

DORSET ACTION

Tackling the climate & ecological emergency together

<https://dtaction.co.uk/local-plan/>

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SUBMISSION TO DORSET COUNCIL ON THE DRAFT LOCAL PLAN.

ON BEHALF OF THOSE WHO ATTENDED THE LOCAL PLAN PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLIES IN FEBRUARY/MARCH 2021.

Introduction

On 28 February and 6 March 2021 Dorset Action held two People's Assemblies to consider and respond to the draft Dorset Local Plan. The idea for these assemblies was initially suggested by Councillors across Dorset attending the Climate & Ecological Emergency Support meetings, who identified a need for fully interactive public engagement. In total just over 70 members of the public attended the assemblies.

The importance of people making their own individual submissions on the plan was stressed. With information being given on the process for doing this. One of the key aims of the sessions was to "de-mystify" the local plan which had been considered confusing and difficult to engage with.

This submission is therefore a 'collective' response on behalf of all those who attended the assemblies.

Dorset Action facilitators also helped Corfe Castle Parish Council and The Swanage Area Forum to hold assemblies for their local communities. They are using the outcomes from their assemblies to make their own submissions as part of the Local Plan consultation.

A powerful visual image of how participants felt

At the start and end of each assembly those present were asked to give three words to describe how they were feeling about their vision of Dorset and the draft Local Plan. The words were put live onto Mentimeter Interactive Presentation Software. This produced 'word clouds' showing the predominance of individual words used to give a picture of the feeling of those present. The two 'pictures' below are a consolidation of these exercises from both assemblies. The 'before' and 'after' pictures illustrate how feelings changed as a result of participating in the assemblies.

People's Assemblies are inclusive, everyone is listened to

A principle of People's Assemblies is that everyone is treated with respect and has an equal opportunity to have their opinions heard without judgement or 'blame'. Facilitators are trained to ensure that everyone who wants to voice their feelings is given the space to do so. In attendance at the assemblies were several councillors (Dorset Council, Town and Parish councils). Councillors are of course experienced at voicing their opinions and speaking in front of others. So it was good to know that those 'non-councillors' present felt that they were equally able to make their voices heard and have their opinions listened to.

- *Thank you for running this and giving me the confidence in expressing my views.*

During the 'main room' discussions and smaller 'break out room' discussions facilitators took notes of all the contributions made. Throughout this submission the words of participants appear as bullet points. In all 449 individual contributions were recorded. So the ones in this document have been pulled out to reflect the general feelings, views, concerns of participants.

The aim being to provide a qualitative submission on the draft Local Plan that identifies and reflects the whole range of feelings and views of those it will ultimately affect – the people who make up our 'Dorset' and local communities.

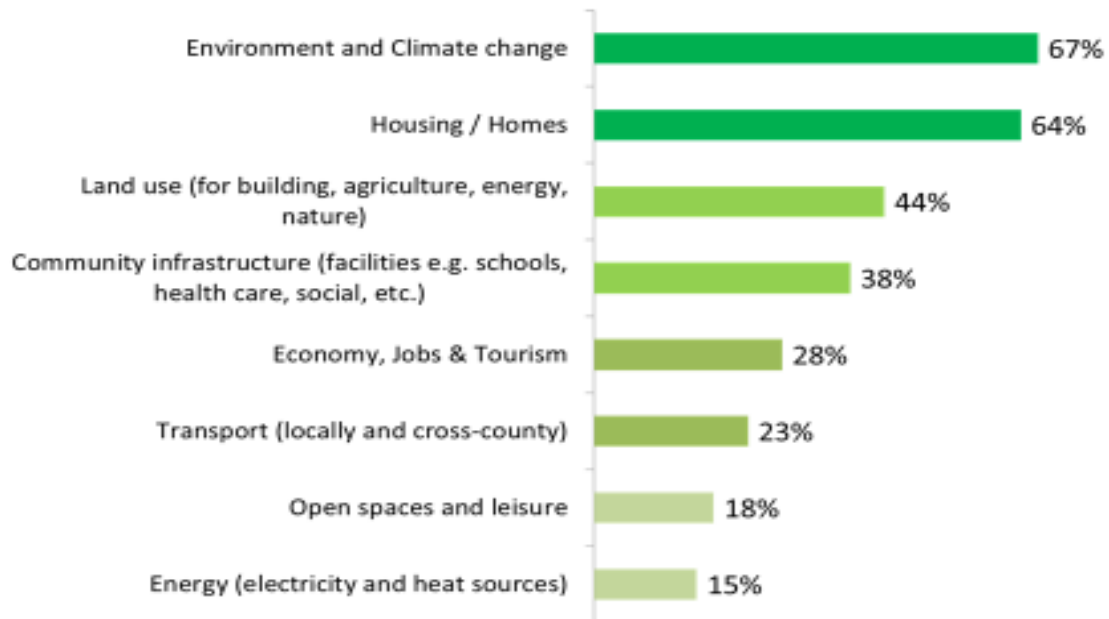
The empowerment and energy that communities can gain from attending and being part of a People's Assembly was acknowledged by one of the Councillors present:

