

## Topic Area - Food & Drink

### Areas for Action

To reduce the environmental impacts of food production, but still meet the rising demands, more food will need to be produced using less land and emitting fewer greenhouse gases. This will mean farming practices within Dorset will need to change. There will also need to be a significant shift in the behaviour of consumers here in Dorset.

Dorset Council must work towards reducing our carbon emissions, food poverty and the level of waste produced, all while meeting the increasing demand for food. To do so, we must help by establishing the following initiatives.

#### DIRECT

- ~ Work with Council tenants and concessions to reduce food waste and promote less packaging
- ~ Continued adoption of the Council's single use plastic policy throughout its estate, operations, tenants and concessions
- ~ Increase range of edible fruits, flowers, and vegetables in Council owned parks, rooftops, and open spaces
- ~ Reduce use of fertilizers on Council land by increased use of locally produced compost

#### INDIRECT (through services)

- ~ Work to develop opportunities for enhancing Dorset's ecological networks
- ~ Work with partners to reduce meat and increase plant-based meals in care homes and schools
- ~ Work with Council tenants and concessionaires to reduce the sale of products with high GHG emissions
- ~ Develop funding scheme to improve the efficiency of Council (Tricuro sites / other care homes) and schools' catering equipment, and switch to electric sources to allow for carbon neutral catering
- ~ Work with County Farm tenants to encourage the adoption of more climate and wildlife friendly practices

#### INFLUENCE & PARTNERSHIP

- ~ Continue to work with producers and partners to promote 'local food' and reduce food miles
- ~ Promote home growing and allotments to Dorset residents
- ~ Explore the adoption of tools to help engage school staff (and potentially students) to create low-carbon meals, with consideration of ingredients, food miles, and cooking methods
- ~ Promote Green Kitchen Standard & Food for Life to Dorset businesses
- ~ Work with partners to promote low-carbon affordable food options to Dorset residents
- ~ Work with partners to help food and drink suppliers within Dorset to be resilient to climate change

**Food and drink - The table (above) is taken from the strategy and identifies the areas for action where we see Dorset Council can either directly impact, indirectly impact or only influence outcomes. Do you agree with what we have proposed?**

Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know  
What we can directly impact **Disagree**

What we can indirectly impact **Disagree**

What we can influence and partnership **Disagree**

We **disagree** at all three points

**Please explain why you think this and if there is anything fundamental that you feel we have missed in "food and drink" area for action?**

We congratulate Dorset Council on the huge amount of detailed research and planning work that has gone into its Food and Drink Strategy and, in particular, on the way that it has noted the many complex interconnections between farming and land use; food production, marketing and consumption; health; carbon output and climate change; and biodiversity loss.

We also note that farmers in particular may feel at first sight that their sector is not represented, given that Farming and Agriculture is divided between (and somewhat hidden within) 'Food and Drink' and 'Natural Assets'. We recommend much better signposting for farmers and agriculture.

We feel that the proposed strategy is piecemeal and misses enormous opportunities as a result. As currently set out, the strategy is a series of important but unconnected and small-scale policy initiatives. In many cases these are vague ("Work to develop opportunities for enhancing Dorset's ecological networks"), unambitious (Reduce use of fertilizers on Council land) and uninspiring ("Explore the adoption of tools to help engage school staff (and potentially students) to create low-carbon meals".)

Individually these can be enhanced – for example, a near-term date can be set for the banning of all chemical fertilizers and pesticides on Council land. This serves the environment and the health of residents, sends a clear signal, gets publicity, costs very little and sets an inspirational tone for everything that follows (more comments appear in our notes on the Action Plan below).

