

Cllr Christopher's E-mailed Report – 26 September 2022

Una and I shared the deep sadness felt by everyone in the United Kingdom, the Commonwealth, and the whole world, at the death of Her Majesty The Queen.

The Queen was a steadfast champion of the British countryside and rural way of life.

It is also with sincere gratitude that we remember her tireless service to our nation and its rural community.

In an ever-changing world, the Queen was a constant. Her devotion and sense of duty was an inspiration.

I continue the battle to see that Chideock Bridge is repaired and am exasperated as to how long this is taking.

On Friday 22 September 2022 the new Chancellor of the Exchequer delivered his financial statement in the House of Commons .

I will be pleased to discuss the statement at length but for now will concentrate on discussion of the new proposed Investment Zones and provide you with a message from Dorset Council leader Spencer Flower :

“Dorset Council has been in conversation with Government officials where we expressed our interest to be a part of the Investment Zone programme which the Chancellor has announced today as part of the mini-Budget. At this stage we have little detail of the policy other than this is intended to drive investment and economic growth. This is an opportunity for Dorset and sits well with our economic objectives set out in the Council Plan and Economic Development Strategy. For this reason, I have informed Government that we would be interested to participate in the programme. We await further detail and if we are confirmed as an Investment Zone location we expect to be working closely with officials. I will keep you posted on this matter through my regular updates to you.”

Cost of living help

The link below will connect you to a site which will sign-post residents to webpages which we hope will help people impacted by the cost-of-living crisis. . <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/w/cost-of-living-help> .

Dorset Council secures funding to improve electric vehicle infrastructure in rural areas

Dorset has been announced as one of just nine areas in England to receive funding from a new government scheme which aims to improve electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure. The funding comes from the new Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) pilot scheme, through which we have managed to secure £2.7million to increase the number of EV charge points in the council area

The project will serve a broad range of users, primarily targeting residents without access to off-street parking, while also meeting demand for en-route charging to support our tourism trade.

The project aims to place charge points in up to 150 locations around the county for the convenience of residents and to encourage the take up of electric vehicles. This will involve the council working with local community landowners to install charging infrastructure in accessible locations which might include car parks, community halls, pubs, café's, and shops, as well as possible on-street locations where suitable.

This pilot will also include a small number rapid or ultra-rapid (50 kW to 150 kW DC) chargers on or near main roads to support enroute charging. Some charge points will be located at popular tourist locations where both residents and visitors can access them.

To overcome user concerns over payment methods, all charge points will have alternative access with a minimum payment method (a non-proprietary and non-phone payment method, such as contactless) installed.

Need more landlords

There are several initiatives which aim to work with landlords to provide much-needed housing to families across the Dorset Council area. The housing service is appealing to willing landlords to partner the council and benefit from the assistance the council can give. Please look at the Dorset website for further information.

Foster with Dorset Council

A note from a foster carer

"If anyone is thinking about fostering, I'd say don't hesitate to investigate it, don't be put off making that initial phone call. Just be open with things that you're worried about as they probably won't stop you being a foster carer. Just pick up the phone and make that enquiry. "Every circumstance is different from one person to another, but the process is so thorough that if you have the slightest inkling that this might be what you want to do then give it a go."

Our fostering service puts the children who need loving, local foster homes at the heart of everything we do. The key focus is on keeping local children close to their schools, friends, and birth families. Our foster carers transform the lives of children and young people by opening their hearts and homes to those who need it the most. At present, demand for foster carers in Dorset is high – especially for teenagers and sibling groups. Find out more about fostering with Dorset Council and register your interest today. Keep up to date with the latest fostering news and subscribe to our monthly e-newsletter. If you'd like to find out more in-person, the fostering team hold regular fostering drop-in events across Dorset.

The Dorset Parent Carer Council annual information event is back! Dorset SEND

Free Information Event - 4 October

This FREE event is for parents and carers of children aged pre-school to 14, who are disabled or have additional needs. The event brings together a wide variety of services and information all in one place. Teams and organisations from across education, health, and social care and the community sector will be attending to provide a fantastic opportunity for families to see what work is currently underway to improve services in the future.

Tuesday 4th October; 10am till 2pm; Kingston Maurward College, Dorchester, DT2 8PX

Free parking, free entry, free refreshments. No booking required.

Dorset County Farms

Dorset Council owns 41 farms (and has owned them for quite some time). These are currently managed in accordance with the County Farm Estate Management Plan of which the principal objectives are to:

- Provide a provide an initial gateway into agriculture for persons to farm on their own account whilst ensuring a financial return to us.
- Provide us with a direct interest in the land management of the county, promoting the integration of good environmental and farming practices as well as best practice and innovation in estate management and agriculture.
- Sustain rural communities whilst providing opportunities for greater public access and understanding of agriculture and the countryside
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The estate is currently run on a two-tier system, with smaller 'starter' units providing a point of entry into the agricultural industry and larger 'promotion' units to allow for career progression. Farms on the estate are predominantly livestock based, with both dairy and stock farms.

The review of the Management Plan was delayed by the coronavirus pandemic but is now in progress. In addition to the current objectives, we are considering how the estate can create additional economic, social, and environmental value to help meet the priorities identified in the Council Plan. In particular, conversations are ongoing internally in relation to the role the Estate can plan in helping to support the Council's climate and ecological emergency which was declared in 2019. The estate is currently run on a two-tier system, with smaller 'starter' units providing a point of entry into the agricultural industry and larger 'promotion' units to allow for career progression. Farms on the estate are predominantly livestock based, with both dairy and stock farms.