- *Thank you all. This has been very powerful. I think you should ask Dorset Council to engage in People's Assemblies in various places as part of the next consultation phase. Talking to councillors at formal meetings can be scary for people. But this is different and shows we can talk and listen to each other equally. It's a great non-threatening way to take people forward.*

The Local Plan covers a whole range of topics as well as looking at each local geographical area. It would not have been possible to cover in detail all of these at each assembly. Participants were therefore asked to think about the main topics in the Local Plan and say which three were most important to them. They voted on a live platform and this was then used to determine which topic areas would be used in the break out rooms for detailed discussion.

The graph below shows the consolidated priorities that came out of this exercise:

Which aspects of the local plan are the most important in your view? (select up to 3)



The fact that Environment and Climate Change came out as top priority is indeed significant. It shows that people in Dorset are taking the emergency seriously and want to see strong leadership from our council to do all they can. As noted elsewhere in this submission, the almost total lack of linkage in the plan to Dorset Council's Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy and Action was of great concern to the participants.

At the separate Assemblies held by Corfe Castle Parish Council and Swanage Area Forum the 'top priority' exercise came out with the same top priorities.

For the facilitated break out room sessions participants were asked to consider two questions:

1. *What is your **overall vision for Dorset's future**? How should we live? Please be as creative or practical as you want to be.*
2. *In relation to your key topic: What do you think your local community, e.g. town or parish area, and the wider county needs **in order to achieve the future vision for Dorset**? (and) consider how does your approach to this topic **reduce carbon emissions** / improve our **natural environment** or help us cope with the **impact of climate change**?*

So all the break out rooms covered Environment and Climate Change. The only two key topic areas that it was not possible to cover in a dedicated break out room were Energy, Economy, Jobs and Tourism. Although elements from both these topics did emerge from discussions on the others.

The sections below cover the main comments, concerns and feelings that came out of all the 'big room' discussions and individual break out rooms.

Concerns on Dorset Council's Consultation Process and the actual draft Local Plan document

There was much concern at the actual process being followed for the consultation. A number of participants said they felt 'disenfranchised'. There was a call for a relaunch of the whole process. Many had tried to use the on-line portal to make a submission and had found it cumbersome and very difficult. It's a huge document that many felt was just not easy to read or understand. The fact that there is no 'save' button for those using the portal was raised and clearly this will just put people off using it.

As well as this given the current Covid situation face to face consultation events have not been possible so only those with access to the internet can really take part. Having a few copies in some libraries was just not felt to be acceptable.

Some participants had attended/viewed the webinars and were very positive on their content. But recognised that again it would only be those with internet access and digital skills that could join in.

Facilitators pointed out the word-doc form that has been provided and can be completed and sent direct to the planning team by email or printed and posted. Some said that the word form was far better but had struggled to put things into the boxes because of the format it had been created in. One of the facilitators had already heard about this and had taken the form and re-done some of the formatting to make it more user friendly. A copy was posted onto the assemblies chat.

Several councillor participants said that there was plenty of 'headroom' in the overall timetable to produce the final plan for submission to have either extended the first phase consultation period or to have waited a few months. In the hope that it won't be long before public meetings and more accessible consultation methods can again be used. The rush to push this through was feeling like a tick box exercise.

It was noted that there will be a second phase of consultation and participants wanted to know if Dorset Council would learn from the experience of the first phase and run a more democratic second phase consultation.

