

Cllr Christopher's E-mailed Report – 23 May 2022

I note with interest that National Highways are amenable to a further meeting with Chideock Parish Council but meeting agenda must be forthcoming first!

I further note with interest that the desire of HMG to help those in smaller properties to receive £150 payments to house holders, via local authorities and this appears to be working.

The ever-tightening cost of living caused largely by the war in Ukraine and long-term consequences of the Covid pandemic, and inflationary pressures is fuelling the likelihood of more interest rate rises this year . This will clearly continue to impact on Marshwood Vale residents and Dorset Council. There are great concerns about the UK's energy price cap which climbed in April by 54 per cent . Clearly there are great concerns in rural areas on the future of government decision making. This is most acute where there is for instance no mains gas nor the money , nor the desire to move to heat pumps.

Returning to the question of interest rates and indeed mortgage rates there is also concern about what happens when fixed rate deals end, variable rates have risen .

The most acute cases are where residents are older but still have mortgages and borrowers are seen as a greater risk by lenders .

I will comment on the transition away from Farming subsidies and the basic payment scheme later , at this stage I would comment as follows:

I would like after 3 years to comment on Team Christopher, as I like to call it , involvement , with the Farming Community Network.

Last Friday when I was meeting the environment minister (see below) Una attended a meeting organised by the Farming Community Network in circumstances where you can not be in two places at one time .

As many of you know I have previous involvement with the Farming Community Involvement and have assisted farmers in tragic circumstances whether involving welfare issues, tax credits , farming after the suicide of a partner or having received a notice to quit and animal welfare issues etc.

Dorset Farm Community Network is aided by Neil Martin of Dorset Council Trading Standards (Also a director of Dorset County Show) and local vets . It is well worth our support.

For your information, The Farming Community Network telephone number is 03000 111 999. The Farming Community Network offers the opportunity to talk to a sympathetic person who truly understands farmers and rural life .

Telephone number 03000 111 999

By way of contrast RABI, the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution offers financial support practice care and guidance to farming people of all ages, including farmers, farm workers and dependents 0808 281 9490 .

I am pleased to report that the RPA are to make interim payments in respect of the basic payment this summer.

I have been invited to meet with Rt hon George Eustace MP Secretary Of State for Environment Food and Rural Affairs next month .

Nutrient neutrality and implications for development:

I recently received the following from the head of planning at Dorset Council,

Dear Councillor,

You may be aware that Natural England has recently issued new advice to local planning authorities whose areas include catchments for freshwater/estuarine habitats where development proposals have the potential to affect water quality as a consequence of adverse nutrient impacts. Nutrient deposition can arise from agriculture but also from the treatment and disposal of wastewater arising from residential development. Dorset Council is affected by 5 catchments in total:

- Poole Harbour catchment
- Somerset Levels and Moors
- River Avon
- Chesil and The Fleet
- River Axe

Dorset Council has been working with Natural England and other partners in developing nutrient mitigation strategies for affected catchments, but where development proposals in affected catchments are unable to demonstrate that they are able to mitigate adverse effects, planning permission will be refused.

Further clarification is being sought from Natural England on various details, in particular around the suitability of current nutrient mitigation strategies in the Poole Harbour catchment for dealing with the impact of phosphorus. In the meantime, planning permission will only be granted if Dorset Council can be satisfied that it will not lead to an adverse effect upon the integrity of a protected habitat as a consequence of the impact of nutrient enrichment upon water quality.

My report coincides with the third anniversary of the formation of Dorset Council and the declaration of the climate and ecological emergency.

I report as below:

How well are we addressing the Climate and Ecological Emergency?

Posted on How well are we addressing the Climate and Ecological Emergency?

A recently published progress report has revealed how well Dorset Council is performing in its efforts to tackle the Climate and Ecological Emergency (CEE).

Dorset Council declared a CEE in May 2019 and, following extensive development and consultation, Full Council adopted their Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy (CEES) and action plan last July, with an agreement to report progress twice a year.

The CEES is a long-term strategy which sets out 41 objectives under nine topic headings. It sets carbon targets and identifies key areas where the council can both reduce its own carbon footprint and support the whole of Dorset to become carbon neutral.

Key headlines from the progress report include (but are not limited to): –

- Significant budget commitment by Dorset Council, with £10 million capital climate change budget and over £50 million in external funding to support activities that address the CEE
- Over 40 solar panel arrays installed on schools and other council-owned buildings, with an additional 50 arrays due for installation shortly
- Estimated investment through the Dorset County Pension Fund in high carbon activities reduced from £128 million to £41 million since 2019 (1.2% of total investment)
- Low Carbon Dorset programme awarded £5.4 million grants to businesses wishing to go greener. Projects should lead to £16.1m of investment in low-carbon projects in Dorset and an annual reduction of 9,400 tonnes of carbon
- 60% waste recycling achieved. Dorset Council is now the eighth best performing council in England and the third best unitary council in England for recycling and composting
- Pro-active lobbying of Government for powers and funding to support strategy delivery through direct representation to government, letters to, and lobbying of, MPs and representation through national groups
- Majority of streetlights upgraded to efficient lighting
- Strategy under development to shift Council vehicle fleet away from use of fossil fuels, with trials of electric vehicles (e.g., road sweepers and refuse vehicles) and Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil fuel for use in heavy vehicles
- Use of primary highway surfacing material reduced by 30%, replaced with recycled products. 15% of surfacing materials made of material recovered from Dorset's former roads
- Expanded our Cut and Collect practices on roadside verges to cover more areas of Dorset. Space management for biodiversity benefit increased by 350km²
- 42 electric vehicle charging sockets/bays installed at 21 locations. Next phase to deliver 51 more underway
- Healthy Homes Dorset supported over 130 homes with energy efficiency and improvement measures, with many more receiving Green Homes Grants to install insulation, ventilation, and solar panels
- Dorset Green H2 project to install 5MW solar farm and electrolyser to produce green hydrogen.

