

Report from Councillor Simon Christopher ~ November 2021

Public Health update on COVID-19 in Dorset

Case rates have decreased across both council areas since last week. Despite this, cases remain at high levels locally. Both areas are now above the South West regional average and remain significantly above the England average. The number of people in hospital with COVID-19 across Dorset is now 70.

With high case rates locally, it's important that we continue to take steps to reduce transmission wherever possible. If we all take steps now we can help bring cases down, reduce pressure on the local health and care system and avoid the need for further measures over the winter period. Ventilation remains key to stopping the airborne spread of the virus – watch this video to see how opening windows, even for short periods of time, can make a difference.

We're asking everyone to take twice weekly rapid tests to check you're not infectious. This helps to make sure you're not unknowingly passing the virus on to others when you're going to work or meeting up with friends and family.

If you're eligible for the booster vaccine, you can now book your appointment five months after your second dose. Demand is high but appointments are being added so check back regularly if you can't find a convenient slot straight away.

CAR PARKING:

Below is set out the official communication in respect of difficulties with Dorset Council Car Parks. Suffice to say that I sent a sample e mail of complaint from a local resident ,(a lady who runs a prominent local business and who has been a good friend of mine since we went to school together) to Matt Prosser the Dorset Council Chief Executive requesting an explanation.

Here is the official communications team commentary:

“Drivers using Dorset Council car parks are being asked to use cashless payments due to ongoing disruption to many ticket machines across the county. If a machine is currently unable to accept cash payment, drivers will still need to pay for parking via a cashless method. This may involve using a phone and will require locating the unique car park identification number. This is displayed on signs throughout the car park and can also be found on the side of the payment machine.

There are four cashless options to choose from:

- o Downloading the Just Park app to your smartphone
- o Paying by mobile phone, using details found on the side of the payment machine
- o For those without a smartphone, you can register with JustPark online at home and pay by SMS (text message) in the car park
- o Some car park payment machines offer debit/credit card payment, this can be checked in advance online at dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/parking

Drivers may find it beneficial to set some of these options up in advance, such as inputting car registration and card details into the Just Park app while at home or registering for SMS payment online.”

Cllr Ray Bryan, Dorset Council's Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment, said: "We're sorry for this disruption. This is very much a temporary measure and we are working hard to reinstate cash payments, which we know are the preferred option for many of our residents.

"Please be prepared to use a cashless method of payment while we work through this issue, it's going to take several weeks to get cash payments operating again."

It's hoped that cash payments will be available again in all car parks by early December.

Clearly, I will be speaking about this at the parish council meeting on Monday.....

PLATINUM JUBILEE:

I have also received a response from Matt Prosser, chief executive of Dorset Council in response to my question in respect of the 2022 Jubilee celebrations for HM Queen Elizabeth 2, our sovereign and defender of the faith.

The response was as follows:

"Dear Cllr Christopher

There are a number of officers across Dorset Council working to support and prepare for Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee, from links with our Lord Lieutenant who is arranging formal services in conjunction with Dorset Council, to mark the occasion through to supporting the national Queen's Canopy project to plant trees across the UK.

We are also linking with DAPTC to provide practical support to those towns and parishes wanting to host local events and needing to apply for street closures or additional waste and recycling services.

I have asked the various teams for an update which I will collate in due course and circulate to members. I am also in contact with the Lord Lieutenant to understand any further requests coming from Her Majesty's team. "

Kind regards

Matt Prosser

Chief Executive, Senior Leadership Team"

BUS SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN AND LEVELLING UP:

The Dorset Council Bus Service Improvement Plan has been submitted to HM Government and there is detail from the official Dorset Council Communications team below . This has coincidentally coincided with the creation of the new Ministry for Levelling Up, as it has been termed in the press, strictly the newly titled Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities under the leadership of former DEFRA secretary Michael Gove . Clearly improved public transport assisted by more buses as cited in the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) would be helpful ,while the mooted reductions in rail services are not helpful.

The concept of levelling up was a concept that first came on the agenda of HM Government in 2019, it may be thought of as vague by many a soundbite perhaps. Clearly many people believe that there should be action to champion, protect and promote the potential of the economy of rural areas such

as the Marshwood Vale . This should involve helping rural businesses thrive so creating prosperity and ensuring we can all contribute towards a net zero economy.