- *Dorset Council planners admitted in a presentation to (Dorchester) Civic Society that they were under pressure from the UKGOV to get the Local Plan done. It seems they didn't push back in light of the constraints of the pandemic!!*
- *Why has Dorset Council missed out the "Issues and options" consultation stage?*
- *This plan is being rushed through without proper information being disseminated to people. When the last Local Plan was proposed there were roadshows and the village of Charminster has the biggest turn out. Most working people in the village are struggling to get through their day during lockdown and do not have the time or energy to read through the local plan - also some do not have access to a computer. Is this really democracy?*
- *Everything you said about the online survey is true. It's impossible for ordinary people to deal with*
- *We need a rerun of the present consultation, the next consultation is simply on the plan before examination. From a planning point, in practice, it's too late*

- *The Plan was written by planners, it is bits joined up together they are often not current thinking. Out of date. Too many sections so difficult to read as a whole Plan. It is as demanded by central government not really locally designed*
- *The next consultation is signing off the draft document before examination so if we want a serious consultation, we need to suspend this one and relaunch afresh. Needs to be about engagement and empowering the community.*

There was a clear feeling that participants would have wanted to see a process that actually started with local engagement and discussions on what the community wanted to see in the draft plan. Then for this to be used to produce a draft plan. Then for that draft to be sent out for consultation.

One attendee summed up the views of many participants regarding their concerns for the validity of the consultation, and this echo's the question put to Full Council in February by David Tooke which queried the legitimacy of this consultation process.



Vision for Dorset's Future

“A green and pleasant county for future generations. We must give them the ability to be here”.

Above quote from one participant. A good summary of the wide ranging discussion on a vision for the future, our future, a future for our children and grandchildren.

There were lots of comments on prioritising the needs of our young people. Too many grow up here then have to move away for education, jobs, housing and in many cases for all three of these drivers. They want a county where young people can stay and work and thrive, not just 'survive' or have to move.

Participants described a vision that creates more sustainable communities in our villages and towns. Linked with decent zero carbon transport options. They described a county that is truly carbon neutral by 2030!

A vision where there is investment in skills and training and the creation of employment opportunities that create a **cleaner, greener future**. They clearly said we can no longer only rely on the low paid tourist industry. But a vision that creates

a Dorset that is an exemplar for eco-tourism would be something positive to strive for.

- *My main overarching criticism is that the draft plan contains no vision of what we would like Dorset to be like in 20 years' time*
- *Addressing Climate and Nature Recovery should be of higher priorities in the plan*
- *Too often people are very negative about planning and planners. We must regard this as a positive process where we get a say in what matters most. We can't waste time arguing about how many houses we need or how long the consultation can last let's make positive comments about what we DO want - not just what we don't want!*
- *Sustainable environment yes, but people need quality work. Youngsters move to get work and don't come back so need work.*
- **Carbon negative by 2030.**
- *Villages are where people live and have communities and friends. This is where facilities and employment are needed. They need to be live, active places with people who know each other and care for each other*
- *We live in the town but we need to have more **house building in the smaller towns and villages** to keep them alive so people don't always have to go to Dorchester to shop or go online and so the villages don't become just homes for the elderly who can't get out and about. Need to keep village facilities to keep them going. It's not just about the bigger towns. Housing must be affordable. Housing becomes a bank account and it's hopeless for people.*

One group was very clear and said they didn't just want a future that is 'cleaner', they want a future that is 'clean'. The Local Plan is a key vehicle to pull this all together and make it happen, but whilst participants wanted to be positive there was a clear feeling that the current draft plan does not achieve this

Housing/Homes

Certainly a very controversial and complex topic. The discussions on this were not around 'we need housing but not in our area'. There was recognition and understanding that we need homes, certainly as a priority for our younger community members. So they can stay in our area and feel confident to grow their families and their lives and feel secure.

One participant spoke with passion, and probably summed up nicely the main feelings of many others:

- *Pause development until all existing property is retrofitted and redevelop existing homes, dividing larger homes and banning second homes sitting empty. They should either be rented or sold. 1 in 10 people in the UK own a second home! Dorset Council need to stand up to Parliament and say no to any new substandard homes. Dorset Council needs to advise residents which solar and heat pump providers to trust as people don't get these as they fear cowboys. New build to exhaust brown sites before spreading onto green sites. Homes on green sites should be passive and have space for each to grow*

food and options for communal living. New developments to create space for nature.

