

Cllr Christopher's E-mailed Report – 29 May 2023.

A very brief report before Tuesday

Clearly there is a great desire to see improvements to safe cycling and walking in the Chideock area and I will speak about this at the meeting.

Dorset has received £1,978,000 as part of the round of Active Travel Funding from the Department for Transport.

This week will see the continuation of the Agricultural Show season with the Royal Bath and West Show following on from the very recent Devon County Show.

Farmers in England have finally been given clarity on how they will receive financial support for providing environmental goods and services under the government's post-Brexit farm payment scheme. Designed to replace the Common Agricultural Policy, the Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes have been created to pay farmers for nature-friendly farming practices such as protecting hedgerows and managing crops without pesticides. All of this is taking place against the backdrop of falling milk prices. And there is a great deal of concern throughout the Marshwood Vale farming community.

A reminder, farmers will no longer be paid for the size of the area they farm, many will find they have to work harder under ELMs, as well as face higher costs to undertake land management actions .

At the Dorset Council Full Council meeting Spencer Flower was re-elected as leader of Dorset Council. The meeting included concerns re the state of empty listed buildings. This concern came from a number of speakers including from CPRE.

This will sound familiar given local history in the Ward where I have battled to get effective enforcement. There is also the matter of work taking place without permission and I continue to work with Senior lawyers and other Officers on this and met with our MP.

It is very difficult for those who do things properly and struggle with the planning system while others are perceived to have buildings constructed or turned agricultural land into garden without perceived necessary permission being received.

Failure to obtain listed building consent is a criminal offence and can lead to enforcement notices, fines and even imprisonment in the most serious of cases.

The meeting also featured concern for the Dorset construction workforce due to planning delays through nitrate and phosphate concerns.. More later.

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.

Parking Fines

The Police and Crime Commissioner and the Leader of Dorset Council recently wrote to the Transport Minister asking them to consider increasing parking fines particularly in rural and seaside areas. Currently they are low in comparison to London and other big city charges - such that holiday makers sometimes abandon their cars and view the 25 fine as worth it. In areas such as Lulworth this has caused severe disruption and has prevented emergency vehicles from getting through.

Town and Parish Councillors

At this time of year Town and Parish Councils are frequently looking for new Councillors to replace those who have retired or moved on. Please consider this valuable and essential work if you could spare some time.

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 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.

There was 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.

Electric Vehicle charging points

We aim to provide access to charging points within a 10 minute drive for most residents within 10 years. That's 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 aren't 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

Household Support Fund

The Household Support Fund (HSF) will reopen for applications on 6 June 2023 for low-income households in the Dorset Council area. The support will be in the form of supermarket vouchers. Citizens Advice will be allocating this fund on behalf of Dorset Council and vouchers will be issued to residents who meet the eligibility criteria within 6 – 8 weeks. Dorset Council households will be able to apply if they have an annual household net income of less than £30,000 and savings of less than £16,000 and not applied for a previous HSF payment within the last 6 months. Calculations for the annual net income should not include Personal Independence Payments, Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance, Carers Allowance or Child Benefit. Applications are limited to one per household. Funds are limited for each window and the form will close when they have been allocated. The April window opened and closed on the same day, so please get in touch as soon as possible once the form opens. If applicants need help completing the form, they can telephone Customer Services on 01305 221000.

Community Grants

Grants of up to £5,000 are available for projects that bring communities across Dorset together. If you are looking to kickstart a new project that will make a difference for people in your community, round 5 of the Community and Culture Project Fund has now reopened. The grants, which are managed by Dorset Council, welcome applications for projects and events for community, arts, accredited museums, heritage, sport, youth, play and physical activity.

Last year the grants supported a wide range of local projects including arts and crafts, physical activities, sports clubs, warm spaces, foodbanks, lunch clubs and cost of living support for childcare places. Not for profit groups who meet our funding criteria are welcome to apply for the grant, which can fund up to £5,000 towards a project that will have a social impact and support local communities and hard to reach groups.

A total of £54,420 was awarded to heritage, museums, and arts organisations across Dorset last year. In addition, 27 grants worth a total of £64,970 were awarded to voluntary and community organisations that work with disadvantaged, under served and marginalized communities in the Dorset council area.

The closing date for applications is Sunday 7 July and decision letters will be sent to all applicants at the end of July. Application details are on the Dorset Council website.

Poole Harbour pollution incident

This report below may well have been superseded by more up to date information; it was believed correct at the date of publication.

Good progress has continued with the clean-up operation since the Perenco Oil Spill on 26 March. Poole Harbour Commissioners are the lead organisation in the clean-up operation, which has gone extremely well. So far over 300 bags of oil and contaminated materials have been collected from the beaches as well as 417,000 litres of oil and oily water collected to tankers from Ower Bay. The clean-up and remediation operation will continue at Ower Bay until the contamination has been fully dealt with. Localised impacts to the site required to enable the clean-up have been assessed and considered necessary in order to remove the oil and protect the wider harbour. Natural England (NE) /Environment group is advising on the remediation and recovery plan.

Foster Carers

Our foster carers and supported lodgings carers now benefit from an increase to their financial payment of 15 per cent from 1 April with a further increase of 12.43 per cent being added to the allowance part of the payment.

Foster carers play a vital role in Dorset by providing care for children who find themselves in need of a home, through no fault of their own. The uplift in payments will help foster families cover the increasing costs of caring for a child in their home.

Recycling Barbecues

Litter Free Dorset is working with Southern Co-op and W&S Recycling to dismantle and recycle 8,000 disposable barbecues as a reminder of how destructive they can be to the environment. A display of disposable barbecues for sale weighing in at over seven tonnes were taken off the shelves following the devastating heathland fires of 2022 and campaigns from Litter Free Dorset (LFD) and the Urban Heaths Partnership supported by Dorset Council

Portland Barge

Dorset Council and Dorset Police have set out their shared position on the Home Office's plans to house asylum seekers on a barge in Portland Port later this year.

The organisations have questions about the proposal that remain unanswered and continue to seek clarity from the Home Office on plans. Both agencies have statutory responsibilities to ensure minimal impact on local services, should the Home Office's plan go ahead. We are still waiting for answers to questions from the Home Office.

Car Parking Machines upgrade

All our car park and on-street pay and display machines are to be replaced. Replacement of the machines is expected to complete by mid-July, with the new machines offering improved reliability and a consistent user experience.

The machines will provide customers with a range of payment options, including cash, card, Apple Pay, Google Pay, and an online app. Wi-Fi will also be improved in car parks with weak phone signals, ensuring smoother transactions. The payment facilities and display screens will be at a height suitable for wheelchair users.

Nitrates.

We have had many questions as to how the nitrates policy affects development. Below is a summary article explaining this.

There are five catchment areas for internationally protected wetland habitats within, or overlapping with, Dorset Council's administrative area where phosphorus and/or nitrogen levels have the potential to adversely affect water quality. Dorset Council has a legal responsibility to ensure that any development it permits will not adversely affect the integrity of any internationally protected site

Simon

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