Dorset Council's Road maintenance method reduce carbon emissions

As part of Dorset Council's 'green' approach to highways maintenance, road retexturing is contributing to a reduction in emissions, the council has refreshed 67,000sqm of road surface this year – raising skid resistance to improve the safety of highway. Where appropriate, the sustainable solution used eliminates the need to resurface a road and instead uses one of two techniques to blast the road surface to regain its skid resistance to the same – or better – level of resistance it had when the material was first laid. Depending on the individual site, the road will either have small steel shots fired at the surface to improve the texture or will have water blasted at the surface to remove excess binder.

This road retexturing has helped reduce the amount of carbon dioxide produced by over 335,000kg, and saved around 6,700 tonnes of virgin aggregates from being used, It also has financial savings of over £1.2m compared to using conventional resurfacing methods to provide a new textured surface.

Dorset Council Commissioning for a Better Life for Older People with Support Needs In Dorset 2022-2027

You will continue to read about the ageing Dorset Population.

It is recognised that Dorset has a higher over 65 population than anywhere else in the Country and as such it is especially important that Dorset Council provides the opportunity for a great quality of life for older people. Dorset Council documentation that I have seen, indicates that typically older people refers to those who are no longer of working age, so traditionally 65 plus.

However with increased life expectancy an increasing number of people find themselves either having to work or wanting to work beyond what was traditionally retirement age.

In England there are 295 older people per 1000 working age population

In Dorset there are 527 older people per 1000 working age population

Currently there are 31,000 people over 80 in Dorset

Council Leader Spencer Flower has written earlier this month to the new Prime Minister seeking funding from H. M. Government for Social Care to reflect cost pressures facing Dorset Council as a result of the figures quoted above and inflationary pressures.

Clearly there is a lot going on in agricultural policy terms:

Farmers are concerned about the move from the Basic Payment Scheme with the Agricultural Transition . In 2022 direct payments will be at least 20 per cent lower than in 2020 . Where 50 % of the 2022 BPS was paid in the Summer the payment being received this December will be dramatically reduced from the usual figure and will impact on cash flow considerations for all farmers, whether County Farm tenants or not .The range of Environment Land Schemes designed to replace BPS are only slowly appearing with the Old Countryside Stewardship scheme filling the gap.

What might be called productivity/efficiency or generally incentivising schemes are being directed at farmers. DEFRA is keen to improve the competitiveness and productivity of Farming in England, a key part of this is capital grants for equipment and infrastructure :

- 40 per cent capital grants under the Farming and Investment Fund (FIF)
- Farming Equipment Technology Fund fixed payment for 120 specified items on line application minimum grant ,maximum grant £25,000
- Farming Technology Fund larger grants £35,000 to £500,000 covering 3 areas water manage to , productivity and added value .

Finally many are pondering the Slurry Investment Scheme envisaged from this Autumn . This is understood to be 50 per cent grant minimum £25,000maximum £250,000 for a minimum of 6 months storage .

My final comment is that I understand that a new round of farm advice under the Farm Resilience scheme will be available from October .

The UK Government has announced a set of measures designed to boost the rural economy in England

This has had a great deal of coverage in the farming National and indeed local press

DEFRA's Delivering for Rural England report, which includes £110m of funding to boost economic activity in the countryside,

The CLA's campaign has become increasingly influential over the UK Government's rural policymaking through 2022, particularly following the launch of a major report into the rural economy earlier this year.

DEFRA's policy changes were published in the final days of Boris Johnson's premiership, but are expected to be enacted by the new Prime Minister regardless.

The changes include:

- Ringfencing of rural productivity funding through the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) worth £110m. Funding will be available for a wide range of activities, including converting buildings for business use, supporting diversification projects, and delivering digital infrastructure
- Streamlining the process to convert disused agricultural buildings into housing in designated areas
- A commitment to ensure the needs of the rural economy are reflected in the levelling up agenda

As one of my friends and indeed a fellow Chartered Accountant has said:

"UK Government is showing some ambition for the countryside. Improving productivity in the rural economy could add up to £43bn in GVA – so this fund is money well spent"

"We now need to see the true detail. Rural business owners are working hard to succeed, determined to create prosperity across our communities. But we need this report to deliver genuine planning reform, full connectivity and a cross-departmental policy framework from government that reflects the sheer potential of the rural economy."

"In the midst of an economic crisis, we need a robust and ambitious plan to create economic growth in the countryside. The UK Government has today taken its first steps towards delivering it."

DEFRA's report has heavily been influenced by a report published earlier this year by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on the Rural Powerhouse, entitled 'Levelling Up the rural economy.' The report followed a year-long inquiry that took evidence from a number of organisations representing the rural economy. and including those where I am an active member.

During the Summer I received the following communication from Vicky Abbott Health Programme Advisor | Locality Link for West Dorset at Public Health Dorset

"Colleagues in the communications team at PHD are about to embark on a promoting positive mental health for rural locations project in the West Dorset (and North Dorset) locality; Broadwindsor (including Marshwood and other surrounding villages) being the focus area for West Dorset. They are particularly looking at working with the community settings in Broadwindsor to reach out to the village communities by way of a support network, including identifying when an individual or family may need support."

This will move forward next month, starting with a free mental health awareness training session, on Monday 3 October 12.45-5pm, at The Comrades Hall, Broadwindsor. I look forward to working with the Parish Council on this.

Best regards

Simon

Councillor Simon Christopher

The Dorset Councillor for the Marshwood Vale Ward

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