Issues explored in the discussions covered:

- Brownfield sites should always be used first
- Remove red tape barriers to retro fitting for existing homes (big issue here for listed buildings and conservation areas)
- **All new dwellings to immediately be built to life time standards and be carbon neutral without fail**
- Dorset Council to really challenge the numbers on how many homes are truly needed to meet local need
- Stop building developments just for people to come and buy to invest, it doesn't meet local need, it pushes up housing prices
- Stop second homes! Do whatever it takes to achieve this, others councils are taking action, it can be done
- Need to include 'holiday lets' into the second home figures to get true picture of the problem
- Don't build huge new developments on natural flood plains or areas of beauty
- Build to sustain our villages
- Housing near jobs, schools, health care and other community facilities
- Define exactly what is meant by 'affordable housing'
- Stop developers being able to default on affordable/social housing units
- Start again on assessing how many homes are really needed, the figures being used are out of date and incorrect
- Be clearer on what exactly housing need is
- Recognise the high level of private sector rents and how developers are driving this up and pricing our local people out of the market and in many cases out of the area!
- Deal with those developments that already have planning permission but where developers are holding onto the land and not building
- Do more to use current homes/buildings that are empty

Great concern on how to provide adequate and affordable housing for young people. They are our future and we need them here. We need them to have jobs that pay well. We can no longer survive as a low income community.

This participant provided a personal example of the difficulties young people are facing:

- *My wife and I work very hard and we have to pay £1,000pm in private rent,. It's crushing us and is already holding back our children from opportunities as we simply can't afford certain activities etc. We're facing over £400,000 of rent in our lives (if we're lucky) - we'd love to own a decent house if someone would give us a chance...!*

Having a Local Plan that would address this sadly typical scenario being faced by young people in our area should be the vision and aspiration for Dorset Council. Participants at the assemblies did not seem confident that it would:

- *Disappointed that no early consultation on vision and objectives. Disappointed that local housing need is not being addresses instead it's a developer's agenda. There must be controls on further second homes, to do nothing will lead to unsustainable development*
- *Housing was turned into an investment commodity from the 1980s onwards. The land owners and developers have created unaffordability - they cannot be expected to create affordability now*
- *I am concerned that not only is Dorset Council going to consult with Town and Parish Councils but also the developers. We should be telling them what we need not them telling us what they want to build*
- *It appears to be a developer's charter to allow second homes and unaffordable houses to be developed on our valuable green spaces*
- *Housing developers have too much power, they have consent in many cases but are not building. Brownfield sites should be used first. We need a land tax*
- *Green and pleasant county. Well protected. Like AONB and heritage sites. Proposed numbers far too high and does not represent genuine housing need. Developments don't go to local people, get sold off for second homes. More research needed. In Purbeck developers admitted they just want to build second homes to increase their profits.*

“Let's not be naïve -the Local Plan process is about development that is compliant with government policy. Such policy is unduly influenced by the development lobby and some think tanks like the Policy Institute. Dorset Council lack courage to develop an alternative approach based on local housing needs. We have to ask why Dorset Council are so afraid of developing approaches that suit the needs and aspirations of local residents”. A good summary comment from one participant.

Land Use

Use of land for housing and how much is really needed, was a major part of this discussion. Also whether the Local Plan has got the balance right between designating large developments near a few towns or spreading more to sustain villages. As well as identifying the need to actually challenge the volume Government say is needed for Dorset. There were different views on these points.

- Migration into Dorset has been an issue historically. This creates a need for more housing. If the new housing is taken up by more migrating then the fear is that those local people in greatest housing need are still not being housed.
- Poundbury is so empty of permanent residents. There are so many second homes there. It is a lonely empty place. I say ban second homes that way we won't need to build so many homes.
- Dorset County's statistics show the area of the county is 2,500 square km. 75% is agricultural. National statistics show that in England only 5% of all land is built on for housing, industrial, facilities etc use. Applied across all Dorset, this suggests you could add at least half as much land again for building with little noticeable detriment to the overall countryside and settlements
- The housing need around Dorset could have been satisfied with more of a spread of development around smaller towns/villages which appears to have been discounted. Does this come back to the implementation of development

boundaries at an earlier time? Do we think it's a good idea to use the land around villages to allow them to grow with housing, employment and community facilities?

