

Top stories in this newsletter



Image by Kate Forrester (adapted)



Logo by Alex Stephen



Image via Pixels [Earl Canwood](#)

Photo by [Rangga Cahya Nugraha](#)

The Great Big Dorset Hedge—the Latest Update



GBDH Volunteers returned to Gorwell Farm near Abbotsbury for the fifth time in 12 months on March 12th. A dozen of us planted over 500 hedge plants in gaps in a hedge that had been laid this season by farmer Simon Pengelly and his dad, John. Thick mist all morning did not dampen our spirits as you can see. Hot soup and sausage rolls were provided by Simon in their wedding venue barn at lunchtime.

This marks a first major step forward in our mission to see Dorset's hedges enhanced. The previous four visits involved hedgerow surveys in April and May which were followed up by a sharing of results in June. One direct result of those efforts in 2023 was yet more hedge-laying assisted by our gap-filling voluntary planting crews.



GBDH volunteers get out at Gorwell Farm on a misty morning



Dorset COP #2: (Conference of the Parties) - Save the Date



SAVE THE DATE OF THE NEXT COP IN DORSET

News is now well established that Dorset is to hold its second COP, following last year's event in September. More details to follow soon, but the date is provisionally set for Saturday, 2nd November 2024. The next COP will be held in the Fusion building at Bournemouth University.

Sustainable Shaftesbury & Shaftesbury Town Council



Sustainable Shaftesbury



Vision Statement and Masterplan

Shaftesbury's response to the climate and nature emergency

'Think Global, Act Local'

Eco News

The production and approval of the multi-part 'Shaftesbury Vision Statement and Masterplan', subtitled 'Shaftesbury's response to the climate and nature emergency', with its seven appendices of action plans for biodiversity recovery, trees, allotments, wildflowers and open spaces management, was a considerable achievement by a working group of some 12 people assembled at the request and under the aegis of the town council - an achievement acknowledged by the town council.

But it is an achievement that was not straight forward and not achieved without a struggle. A notable feature of the exercise, and no doubt of the nature of all such enterprises involving local councils in more areas than just Shaftesbury, is the politics of climate change in a fragile and fracturing democracy.

The final illustrated document was presented to the town council for adoption in December but deferred for further discussion after several members of the council objected to a number of items in it - mainly on the grounds that it was not the council's role to tell people what they could do in their own gardens or put into their own stomachs. In effect, that it is not a town council's role to stop people killing the planet or themselves.

So... What happens next?

The approved plans include a total of nearly 100 actions that can and should be taken under the headings Energy, Travel and transport, Biodiversity, Land management, Food consumption and production, Housing and commercial development, Waste reduction and management, the Circular economy, Water management and Air quality. Each action has been given a green, orange or red coding - green meaning action is already being taken (mainly within the town council itself), orange that action is pending, and red that nothing is being done yet.

The red items include most of the really ambitious, game-changing actions such as setting up a community-run energy company to generate our own energy needs from renewable sources such as solar and wind power,

Sustainable Shaftesbury & Shaftesbury Town Council Eco News - *cont'd*

The dozen or so volunteers appear determined by and large to continue their work to make sure as many as possible of the agreed actions actually happen so will continue to meet and welcome input from anyone else with similar sympathies. The approved document stipulates that a review of the plan will start in July and so the working group continue to meet to refine and add to the actions needed and in particular to suggest items for funded work in time for the new council's discussions on setting its budget for 2025-26 that start in September.

High on the 'to do' list is also ensuring that the Sustainable Shaftesbury masterplan becomes an integral part of the Shaftesbury Neighbourhood Plan, currently under review, as well as STC's five-year strategic plan that expires next year. Members of the Sustainable Shaftesbury working group have always been clear that without the sustainability vision being central to both the development of the town and the town council's own strategic plans it has little meaning or relevance and it is to that end that most focus is now being directed.

For more information see: <https://www.planetshaftesbury.org>.

By Richard Thomas, Sustainable Shaftesbury

Dorset CAN—AGM and Trustees



Dorset CAN is holding its AGM online on Thursday May 9th at 7pm. We also plan some speakers to make for a lively and inspiring session.

Although we only registered as a charity last April we have an Annual Report to share with you about all our great work in 2023. We want to build a successful charity which can deliver its objectives with a stable financial base.

Please put the date in your diary and look out for more details.

We are also looking for more trustees. If you've got a background or interest in charity governance and could help our enthusiastic band of ten trustees please email me, the Chair of Trustees, at vicki.elcoate@gmail.com. The trustees meet occasionally and have so far worked to produce a strategy, business plan, risk plan and the annual report. We welcome people with different backgrounds and skills as the best boards are diverse. There is plenty of training on offer.

The Dorset Council Local Plan—the Current Position



Dorset's Local Plan is such an important document. For the next 15 years it is a masterplan for the development of Dorset defining how towns and villages will grow, the placing of new housing developments and the siting of industrial sites (including renewable energy generation). Along with the Mineral Plan, the Local Transport Plan (due next year) and the new Natural Environment, Climate and Ecological Strategy (NECES) these four policies pretty much define what the Dorset Council will do and how our county will grow.