But going beyond individual initiatives, we believe that by setting up a clear strategic framework of ambitious and integrated policies, the Council could establish Dorset as a pioneer (rather than a reluctant follower) in its approach to the climate and ecological emergency. Rather than "working to explore the adoption of tools..." at this level Dorset Council could be pioneering radical plans for a 'Dorset Diet' or 'Chemical-Free Dorset', or 'Regenerative Dorset': the first county-wide drive to create a circular local economy centred on the promotion of Regenerative Agriculture across Dorset. These are not just cosmetic changes, they would signal a move from the modest "Influence and Partnership" role (which throughout the DC document grossly understates Dorset Council's most important potential role) to a more visionary "CHAMPIONING" role. In its 'CHAMPIONING' role Dorset Council could lead with the (relatively low-cost) task of co-ordinating, encouraging, publicizing and facilitating schemes that are already underway across the county – e.g. initiatives to clean up river catchments (Asker, Char), to create pesticide free wildlife corridors across the landscape (Char Valley Lifelines) and to create an agroecology training centre (Bridport Area). Other food initiatives (food festivals, food banks, community schemes, etc.) in Weymouth, Bridport, Shaftesbury and elsewhere could be pulled together under one umbrella and helped to spread into other towns and parishes. In this way, DC could promote very visible campaigns that attract publicity and public engagement (and tourists) and harness local skills and experience that are **already**

**engaged on projects that are far more ambitious than anything proposed by Dorset Council in its draft strategy.** By championing these ideas and others that are already underway, DC can get massive publicity for Dorset as the most progressive county in England - creating a blueprint that others can follow and harnessing the energy and expertise of its residents to make climate and ecological action a part of the everyday life of all of us.

A crucial component of this strategy (which must straddle 'Food and Drink' and 'Natural Assets') must be for Dorset Council to grasp the nettle of industrial farming. To help nature to recover from years of degradation and promote a regenerative future for local communities, the strategy **must** help and encourage the farming and landowning community to restore, rather than further weaken, the soil, field margins and hedgerows, rivers, pollinators and biodiversity as a whole. This vital task (which DC can only undertake indirectly with local farmers, but in collaboration with AONB and Dorset Wildlife Trust and with local groups like the Landworkers Alliance) is hidden away in 'Natural Assets' as: "Communicate to businesses and land owners good practice in terms of protecting and enhancing ecological value, carbon sequestration and climate resilience". This needs to become something like "Pioneer a Revolution in Dorset Farming" which translates into an ongoing campaign to educate, support and encourage Dorset's farmers to create, manage and restore diverse and wildlife-rich habitats, create and manage dynamic woodlands, healthy soils and clean rivers (though the adoption of agroforestry and other regenerative agriculture practices) – as well as to work together to access financial support and ELMS funding and to reach tourists and local customers for their food and other services.

## **Action Plan**

We have identified a number of initial targets and specific actions that Dorset Council can take to address the areas above.

**Food and Drink - The action plan identifies where we see Dorset Council can take action. Do you agree with what we have proposed?**

Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know

### **We disagree**

#### **Please explain why you think this**

As noted above, the splitting of farming and agriculture between the Topic Areas 'Food and Drink' and 'Natural Assets' has led to some confusion.

For example, the 'Natural Assets' Action Plan undertakes to "Work with tenants of County Farm's [sic] to promote and ensure best environmental practices are upheld" and to have "Guidance created & communicated by 2021". However the 'Food and Drink' Action Plan undertakes to "Work with County Farm tenants to encourage the adoption of more climate and ecological friendly practices" and targets this as "Future action beyond 2023".

We believe that Dorset Council should seize this opportunity to create an inspirational county-wide plan to take its County Farms estate first 'chemical-free' and then 'organic' or 'regenerative'. The Plan can be published in 2021 with target dates in the near future. This will have a far more visible and immediate impact in support of DC's strategy of "demonstrating low carbon, ecologically friendly farming technique" than the woolly 'beyond 2023' target currently proposed.

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Specifically, the good intentions of the Strategy Document have not been followed through in the creation of the Action Plan, viz:

- ❖ **Areas for Action (Direct) #3** Increase range of edible fruits, flowers, and vegetables in Council owned parks, rooftops, and open spaces has become “2 additional [community] orchards developed by March 2023”. What happened to the parks and rooftops? Why only 2 orchards?
  
- ❖ **The Strategy Documents lists 5 Areas for Indirect Action:**
  - Work to develop opportunities for enhancing Dorset’s ecological networks
  - Work with partners to reduce meat and increase plant-based meals in care homes and schools
  - Work with Council tenants and concessionaires to reduce the sale of products with high GHG emissions
  - Develop funding scheme to improve the efficiency of Council (Tricuro sites / other care homes) and schools’ catering equipment, and switch to electric sources to allow for carbon neutral catering
  - Work with County Farm tenants to encourage the adoption of more climate and wildlife friendly practices

But the Action Plan contains only one Indirect Action, scheduled for “Beyond 2023”.