Using more 'brownfield' sites for housing was discussed with one participant feeling that all brownfield sites should be used before any building takes place on green field sites.

Thinking forward on land use rather than just planning for the immediate future was commented on. Whether current plans are being proposed on accurate and up to date information was questioned.

- *If fossil fuel powered cars are to be eliminated by 2030, then car parks will be in less demand*
- *Consider change of use for such as car parks. Could be covered with PV solar array as a source of energy*
- *The evidence is out of date; cobbled together from old district council figures – some from 30 years ago*
- *The register of 'brownfield' land is not up-to-date; eg council-owned 'brownfield' land in Wimborne is not on the register*
- *Anticipate autonomous vehicles that can be summoned to your door or the supermarket or wherever: fewer vehicles, less energy use, less need for road space. Roads could be put to new uses*
- *Several sources of evidence are disputed, inadequate and/or out of date. When the climate and ecological emergencies are taken seriously, privately owned land will have to be subject to instructions (or incentives) – less pasture, more trees, more wilderness.*

Many comments on water levels and flooding issues. Concern that data used is not up to date or accurate. Again feelings that no point in having a plan that takes account of now, need to be looking forward at least 20 years and starting to work now on those predictions.

- *Strategic flood-risk assessment (2008) Evidence out of date. Flood-prone land should not be built on.*
- *River flooding, such as of the Somerset Levels ten years ago, is best managed in the higher reaches with 'leaky' dams and trees to absorb carbon dioxide.*
- *River Stour is under great stress.*
- *Flooding by inundation of the sea with growing dangers of continuous sea level rise and more powerful storms*
- *We already have problems with flooding and with an extra 3,500 houses (Dorchester) there's no way it won't flood somewhere. We swing from drought to floods. In times of drought, the water table can be very low – what about the water supply for these houses?*
- *Beavers on the Isle of Purbeck (good) but 'flood meadows' are often historic. Planting trees on them is not always the answer.*

The group want to see more imaginative use of land that protects the environment and provides the green economy that is needed for the future. Also concern that the

draft Local Plan does not take any real account of ecological and biodiversity issues in proposals for land use.

- *More sustainable energy. Corfe could have wind generators on Beacon Hill*
- *Award grants to remove hard surfaces and dig up driveways*
- *We should have a new recycling plant*
- *Connection between agriculture, land use and food. We are one of the least healthy countries in Europe eg heart attacks, obesity etc. How do we make the connections? All the topics are connected but they don't seem to be connected in the local plan*
- *There is currently 38k ha of solar proposed but if we get the balance with agriculture wrong, we can end up importing food that could be grown locally.*
- *Returning to the climate emergency, the local plan ignores the fact there's an ecological emergency. There's no comprehension of the level of destruction that's happening.*

Some discussion on land for retail and feeling that the plan does not take account of the changing nature of our high streets. There is no forward vision for these areas other than a picture of what traditionally high streets looked like.

Strategically pulling it all together is not easy and the group recognised that. Perhaps a totally different way of developing complex strategies is now needed. Using the same methods and processes as before, which have not necessarily worked in the past, will just give us the same result. Time for a totally fresh rethink.

How land is used is crucial. We are a rural area and need to recognise the importance of that. What works for a city may not work for Dorset.

- *We need sustainable land use in all its senses incorporating economy; community; facilities; infrastructure; population growth; environment*
- *Dorset Council need to rethink how land use is redesigned from the bottom-up rather than a top-down approach*
- *We should be planning for land for nature recovery at the same time as housing and jobs with an holistic approach to planning*
- *We want an up to date rural-based local economy. You can't achieve the aims of your vision with aspiration alone, you need to have an economy that will attain your aims. Anything that enables the Dorset Council area to provide real wages. The conventional wisdom of the Local Plan system does not reflect that aspiration.*

Community Infrastructure

A big concern from this group was that when housing developments are proposed and are agreed because local infrastructure is promised, the housing gets done but the infrastructure gets lost. The Local Plan should be strong enough to stop them doing this. A good recent local example was given by one participant:

- *We were supposed to be having a new health centre, but the Section 106 agreement was not signed so the developer is just not doing it. So the housing comes first and then we lose the infrastructure.*

The same point was made on affordable housing. It's in the outline planning that then gets agreed, then at a later date the developer says they can't make the overall costs stack up on the site, so they will have to reduce the affordable housing and they get away with this. So everything is driven by the developer's profit margin and not by local need. The group felt it is local people who miss out when affordable housing is lost because the price of market housing is so high it's beyond the reach of local people getting the local average salaries.