Part of levelling up has to involve the need to improve digital infrastructure in hard to reach rural areas, so that there is levelling up of the difference between poor broadband connection in rural areas and better broadband connected urban areas and an effective planning system.

Dorset Council has submitted its bid for the Government's Bus Back Better £3 billion fund to revitalise the nation's bus services.

In March the Government launched Bus Back Better, a new National Bus Strategy for England with aims to rejuvenate local bus services by making them:

- o More attractive for passengers
- o More affordable
- o Easier to understand and use
- o Faster and more reliable
- o Greener

This strategy requires each authority to produce a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) to coordinate services and future investment through either an Enhanced Partnership (EP) or Franchise approach. Dorset Council has developed their BSIP by working closely with local bus operators, community and business voices, bus passengers, and the voluntary and health transport sectors.

This BSIP is an ambitious plan. It focuses on revitalising the local bus network, reversing the decline in local bus passenger use and to have more buses, to more places and operating for longer periods of the day.

The key aims of the BSIP are:

- o To significantly increase the number of people using local buses across Dorset
- o To increase daily services with a mix of fixed and flexible services across rural and urban areas of Dorset
- o To develop a range of on-demand public transport services delivered by a mix of operators by identifying gaps in the current local bus network
- o To continue to protect Dorset's environment by moving to a decarbonised local bus fleet
- o Create and maintain a comprehensive network of travel options to link up communities and reduce rural isolation.

Cllr Ray Bryan, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment, said:

“This plan is just the start. To get people to use the bus we must have a long-term plan and a guarantee of long-term Government funding for at least 5 years so that we can change people's views and build their confidence to use the bus.”

Cllr. Noc Lacey-Clarke, The Cabinet Lead for Environment, Travel and Harbours, said:

“We are keen to develop a bus strategy that is available to everyone, with particular attention to access to training, education and work.”

Once the BSIP is submitted the council will wait for an announcement from Government on whether they will be awarded money from the fund and how much. Once the amount is known then an amended BSIP and action plan will take the plans forward.

A35 MATTERS:

I have held a number of meetings in connection with National Highways to make the A35 safer .

This is a desire of both our MP and myself that this major road is made safer and involves amongst other things the possibility of adjustments to speed limits , the possible introduction of average speed cameras and better signage indicating potential hazards. I am working with Dorset Council officers to improve safety in villages that are not on the A35 where the Dorset Council is responsible, I am also working with the new lead member for highways responsible for road surfaces on B and C roads in the Marshwood Vale Ward and indeed other non National Highways roads in Dorset .

I will be looking to arrange for David Sidwick, Police and Crime Commissioner for Dorset to visit Parish Councils in the coming months.

CLIMATE EMERGENCY:

Many e mails have been received and rightly so in connection with climate change .

I do not think I can do better than provide details of a letter from my colleague Councillor Ray Bryan who has responsibility for the Dorset Response to tackling climate change and the climate emergency.

Dorset Council letter to Government – Help us tackle the Climate Emergency

Posted on November 5, 2021 Dorset Council letter to Government – Help us tackle the Climate Emergency

As COP26 continues, Dorset Council has sent letters to key members of central government calling for further help in tackling the Climate and Ecological Emergency. The following summarises the key points within the correspondence.

From Cllr Ray Bryan, Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment, Dorset Council: –

“Back in May 2019, at our very first Full Council meeting, Dorset Council declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency (CEE). Supported by councillors from across the political spectrum, we have spent the last two years putting together a strategy for how we will play our part in tackling the greatest existential crisis ever faced by mankind.

We’ve done the research, looked at the available data and set out how we can achieve our goals at a local level. We’ve already made remarkable progress in reducing our carbon footprint via energy efficiencies in our buildings, developing and transforming active travel with our partners at BCP Council, and celebrated the continued success of our waste recycling services, which are amongst the best in the country, to name just three examples.

But there’s an uncomfortable truth that I need to bring to your attention; it won’t be enough.

Dorset Council’s services account for only 1% of the county’s carbon emissions. And yet, to achieve carbon neutrality as quickly as possible, we – as in the people of Dorset – need more money and better support from central government in dealing with the CEE, especially in the wake of the financial challenges caused by the pandemic.

