

Dorset Council - Full Council Meeting, 14 July 2022

Questions and Statements submitted for the Public Participation Period

Question 2 – submitted by Jane Ashdown

A number of local media outlets (West Dorset Magazine <https://westdorsetmag.co.uk/editions/edition-9/> Dorchester Nub) recently reported that Dorset Council has received £135,000 from the Government's Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). According to MP Chris Loder, these funds are to support Dorset Council in reworking their Local Plan. In particular Mr. Loder claims that this reworking will allow the Council to shelve the 4,000 houses proposed for the north of Dorchester (DOR13). Given how unpopular this latter proposal is and given the water quality, traffic, environmental, heritage and cultural degradation this development would bring such news is to be welcomed. As is the prospect of rethinking the overall Plan.

However, in a May press release the Government's DLUHC web site (May 21st, 2022 – see link below) lists North Dorchester (DOR 13) as a Garden Village project in receipt of £135,000 to promote its development for housing.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/garden-communities-set-to-flourish-across-england#:~:text=Today's%20investment%20brings%20total%20funding,North%2C%20Midlands%20and%20South%20West.>

This is puzzling - two different announcements about the proposed housing development north of Dorchester and the same amount of funding in each case. The people of Dorset and particularly Dorchester could be forgiven for being confused. And amidst these possibly conflicting announcements Dorset Council has not issued any statement or press release about receiving government funding which might clarify the situation. Indeed, since Councillor Flower's press release back in January reflecting his concerns about the Local Plan there has been radio silence in terms of changes to the Local Plan as a result of the consultation well over a year ago and silence on a timetable for moving forward.

As taxpayers we should be the first to know about changes to the Plan. Can Councillor Flower clarify how this £135,000 will be used? Can he also clarify the status of the north of Dorchester (DOR 13) proposal for 4,000 houses in light of this funding?

Response by Cllr David Walsh

The £135,000 is in fact part of the Garden Communities initiative and is not related to reworking of the emerging local plan. Dorset Council has been provided with funding to evaluate the feasibility of bringing forwards a garden community in North Dorchester and work is taking place with the involvement of local communities to consider options. The site at North Dorchester will need to be taken forward through the emerging Dorset Local Plan.

Question 3 – submitted by Giles Watts

At a recent planning meeting for Town and Parish Councils on 29th May, Dorset Council published a timetable for Dorset's Local plan which shows submission of the new plan between October 2022 and March 2023. This is contrary to Spencer Flower's suggestion that he is negotiating a 2-year extension with the government along with mitigation against failing the 5-year housing supply and the housing delivery. In public, the council have been silent on the schedule for the Local Plan and what changes they plan to make. Furthermore, they have not published any analysis of the initial public consultation that took place over a year ago. Can the council please confirm the schedule for the Local Plan going forward and clarify what further opportunities there will be for consultation with the general public when a revised plan is published.

Response by Cllr Spencer Flower

The dates quoted at the meeting with the town and parish councils were the dates from the current adopted local development scheme. We have not yet confirmed a revised programme, but are likely to do so later this year. There will be a further opportunity for people to comment, at the next stage when a revised version of the plan will be published. There will also be a public examination, where all the issues will be considered by an independent inspector, before the plan is adopted'

Question 4 – submitted by Sandra Reeve

Energy Efficiency.

I welcome the recent changes to building regulations, which came into force on 15th June, that require new homes in England to produce significantly less CO2. I also welcome the phasing out of gas boilers by 2025 which will support the change towards heat pumps. These changes pave the way for the Future Homes and Buildings Standard in 2025 which will mean that all future homes will be net zero ready and will not need retrofitting. However, it is within Dorset Council's power to act faster. It is wrong that new houses are being built now that will require retrofitting in a few years' time. It is also wrong that houses are not being built with rooftop solar as standard in this time of very high energy prices and rising cost of living. Will Dorset Council use its powers to make sure new developments conform to the highest possible standards of insulation and have rooftop solar as standard for clean, renewable energy generation?

Response by Cllr David Walsh

Building Regulations are being stepped up to improve the energy performance of new buildings and this is a vital step forward in tackling the climate emergency. Planning applications must be considered in the context of the adopted local plan and government policy, which currently do not require such measures to be included. However, Dorset Council is reviewing its policies on new development to ensure that development is optimised for minimising its carbon footprint and resilient to climate change.

Question 5 – submitted by Alistair Chisholm

Nutrient Neutrality.

In June, Dorset Council generated a report on the “Five Year housing land supply” and its impact on the Purbeck Local Plan. The conclusion was that, due to the new guidance issued by Natural England about nutrient neutrality for nitrogen and phosphorous, no new developments in the Poole Harbour watershed which are not yet started can be included in the five-year housing supply. As a result, the Council is unable to identify a deliverable housing supply for the 2021-2026 plan period. Presumably this advice will also impact any similar developments in Local Plan such as DOR13. Please can the council provide more information on the implications for both the Purbeck and the Dorset local plans?

Response by Cllr David Walsh

Dorset Council will be assessing the implications of the need to secure nutrient neutrality across the various catchment areas that affect Dorset. In the case of Poole Harbour catchment and the Purbeck Local Plan, Dorset Council is awaiting clarification from Natural England on the degree to which current nutrient mitigation measures secure nutrient neutrality for both nitrogen and phosphorus. Dorset Council will provide updates to its evidence and understanding of the issue as and when it has further information to publish.

Question 6 – submitted by Tracee Cossey

The County Hall site in Dorchester is barely used. The library has moved, the County Court has closed and many of the remaining buildings have few permanent staff with many people choosing to work from home. This is a large site with considerable potential for brownfield development that would have a much lower carbon footprint than any greenfield development in the area. Would the council consider a full redevelopment of the site by adding it to the official Brownfield register with the purpose of providing affordable and social housing for the people of Dorset?

Response by Cllr Tony Ferrari

We are very aware of the changes occurring in office use over recent times and made the strategic decision to either reuse South Walks House or County Hall. The decision was taken that despite the reduced numbers of staff coming in every day, significant staff numbers still need an office location and Dorset Council needed to retain a substantial building in Dorchester. We will continue to look for efficiencies across our office usage but a site needs to be retained.

Although it did not generate housing, the solution adopted was to lease South Walks House to the NHS. Doing so enabled the NHS to provide additional health facilities for Dorset residents. This was the right use of a building offsetting any negligible carbon footprint increase, with healthcare facilities into the centre of Dorchester that in turn is generating increased footfall and trade to local businesses and substantially reduced Dorset Councils property costs which is a fantastic outcome for Dorset residents"