There was a good discussion on repurposing current infrastructure to update and make it fit for modern demands. For example it's important that our villages aren't left to wither or just become dormitories for second homers. We have a good network of village halls for instance, and some of them have been upgraded to provide all sorts of local amenities – cafes, educational venues, meeting and social space, even weekly drop in shops. This should be encouraged and money put into local communities to do these things. Coupled with looking for land that could be used for small work spaces. It would all make for more sustainable local communities.

It has now been shown that for a lot of people working from home is possible. If not full time, for some of the time. That raised **serious issues about digital accessibility in Dorset. Improving this has got to be a top priority.**

More thinking and research needs to be done on road and affordable public transport. The past loss of small railway lines was regretted. We don't have major roads in Dorset, so all traffic, cars and HGV Lorries, come through small areas creating blockages and pollution. Reducing traffic like this is imperative, but must be balanced with employment needs.

- *We need to concentrate on the young. There is now more working from home. We're getting smothered by HGV Lorries. Need a road to take them away. Need something to go straight up to M5. We are not a well off County, our jobs are poorly paid. We don't just want masses of people coming here. We lost our only village shop. We have a mobile post office coming once a week. We have a village hall. We use the hall for coffee.*
- *I want more emphasis on public transport and trains. Would like to think people will use cars less in the future.*
- *We need local jobs and schools, to create genuinely sustainable and affordable communities.*

There was an example of housing being built in an area with very minimal public transport. So only people with cars were interested in them. That doesn't help the environment or the local people who don't have cars. Any local facilities that are there will die because people with cars will go to the towns and then people without cars are stranded.

In the past village areas were more sustainable in terms of generating local power. We used to have a lot of little water mills. The infrastructure for some of these is still visible. During the pandemic at the start when flour was not readily available the water mill at Sturminster Newton was started again and they produced flour. It can all be done with the political will and some imagination and engaging with local communities. Empowering them to just get on and do things with quite often minimal seed funding.

- *I worked on proposal for us to have a village hall and how it would serve the village. And build it to cope with extension of the village. That is the way forward. It's taken us 30 years to get a sense of community here. We need something to bind the community together.*

So just building houses is not enough. But participants were expressing concern that the draft Local Plan does not include enough on how the needed infrastructure will be provided and how it will be funded. If the plan is not robust enough on this then there is a real fear that we will become an elderly, second home dormitory. There are examples already of villages where there are more second homes than local people trying to live and make a living there.

For the towns similar fears were expressed. One participant said that in and around Weymouth there are now several large estates with more than 1,000 houses and more housing development is being “imposed from on high”. But how can this new housing be made viable without the local work to go with it. There is little employment land in Weymouth and it seems a lot of that is being re-designated as retail. This brings some jobs but high streets are now under threat as the retail industry moves to digital trade.

- *So when Chickerell is full of houses everyone will have to drive to work in say Poole. But I thought the idea was to have housing and jobs near to each other. Each development should have its infrastructure within walking, cycling distance.*

So little confidence that the draft Local Plan is going to deliver a joined up, defensible strategy on the required infrastructure being provided alongside the high numbers of proposed housing in the plan. Also little confidence that the draft plan actually sets out the current infrastructure for each area and if it is currently adequate and if not what it needs to look like for the future.

Good community infrastructure does what it says on the tin – it creates a thriving community. It should be a major factor in the draft plan. Not an afterthought or second place to meeting the needs of government and/or developers.

- *The future is not for us, it's for our future generations. I want to see a Dorset affordable for them. Housing and transport. Most children leave. A county with **housing and infrastructure** for our future.*

Transport

The group looking at transport didn't feel that there is any coherent transport infrastructure at the moment and none given in the draft Local Plan. They want to see a plan setting out low carbon public transport, reaching between our towns and out into the rural areas. Particularly rural areas where housing is planned.

