

## **Cllr Christopher's E-mailed Report – 24 April 2023.**

A few thoughts prior to the meeting tomorrow

### **Roads Maintenance**

As part of our maintenance programme, a number of roads in the area are being given an 'early life intervention' to keep them in good condition. We do this through road preservation, a preventative treatment which stops water ingress and surface deterioration. This prevents more damage that ultimately leads to potholes. Road closures with diversions will be in place during the overnight work, along with parking restrictions where applicable, so please be patient.

### **Potholes**

Dorset Council was given a £2,914,000 slice of the £200 million budget set aside by Chancellor Jeremy Hunt during his Spring Budget, Dorset Council monitors approximately 2,400 miles of road.

### **Second Homes Council Tax**

Dorset Councillors have been discussing proposals for council tax premiums on second homes and empty properties, in anticipation of the new flexibilities for councils in the forthcoming Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill. At that time, it was hoped that the Bill would receive Royal Assent by 1 April 2023. Councillors were due to vote on proposals at a rescheduled Full Council meeting on 30 March in order for the change to be introduced from April 2024, as the council was required to make the decision a year in advance.

However, we now understand from government that there is no likelihood of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill becoming law before the end of March and therefore a decision on this matter could not be taken by Full Council on 30 March as planned. The proposal to introduce council tax premiums on second homes and empty properties continues to be something Dorset Council are keen to explore, following constructive discussions at Overview committee and Cabinet. We will watch the progress of the government's new Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill closely and bring this to Full Council once the legislation has passed.

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### **Home Upgrade Grant (HUG) scheme**

Dorset Council, BCP Council and Public Health Dorset have been awarded £4,343,000 by central government to upgrade homes and off-grid households with energy efficiency measures as part of the Home Upgrade Grant (HUG) scheme.

The HUG scheme will provide energy efficiency upgrades and low carbon heating via local authority funding, to households in England that are low income, off the gas grid or have an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) between D and G. You can find more information about the funding on the gov.uk website.

### **Electric Vehicle charging points.**

We aim to provide access to charging points within a 10-minute drive for most residents within 10 years. That is the target set by Dorset Council which has announced 'ambitious plans' to expand the charge points into villages and rural locations across the local authority network. The announcement comes as part of the council's 'Charging Ahead' policy which switches the focus from the county's 'main towns' to supporting households in areas that are not able to charge electric vehicles at their homes. The plans, which will play a key part in preparing the county for the government's 2050 net-zero target, will see as many as 200 electric vehicle charge points installed in communities across the Dorset Council area over the next three years. Funding for the new charge points will mostly come from the government's local electric vehicle infrastructure (LEVI) scheme and Mer, a European EV charging company, with additional contributions from the council. If your community could benefit from a ChargePoint, you can suggest possible locations by submitting an online form on our website or by contacting your local town or parish council.

## **School attendance strategy.**

The new strategy, which will be implemented during this year and next, sets out to achieve the best attendance and raise the hopes and ambitions of our children and young people through a community partnership approach. The vision for the new strategy is “attendance is everyone’s business” and will be achieved by the community working closely and positively together, and with everybody taking responsibility to support children to be safe in school. Everybody in the community will be able to be involved in making the strategy work, from school staff, parents and carers to local shop owners and GP surgeries.

After thorough consultation, the attendance strategy has identified five key priority action areas of work which are:

- Consistent Dorset-wide policy and practice
- Knowledge sharing and communication.
- Early identification and targeted intervention
- Consistent approach to transition (moving to a new school)
- Transport

Since our last parish council meeting, I have attended many meetings, whether in connection with schools, also road safety with Chris Loder MP, the head of Dorset Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and as the Dorset Councillor's representative at the Local Access Forum. to name a few. With respect to road safety, this will form the major part of my comments at the meetings. I have passed on the concerns of parish councillors to the leader of Dorset Council and will be working with Chris Loder MP on this.

The government has announced its intention to transfer the functions and powers of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) to local authorities. It is also proposing the withdrawal of central government support for LEPs from April 2024.

On 1 April 2023 Non Domestic Buildings let on an existing tenancy were required to have an EPC rating of E or above

At this stage it is worth noting that from 1 April 2030 the minimum EPC rating will change from E to B.

I will further set out my understanding of the position.

There are a number of exemptions including:

- a) A temporary building only to be used for 2 years or less
- b Used as a place of worship or for other religious activities
- c) An industrial site, workshop or non-residential-agricultural building typically not heated
- d) A detached building with a total floor space of under 50 square metres
- f) A furnished holiday let where the landlord is responsible for meeting the energy costs

Also, a building which is listed or within a Conservation Area does not require an EPC where compliance with the minimum Energy Efficient Standard would unacceptably alter its character and appearance.

The Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard Changes will be enforced by local authorities.

Where the local authority believes a landlord is in breach of the Regulations they may serve a compliance notice,

Ultimately penalties can be issued of up to £5000 or up to 10 per cent of the rateable value whichever is higher subject to a maximum of £50,000.

I recognise that the production of food and also the Dorset Council Farms Estate are hugely important to the County of Dorset. As we experience April showers it is possible that we do not all focus on water resources and climate change and the likelihood of water shortages, there is also a continued debate on pollution.

Defra has revealed new measures that will see more funding for farmers in England to improve the storage of slurry, manage irrigation more efficiently and secure water supplies through the construction of on farm reservoirs.

£34million is available through the first round of the Slurry Infrastructure Grant - more than double the original budget following very high demand from farmers. This is part of a new integrated plan with the aim of improving water quality for people, businesses, and nature.

Also outlined in the update is the second round of the Water Management Grant, which will open for applications in Mid-April. It will provide £10million in funding to help farmers manage their water use through more efficient irrigation and securing water supplies through the construction of on-farm reservoirs. The integrated plan is said to focus on the quality of the water environment - both how clean a source is, and how much water it contains. Within this, it aims to tackle every source of pollution, including from storm overflows, agriculture, plastics, road run-off, chemicals, and pesticides.

I have in the not-too-distant past, spoken to audiences in village halls with solicitors and chartered surveyors and indeed other members of the tax agent community about tax matters.

Very often there are discussions about the applicability of Inheritance Tax reliefs.

These are questions posed by landowners tenant farmers and indeed those who both own land and rent land.

The history of this is that in recent months there has been much discussion of the Rook report chaired by Baroness Rook of Stratton in the County of Dorset, one key part of the report is future applicability of Agricultural Property relief for agricultural let land.

The definition of agriculture in the tax system will become even more interesting when consideration is given as to whether in the future it would provide for Agricultural Property relief in respect of environmental land management and ecosystem services. Ecosystem services include the provision of carbon sequestration, biodiversity net gain units or nutrient neutrality offsetting.

The budget did announce a consultation on whether 100% agricultural property relief from inheritance tax (IHT) should apply when farmers make long-term changes from agricultural to environmental land use. This has been a major sticking point for those considering entering into Environmental Land Management schemes or other natural capital-based agreements. The call for evidence and consultation will run until 9 June 2023.

There is also the question of future availability of Agricultural Property relief in respect of landowners owning affordable housing built on exception sites.

I now turn to the cost of living generally, which is still a burden.

Some of you may have picked up on news of an All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) report in respect of Rural Business and the Rural Powerhouse. There will be appreciation of the rural premium as it is described, making life much more expensive in the countryside. And indeed, perhaps outweighing the benefits.

The government will maintain the energy price cap of £2,500 for domestic supplies for a further three months, from April to June 2023. From July 2023, the cap will increase to £3,000. This reflects higher-than-expected energy prices. Of course, it is quite possible we are likely to see prices falling over the summer and beyond to reflect the reductions in global prices that have largely been seen over the last three months. Albeit with a price spike last week when the Organisation of Petroleum exporting countries sought to reduce production.

The government had previously announced further support for business through the Energy Bill Discount Scheme, which replaces the Energy Bill Relief Scheme on 1 April 2023. This will provide electricity discounts at £19.61/MWh (with a price threshold of £302/MWh and gas discounts at £6.97/MWh (with a price threshold of £107/MWh). For energy-intensive industries, such as manufacturing, there is a larger discount of £89/MWh for electricity and £40/MWh for gas.

The new discount scheme prevents an obvious cliff edge for businesses in terms of increased energy costs. However, the discount rates are substantially less than under the current relief scheme, so the benefits will be limited unless businesses are eligible as an energy-intensive industry.

It is my understanding that rental income from telecom masts have been falling substantially.

Indeed, since the Electronic Communications code was revised in 2017 there has been an imbalance between landowners and operators to mirror the disparity between the difference in power between individual farmers (at the extreme) and supermarkets.

The code in 2017 was revised such that the new valuation system was based on the sites value to the landowner in determining the rent.

Some may have thought it was in the interest of the nation for rents paid to fall by 40 percent as perceived in 2017. In the event rents are believed to have fallen by some 77 per cent There is also the impact of losing protection under the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954

Also, negotiation of agreements appears to take at least 18 months not 28 days.

Best regards

Simon

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