change themes, new public art, or heritage capital projects including accredited museums.



You can apply for a capital grant of between £1,000 and £25,000, to fund up to 20% of your total project costs. For more details, click [here](#).

Saving the White Lion pub in Broadwindsor

The people of Broadwindsor have shown in recent years their determination to sustain and enhance services in the village. When the only village shop closed nine years ago, and the owner was unwilling to sell at a viable price, the community bought the former telephone exchange and converted it into a thriving community shop.



Four years ago, they built a brand-new multi-use games area. Funds for these two ventures were raised from various sources, including European funds through the Southern Dorset Local Action Group, which closed down following Brexit.

Late last year, the village was threatened with yet another closure, when the landlord of the White Lion pub departed and Palmer's Brewery decided to close it. A group of villagers, led by David Leader Vice-chairman of the Parish Council, formed a Save the White Lion group and have managed to raise £36,000 through crowdfunding in just two weeks of effort. They are about to sign a tenancy agreement with Palmers Brewery, will refurbish the pub through voluntary effort, and aim to reopen for business by Easter.

Parish Council promotes tree planting

Corscombe and Halstock Parish Council recently completed the planting of a hedge around Corscombe village playground. It then promoted the planting of further native trees by householders in the village. On Sunday 6 February, 50 householders gathered at the village hall car park to pick up trees to plant in their gardens, as part of a mass order of 236 trees provided by Beaminster Area ECO Group.



Michael Dower, from the ECO Group, said, "This is our third season of planting in Corscombe and Halstock Parish. In the previous years, we delivered larger clusters of trees for planting by several smallholders in the parish. It was lovely to see so many people keen to enrich their gardens with native plants. Netherbury and Mosterton parishes are also receiving trees from us this year."

Campaign Information

New Pan-Dorset Campaign Alliance Meeting

The next pan-Dorset meeting of the Dorset Deserves Better Campaign Alliance will take place on Tuesday 22 February at 7.00-9.00pm. We will send all Alliance Partners a formal invitation but anyone who wants to attend can join us. The main objective will be to revise our Campaign Strategy given the extraordinary events that have taken place over the last 2 weeks, namely the public statement by Cllr Spencer Flower and the burgeoning of the Campaign Alliance.

Campaign Communication

The main page for Dorset Deserves Better is <http://www.dorsetcan.org/ddb>

For general enquiries and communications, email: dorsetdeservesbetter@gmail.com

For media enquiries, or sharing social media content email: mediaddb@gmail.com

For the news release & Open Letter go to: <https://www.dorsetcan.org/ddbpr>

Send us your news on: dorsetdeservesbetter@gmail.com

Social Media

To keep up to date with the Campaign :

- Visit our website at: <http://www.dorsetcan.org/ddb>
- Follow all of our social media posts at:
 - Twitter: @Dorset_CAN;
 - Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/147832150657785>
 - Instagram: @dorset_can;
 - Snapchat: @dorset_can;
 - Dorset CAN (Climate Action Network) Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/DorsetCAN>

Join the Campaign

If your organisation wants to join the campaign, please fill in and submit a form here:

<http://www.dorsetcan.org/link>. Individuals can join the campaign at:

<https://bit.ly/DorsetDB>

Join the Campaign Team

Please write to us at dorsetdeservesbetter@gmail.com if you can help us with the campaign especially:

- Gathering news from partners and preparing the weekly newsletter
- Research to strengthen our arguments as we build the campaign.