- *We need smaller buses that are more frequent and are electric*
- *We need local car clubs*

Grid locks in town centres must be eliminated. The aim must be for traffic free town centres. There should be shuttles going into town centres from external car parks.

The feelings here were about reducing the appalling traffic pollution that is present and harming all of us on a daily basis, as well as rejuvenating and reshaping our town centres to meet the current ways that we live and socialise.

- *Those that can afford should not get free bus passes*
- *Monies paid by Dorset to bus companies should reflect the actual cost*
- *We need a transport plan that is general and flexible and is enabled to take full advantage of technology advances*

The group thought wider than just public transport and considered improvement in opportunities for more cycle ways, safer walking routes, trailways. Actively encouraging and enabling the reduction in car use.

There are old railway routes that are a potential for electric bikes and scooters

A proper strategy to deliver this is needed. A plan that also looks to make the most of adjacent geographical areas and the work other authorities are doing. The rest of Dorset conurbation, Somerset and Devon. Linking up of vehicle and non-vehicle networks.

And to go with this clearly a total gearing up in the provision of electrical charging points and working with external partners to deliver this.

There was also recognition that just getting everyone to move to electric vehicles was not the 'answer' to reducing carbon emissions.

- *Electric vehicles are expensive and they take a lot of CO2 to produce and there are other contributions eg tyre tread. Only a tiny percentage of people can afford them and many don't have a car at all. How do we level the playing field?*
- *We need safe road, we should feel safe when we are out walking*
- *Pavement parking should be banned, made illegal.*
- *I want to see the beautiful coast, countryside and biodiversity protected and enhanced for future generations who will be able to appreciate this while living in inclusive, diverse and thriving communities*
- *I am concerned that there is a lack of a joined up approach to the plan. Targets for climate, enhancing natural beauty and connecting communities are at odds with plans for expansion of towns and businesses.*
- *Completely agree about transport. We really need a decent decarbonised transport network, which links communities by affordable, decent public transport and which connects to the railway networks.*

Open Spaces and Nature

A wide ranging discussion covering land and sea, with comments on land use as well and what should be done to protect open spaces and nature in order to protect our future.

- *I want to see a Dorset that protects and enhances the natural environment while providing thriving sustainable communities supported by a zero carbon economy*

- *I want to see the beautiful coast, countryside and biodiversity protected and enhanced for future generations who will be able to appreciate this while living in inclusive, diverse and thriving communities.*

Sites for nature recovery should be allocated at the same time and in the same way that land is allocated for housing and employment. We need to change how we use our soil, we need to look after it and to start using regenerative farming methods.

Whilst this is not totally within the 'gift' of the Local Plan to deliver, some of it can be greatly influenced by the plan and how land is designated.

The discussion recognised the need to balance open spaces against the need for housing. But creating quality open spaces and greenery within any new developments can be achieved and should be part of the Local Plan. Far more re-wilding in all sorts of different places was raised as a big positive to enhance the environment.

- *We need more re-wilding and we need to stop intensive farming. Over the years land-use has changed drastically. What used to be a more natural grass land has been changed to what was thought to be a more superior fertilised farm land which leaves it depleted*
- *I want to see us growing our own food locally. Farming practices need to change. Nature needs to be brought back into how we design our landscapes.*

Within the group participants had examples of where local communities had come up with their own ideas on how local areas could be improved. For example spaces like cemeteries could be re-wilded to bring back biodiversity and create welcoming areas for people and insects.

Farming practices had a 'deep dive' in the group. And the way that we have come to expect things.

- *We need to stop being so greedy, we have gotten used to having fruit and veg flown and shipped into us from around the world. We need to change our mind sets as this is no longer sustainable. We need to work with nature not against it. We should eat seasonal food grown locally.*

Having more local fruit and veg markets and supporting local food producers, whilst educating people that local food is more sustainable needs to be part of the broader strategy for use of local land and re-designing open spaces. Whilst big open spaces for outdoor activity is great, there are a lot of small open spaces within towns and villages that could be used differently. For re-wilding as well as just making it available for people to grown food.