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A number of the initial targets and actions are vague and unnecessarily delayed. We understand that Dorset Council does not have the time, money or human resources to do everything at once, but:

- ❖ **Action 2:** There is no need to “undertake audit” of the use of chemical fertilizers on Council land. Simply set a deadline to stop using them. Cutting the audit would – save time and money.
- ❖ **Action 4:** There is no need to defer the plan for County Farms to “beyond 2023”. Some County Farms are already organic and the model and practice exists. Start the transition programme to low-carbon, regenerative agriculture on County Farms in 2021.

This leads us to a general concern about the role of the County Farms Estate and its existing Management Plan (2016-2021), viz:

- ❖ The Estate Management Plan says “It is therefore considered good practice to actively pursue options for investment in land which offer significant improvement to the Estate and/or the possibility of substantial future capital receipts.” There is no such undertaking in the Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy document or the Action Plan.
- ❖ Given the important role attributed to the County Farms Estate, there should be a clear undertaking in the Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy document not to sell off any more County Farms.
- ❖ The Estate Management Plan says: ”POLICY: ... where appropriate and in the interests of the Estate and the County Council small areas of land will be leased to Parish Councils for Parish Allotments.” This would be an easy way for DC to “Promote home growing and allotments to

Dorset residents” but the policy has not been carried over into the Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy, which refers only to using the “Planning Process” to ensure that allotments are provided by developers.

Overall Dorset Council’s Action Plan in this area contains 9 actions, of which 6 are scheduled for action “beyond 2023”. The overriding impression is that Dorset Council’s visible impact in this area will be to promote the Green Kitchen Standard locally (the basis of 3 of the 9 actions) and open 2 community orchards before 2023. Given the importance given to Food, Drink and Agriculture in the Council’s “FOOD & DRINK Detailed Technical Paper” we feel that the proposed actions are a woefully limited and delayed response in a year when the pandemic has highlighted the real and present risks to our food security and to the health and safety of our communities that could arise as consequences of social, economic and political disruption in the wake of mass migration, civil and military disputes over food and water rights overseas, financial constraints and uncertainty in the wake of government Covid bailouts, etc. What the Action Plan must recognise as a result is the urgent need to build sustainable, regenerative resource networks in and between local communities across the county.

Overall, we feel Dorset Council’s Food and Drink Strategy is disjointed and piecemeal and its Action Plan does not follow through on the strategy. Details are contained in our response, but the headlines are:

- ❖ Farming and agriculture are not well covered because farming issues are split between the ‘Food and Drink’ topic and the ‘Natural Assets’ topic.
- ❖ DC’s proposed policies and actions are all useful in a carbon reduction programme but hardly scratch the surface of the kind of adaptation and resilience strategy that will be needed in the event that climate change, mass migration, mounting financial, political and economic uncertainty and further health/virus concerns combine to disrupt food supply chains and force communities to become more self-contained and self-sufficient.
- ❖ We believe that local action being undertaken in and around West Dorset, especially by groups like the Landowners Alliance, Seeding our Future and Char Valley Lifelines, already far exceeds what Dorset Council is planning to do “beyond 2023”. DC could take on the role of facilitating, replicating and resourcing these initiatives rather than trying to come up with its own equivalents.
- ❖ By setting up a clear strategic framework of ambitious and integrated policies, the Council could establish Dorset as a pioneer (rather than a reluctant follower) in its approach to the climate and ecological emergency. It could pioneer radical plans for a ‘Dorset Diet’, ‘Chemical-Free Dorset’ or ‘Regenerative Dorset’: drives to establish Dorset as the most progressive county in England - creating a blueprint that others can follow and harnessing the energy and expertise of its residents.
- ❖ We believe DC needs to “Pioneer a Revolution in Dorset Farming” which translates into a campaign to educate, support and encourage Dorset farmers to create, manage and restore diverse and wildlife-rich habitats, create and manage dynamic woodlands, healthy soils and clean rivers (by adopting agroforestry and other regenerative agriculture practices) – as well as to work together to access financial support and ELMS funding and to promote their food and other services.