As a coastal county and predominantly rural, the dangers of increased flooding incidents and other extreme weather events alone caused by climate change could be catastrophic for our communities.

We are doing everything we can to address the Council's carbon footprint, but the remaining 99% of emissions can only be tackled by everyone – central government, businesses, councils and, most importantly, the public – if we work together. And you can help us to make this happen.

With post-pandemic recovery well underway, there has never been a better opportunity to demonstrate how “Building Back Better” can mean making the most of this extraordinary chance to invest in infrastructure that will help prevent and address the worst consequences of man-made climate change.

It's also the perfect time to make some big changes to national standards, legislation, and procedures to ensure that everyone is pulling in the same direction. We feel that councils need to be provided with significant new powers, responsibilities, and funding to deliver an inclusive and green recovery in their local area.

Here are some of the things we'd like to see the government address: –

- o Remove hurdles for renewable energy deployment. It's unnecessarily difficult to set up solar arrays, wind farms, and tidal power generation in terms of bureaucracy, funding, and physical infrastructure. The economics of subsidy free renewable energy is extremely challenging with a high degree of uncertainty, with network constraints in Dorset increasing these risks and cost, driving up the scale of development and planning issues. In addition, the planning system is unsupportive of on-shore wind, largely ruling out this technology – this needs to change immediately.

- o The latest National Planning Policy Framework doesn't go far enough when looking at climate change prevention. We want increased enforceable standards for building insulation and energy efficiency (as have been introduced in Scotland), implemented nationally so developers can't just choose to build elsewhere. We want to see massive investment to bring all existing homes up to the highest possible energy efficient standard by 2030. Councils should also have greater powers to refuse planning permission for developments that negatively impact their local environment and are energy inefficient.

- o We need more investment in sustainable public transport infrastructure and active travel, especially in rural areas. Over the past few decades, local councils have been forced to cut subsidies for bus services and, as a rural county, Dorset was impacted more than most. We cannot expect people to get out of their cars and onto public and active transport if the service provision just isn't there. The reduction in emissions from private transport would be significant, and the health benefits of increased walking and cycling are huge too, helping take pressure off the NHS

- o We want stronger support for digital infrastructure and flexible working. Enabling employees to work from home during the pandemic has maintained productivity and lowered travel-related emissions. However, some still struggle with connectivity issues, while tacit support from government for “get back to the office” messages is both insulting and counter-productive for those who have worked harder than ever over the past 18 months from their homes. Digital infrastructure investment will allow for this change in working to continue, helps businesses – especially those in rural areas – and is significantly better for the environment as commuting is greatly reduced.

For too long, many people have seen the potential adoption of greener policies and the transformation of our economy, both at a national and local level, as a negative; That by addressing the CEE and putting environmental and ecological benefits ahead of all else, it will mean a level of

sacrifice and compromise that some people are not willing to accept. It does not need to be this way. We just need to change our focus to building prosperity around a sustainable economy, rather than slip back into old habits and traditional areas of development that can harm our environment.

If the UK Government can demonstrate bold leadership and use this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to empower local councils, businesses, and communities to build a better Britain that recognises the Climate and Ecological Emergency and its scientifically predicted consequences, we can ensure that future generations reap the benefits of a healthier planet and strong economy.

I have faith that our leaders will take the urgent action necessary to invest in a cleaner, greener future for our country and remove the obstacles we face as we all work together to do what is necessary to address this crisis.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr Ray Bryan”

The letter above has been shared with all local MPs whose constituencies are based within the Dorset Council area.

Detailed letters that expand on the respective themes contained above have also been sent to:-

- o The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP (From Cllr David Walsh, Portfolio Holder for Planning)
- o The Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP
- o Julia Lopez MP
- o Greg Hands MP

I thought I would share with you the latest Covid figures and other issues that are topical per the official news bulletin these also include notes on pop up campsites and highlight the residents survey.

Other Dorset parish councils have written to the chief executive of Dorset expressing concern about the number of campsites that have emerged in their wards and the impact on local residents and the countryside.

Finally I have to inform you that in advance of the final setting of the 2022/2023 Dorset Budget setting process there is an appreciation of the difficulties the Council faces, most notably in the need to fund statutory demand lead services.

Best regards

Simon

Councillor Simon Christopher

Dorset Councillor Marshwood Vale

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