- *It's true that the NFU have a strong political lobby. Our MP Simon Hoare seems to listen to them. It's round the wrong way, organic food shouldn't be seen as expensive compared to non-organic food. It isn't a level comparison. The cost of non-organic food does not contain the cost of the damage it does to the Environment.*
- *The solution is Education. I work at a local school where young people are becoming vegans and vegetarians. They are questioning what change needs*

to be done. It seems the older and younger people are starting to see the need for change. It is the 30/40 age group who seem complacent and need to be targeted.

The group also thought about the damage that is being done to open spaces and waterways and the link between this and farming practices.

- *In order to achieve clean water and soil people need to stop using fertilisers, pesticides and insecticides*
- *I've been looking at waterways recently and feel we really need to raise people's awareness of the poor quality of our waterways; and this is due to the fertilisers seeping into them*
- *We must be serious about Nature Recovery. We must replace the convention approach of mitigation of harm with avoidance. The growing body of convention wisdom to embrace the mitigation model is concerning as it often comes with funding for the NGOs who are supposed to be protecting the environment. We need to move away from that approach.*

Using nature and our natural resources to create a carbon free, sustainable future was covered by the group. Open spaces are there for recreation, enjoyment and for helping us achieve other things. Onshore and offshore wind farms were mentioned as well.

- *Our unique selling point is our AONB preserving and enhancing that would be a start. Traffic ruins it. In Purbeck we could have an Eco Island with more cycling and walking. We should play to our strengths.*

They also thought about how the current way of building adds to pollution and doesn't help people reduce their own carbon footprint. And this can be addressed and is within the 'gift' of the Local Plan, given a robust approach to planning and a strong political will:

- *The standard of house building needs improving. If we had a policy mandating passive housing then the builders wouldn't build as many houses as they would say couldn't afford it*
- *Interestingly Poundbury is not 'green'. It was built conventionally. There are no solar panels in sight! Some new houses in Chickerell have grey water built in*
- *Due to the building lobby new developments are still installing gas boilers in new builds. Surely Dorset Council is in the position to influence that?!*
- *Well it's not because they are short of money (to be able to build passive housing), I mean, the Chief Exec of Persimmons Homes received a bonus of £82M; so there is plenty of money in building houses!*
- *I think it is something like a million planning permissions have been granted and not taken up. Why do they get permission and then not build?*
- *Yes it is just over a million and this is largely because developers say it is not viable and this is the crux, there is no guarantee that the housing will be built; market or affordable housing. Makes me ask who are these homes for? And who stands to gain? And leads to a fundamental inequality that needs addressing.*

So land is held by developers who have no immediate plans to build for anyone.
Land that could be used for other purposes.

Other comments recorded during discussions

Other areas covered included:

- Noted that wind farms are mentioned in the draft plan, accept that some will not be happy with that, but a lot of people will very much welcome it
- Dorset needs to produce its own energy from wind and solar, it can be done and we have plenty of local resources to achieve this
- Green growth has got to be the top priority for the economy and the draft plan does not recognise this
- The Climate and Ecological Emergency must drive and guide us in everything. Better public transport, no new roads, protect trees and hedgerows, protect places for nature, no second homes, far more social housing not just affordable
- We need a lot of really good jobs for all sorts of people. We should be encouraging jobs in the 'green industries'
- Dorset Council risks falling behind Cornwall, Devon, Somerset and Wiltshire who are all investing heavily in their net zero planning. Most Dorset Councillors still seem to be in denial of the need to ACT
- There is just no vision of the interconnections between the different topics
- They just took the old local plans from the district councils and 'mashed' them together!

Finally!

Dorset Council should listen to these comments and if they want a plan that the local community will support they need to amend the draft to ensure these points are adequately covered and included.

A copy of this submission can be found on the Dorset Action Website so that those who participated can see that their comments, thoughts and feelings were recorded and submitted as part of this consultation process.

<https://dtaction.co.uk/local-plan/>

Final word to the participants:

- *Thank you to everyone who has put this together - it has been amazing*
- *My overwhelming feeling is the communities should crack on with what they want to do. I don't feel Dorset Council necessarily listens so let's show them change is possible and people really do care about environmental and climate action*
- *There are some people who feel angry about this, that we didn't share in the vision to start with. This is a way to get comments in front of the council and get some press attention too.*