The progress report outlines the Council's key progress, but also includes the next steps to be taken under each of the nine topics. The full progress report can be found on the Dorset Council website.

Cllr Ray Bryan, Dorset Council's Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment, said:

"It's important to make sure everyone is kept up to date with how we're getting on delivering our Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy and action plan, and I'm especially pleased that Dorset residents will be able to see that these works are gaining real momentum now.

As a local authority, we must deal with many competing priorities, but our commitment to delivering on our CEES ambitions remains steadfast. Much has already been delivered, both by Dorset Council directly but also working with a multitude of partners. There is no one single point of success or failure defining whether we will be successful; the journey to a decarbonised Dorset will involve us all.

We will continue to work towards our goal to become a carbon-neutral council and putting in place the necessary actions and partnerships to accelerate the journey towards a carbon neutral Dorset. I welcome

the opportunity to discuss with all interested parties what their views are on concrete steps that can realistically help us accelerate our ambitions, balancing the social and economic needs of all residents, especially the most vulnerable. I am absolutely committed to making Dorset the best in class, and I know that we have all of the ingenuity, passion, and capabilities to achieve this.”

On a personal note and having worked with various past editors of the Ecologist magazine I must stress how serious agenda items climate and ecological pressures are for me

Dorset Council awards £90,000 to support food schemes in the county

In a bid to support residents with rising living costs, Dorset Council has awarded £90K from the Government's 2021 Household Support Fund to various food schemes over the last five months.

20 food projects – ranging from foodbanks to social supermarkets – received dedicated funding as part of the Governments' plan to help those with limited disposable income across the winter period.

The funding has enabled community groups and charities to continue to supply food and essential items to residents.

The Household Support Fund (HSF) was launched in December last year to help residents, including vulnerable families, with the cost of food, heating, and other essentials across the winter months from central government funding and has recently been extended to 30 September.

Chris Lee, Chair of Trustees from Verwood Foodbank, said:

“The Verwood food bank provides emergency food to those in need and signposts clients to organisations that can help them out of poverty. The pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis continue to create a huge level of demand for our help. Help from Dorset Council through the Household support fund has helped us to support many of those in need.”

Dr Neil Hardisty, Director of The Nest Weymouth, said:

“The Household Support Fund is proving a real blessing to both The Westham Nest and the new Littlemoor Nest. It means that we are not having to search out grants to ensure that our members are able to access a good selection of nutritious foods. As the cost-of-living crisis starts to bite we are seeing more people coming through our doors seeking help and support.”

Cllr Laura Miller, Cabinet member for Culture, Communities and Customer Services, said:

“We know that a significant number of households are experiencing hardship due to rise in basic living costs.

“The Household Support Fund is there to provide rapid short-term financial support to meet immediate needs and help those who are struggling to afford food, energy, water bills, and other related essentials.

“I am really pleased we've been able to help so many local people over the winter months and I would urge any individual, or household to check out what help is available if they are experiencing financial hardship.”

More information is available for residents who struggle with access to food on the council website.

For more information about the Household Support Fund, check out details online

Further announcements on the 2022 Household Support Fund will be available from 1 June.

Since we last met I have had meeting with various Members of Parliament at various locations across Dorset and Devon:

Simon Hoare MP

Luke Hall MP

Rt hon Theresa Coffey MP

Ian Liddell Grainger MP

Felicity Buchan MP

Rebecca Pow MP

and Chris Loder virtual meeting .

I will highlight in particular the work of Rebecca Pow the Environment Minister

Rebecca has overseen the passing the Environment Act which she sees as being an example of the Rest of the World to follow

The Act seeks to clean up the country's air, restore natural habitats and increase nature, reduce waste, and make better use of our resources. Crucially, it will help the decline in species by 2030 helping to reverse the fall in population of British species.

Her literature talks about new legally binding environmental targets and enforced by a new, independent Office for Environmental Protection which will hold government and public bodies to account on their environmental obligations.

The Environment Act provided long term targets to improve air quality water and waste reduction and resource efficiency

It further talks of a target on PM2.5 concentration the most harmful pollutant to human health .
It also refers to effective collaboration between water companies through statutory water management plans
Drainage and sewerage management planning a statutory duty.

And the final of many bullet points I picked up on: - Require local authorities to tackle air quality !!!

Clearly the meeting with Rebecca Pow the environment minister was also particularly interesting as we move to Environmental Land Management Scheme .

ELM aims to reward environmental activity.

While the first tier of this the sustainable farming incentive should be available to all farmers, there is some discussion whether 2 of the other components of ELMs create problems for the tenanted sector:

The Local Nature Recovery and Landscape Recovery elements of ELM have at least a partial reliance on taking land out of agricultural production and use it to enhance nature, the environment and bio diversity instead.

Clearly tenants will look at their own position, whether Agricultural Holdings Act Tenancy (AHA or Farm Business Tenancy . Similarly , owner occupiers and landlords should take professional advice in respect of the possible loss of Capital Taxes reliefs.

All of this is taking place at a time when food security is a genuine concern and when we are living through price inflation unprecedented in recent times.

Best regards

Simon

Councillor Simon Christopher
Dorset Councillor Marshwood Vale
077988 33715