In March, after 3 years of procrastination, Dorset Council announced that they were going to rebuild the Local Plan from scratch by trialling a new system defined by the government. This "streamlined" system will start later this year and lead to a new Local Plan fully approved in 2027 (3 years later than originally intended).

The Dorset Council Local Plan—the Current Position cont'd

The new system relies more heavily on centrally defined policies and there is less room for meaningful public consultation. The changes have been brought about partly because the government wants to have greater control (e.g. to force the number of new houses built every year) and also because the Local Plan process has become stalled in many counties because it has become intensely political and deeply unpopular.

The truth is that housing is big business with big profits and little gets built these days without the major housebuilders who prefer greenfield developments where profits are larger and less risky. Councils have been so starved of central funding that they are now entirely dependent on secondary payments from property developers (Section 106, CIL) to fund affordable housing, local infrastructure and improvements to services. It is sad but true that since Brexit and Covid, the country has become significantly poorer and that the system is broken.

While it is recognised that Dorset needs a Local Plan, the vision offered by the council (and the government) differs such a long way from what most people want. During the consultation on the previous draft Local Plan in 2021, the general public overwhelmingly voted to:

- Build more affordable housing, social housing and low-cost rental housing helping working families and young people to live in Dorset
- Protect Dorset's unique natural environment by a greater emphasis on brownfield sites
- Provide better infrastructure: public transport, roads, health and education services
- Tackle climate change by ensuring houses are well insulated with a low carbon footprint

Unfortunately, there has been no acknowledgement from Dorset Council that these priorities will be incorporated into the new Local Plan. Instead, the can has been kicked down the road for yet another year.

Dorset CAN set up a campaign group in 2021 to persuade Dorset Council to “re-think” the Plan and address these issues. The campaign is called “Dorset Deserves Better” (DDB) and has the support of 66 organisations across Dorset including 25 Town and Parish councils representing over 30% of residents in Dorset. In March, DDB joined up with the Dorset branch of the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) to write an [open letter](#) to the Head of the Council (Spencer Flower) expressing our concerns about the new Local Plan and reminding them of the need to listen to local communities. As yet we have received no reply.

DCAN Energy Team Update



The DCAN Energy team met online on 25 March to discuss progress on several fronts. Around 90 people registered. The video of the webinar can be [viewed here](#).

The plan is to develop Low Carbon Neighbourhoods.

We are working on four strands:

1. **Dorset Greener Homes** is currently running on a year-round basis – if you want to visit a home and get impartial and practical advice based on experience, you can make an appointment on [this web page](#) (deselect ‘All’ and select ‘Open all year by appointment’). We need more homes to stage an open day event in September, with eco-retrofit or low-cost solutions especially welcome. We also need help in coordinating, recruiting, and publicising the event. If you are interested, please write to Sam at dorsetgreenerhomes@gmail.com. The homes do not have to be perfect grand designs!

2. Training **Energy champions**, who will visit people's homes with a thermal camera and give free advice on saving energy and making homes cosier. 4

DCAN Energy Team Update *cont'd*

3. Negotiating reductions for bulk ordering of **solar PV panels**, and helping homeowners to choose a system that is right for them. If you might want to organise this in your area, [Contact Jenny](#).

4. **Onshore Wind** in Dorset has been held back for 15 years, with Will Bond's Alaska Farm wind farm being a glorious exception. A small working party has been looking at the possibilities when the planning rules change. [Contact Giles](#) if you would like to be involved.

Two other initiatives were featured in the webinar

- **Tim Crabtree's** presentation for the Dorset Community Energy **Retrofit Hub** can be viewed by [clicking here](#). A grant for a feasibility study has been awarded to develop training and other resources for eco-retrofitting homes, initially in Bridport but eventually across Dorset
- David Toplas outlined his plans to create a **Community Energy Project**, including community heating, a renewable energy hub and batteries, initially in Loders, but potentially extending to bridport and other towns His presentation can be seen [here](#).

All these projects need your input and experience/time/enthusiasm.

This Sacred Earth: An Ecodharma Retreat July 15th—22nd

Among the ancient trees and rolling meadows of rural France, join us for a lively retreat of meditation, Earth practices, community, inquiry, and wise action. Showcasing visionary ecological-spiritual communities throughout Europe, together we will transmute eco-anxiety and grief into responsiveness, explore land-based practices, skillful environmental protection, and discover the magic of our sacred world.



We will gather with a wide range of spiritual teachers across many traditions, thought leaders, land artists, farmers, and inspiring compassionate activists during this time of climate crisis and environmental loss. For more details: <https://www.dechencholing.org/program/this-sacred-earth-an-ecodharma-gathering-15-07-2024/>

Each day will finish with an **online symposium** of speakers including: Helena Norberg Hodge, Daniel Christian Wahl and Doudald Hine.

Dates for Your Diary:

Bridport Charter Fair on Sat 18th May
 DCAN Greenwashing event early June
 DCAN AGM on Thurs 9th May
 Great Big Green Week 8-16th June

New Page on our Website

We have a new page on the website, where people can find all our recorded talks: https://www.dorsetcan.org/all_events/access-recordings-of-our-talks-events/