

HILTON PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES of the remote meeting of the Parish Council held on Tuesday 4th January 2022

PRESENT: Cllrs Justine McGuiness (JMcG) (Chairman) Catherine Langham (CL) Shulla Jaques (SJ) Rodney Northover (RN) Marion Walbridge (MW); (JH), Clive Jones (CJ) George Sotiriadis (GS) Unitary Councillor Jill Haynes

IN ATTENDANCE: One member of the public and Mr. David Green, Clerk (DG)

1. **WELCOME & APOLOGIES:** The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting after what has not been an easy year and wished all a Happy Christmas & New Year. The Chairman gave the Parish Council's condolences to Cllr Langham following her sad loss.
2. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS:** The minutes of the previous Parish Council meeting held on the 2nd November 2021 were agreed and signed the Chairman.
3. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:** None
4. **MATTERS ARISING:**

4.1 Post Box

The Chairman confirmed that this had now been repaired.

4.2 Phone Box

The Chairman confirmed that the next stage would be the installation of cork tiles at the rear wall of the box and the repainting of the gold crown.

4.3 Old Brewery Hall

The Chairman reported that the Christmas Fayre had been very successful; no request for PC assistance had been received.

4.4 Ash Die-back

A written report regarding two trees of concern near the Brewery Hall had been received prior to the meeting. This will be followed up.

4.5 Hilton PCC Grant

Further information concerning the grant application had been received but there had been insufficient time to consider this. A decision concerning this will be made post meeting.

5. UNITARY COUNCILLORS REPORT:

JH had provided a written report for November & December prior to the meeting. JH gave a Covid-19 update noting that there were high numbers among the over 60's in the local area but the numbers per head of population were relatively low compared to the national average. There were implications for Dorset County Hospital in terms of the separation of patients.

JH noted that 'hybrid' meetings were the norm but central government was not supporting this practice which is based on 'in principle' decisions being taken. The Community Governance Review had been inundated with applications, some of which were very complex, for example around Bridport and Symondsburry. Dorset Council was struggling to

manage the process, which requires cross party support, hence the reasons for the publication of a revised timetable.

6. OPEN FORUM:

A resident raised the issue of the road closure at Hilton on 29th December which had resulted in heavy goods vehicles attempting to use the Knapp as an alternative route. This had caused damage to verges and was unacceptable. The Clerk had reported the concerns of councillors and residents to Dorset Highways who had said that this was a short notice closure and advance notification to residents had not been possible. It was pointed out to Highways that diversionary notices were not adequately sited in order to provide advance warning of the closure and Highways have provided assurances that they will look at this in the future.

The Parish Council will request that the Community Highways Officer makes a site visit to the Knapp to look at the signage and consider whether any further measures could be taken.

The Chairman noted that local roads were certainly not designed for the large lorries and tractors which are now using these routes.

GS reported that a neighbour had raised an issue with a flooded brook depositing silt in a garden. The Chairman suggested that the Environment Agency should be contacted.

7. SPEED SURVEY RESULTS

SJ noted the speed survey outcome and the advice from the Road Safety Team none of the tested locations met the criteria for a Speed Indicator Device, based that the fact that the 85thile results were close to the 30-mph limit. The Council resolved that no further action would be taken at this stage.

8. PLANNING APPLICATIONS, DECISIONS & ISSUES

Hawkes Field:

- i) JH noted that the application for change of use to continue the use of the former equestrian storage and office building as a dwellinghouse had been refused
- ii) The Clerk noted that the application for a new dwelling had also been recently refused
- iii) There has not been any decision concerning the Certificate of Lawfulness concerning use by heavy goods vehicles

CL noted that there is a planning webinar on 27th January with David Walsh to which all are invited.

9. COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES UPDATE

8.1 Queens Platinum Jubilee event

The Chairman reported that the hire of marquees for the event would have insurance costs of £ 150 per marquee, and two would be required. CL confirmed that this would not have to be paid in the event that the event did not take place and the Council agreed in principle to meet this cost.

10. FINANCIAL MATTERS:

10.1 Finance report:

The Clerks report showed that the financial position is still more than adequate, with the bank balance at 31st December being £ 12,095.16 and the general reserve being £ 9,757.09

10.2 Retrospective payments authorised:

Date	Amount	Payee	Reason
01/11/2021	£ 231.60	David Green	Oct 2021 Pay
03/11/2021	£ 28.35	David Green	Expenses
04/11/2021	£ 109.44	X2 Connect Ltd	Information signs
29/11/2021	£ 720.00	Dorset Council	Speed survey
30/11/2021	£ 266.80	David Green	Nov 2021 pay
07/12/2021	£ 22.47	Justine McGuinness	Lights & Batteries
08/12/2021	£ 115.10	Zoom - renewal	Renew Zoom
30/12/2021	£ 236.00	David Green	Dec 2021 pay

10.3 Precept confirmation

The Chairman noted that the publication of the tax base calculations did not materially alter the precept request for 2022/2023, which will be £ 5,612. The effect on Council Tax Band D is an increase of £0.87 pence for the year.

11. HIGHWAYS & RIGHTS OF WAY:

11.1 Grit Bins

The Chairman noted that a salt bag had been delivered to Cllr Northover.

11.2 Road Signage

A report had been received from a resident with photographs showing instances of damaged and concealed road signs. This will be forwarded to the Community Highways Officer for attention. The Clerk advised that it is a landowner's responsibility to ensure that road signs are kept free of foliage.

CL raised the issue of the signage at the ford on Aller Lane, and noted that 6 cars have been lost in 6 months at this location. It was agreed that the PC should consider putting up its own warning signs and a quote for these will be obtained.

12. CORRESPONDENCE:

The Clerk had received correspondence which had been circulated:

- 12/11/2021 – Dorset Council – Blue Badge car park charging policy. The Chairman had been unable to access the online discussion and is waiting to see if this will be re-scheduled.
- 25/11/2021 - Flood newsletter & update from Adrian Simmons

13. ITEMS FOR THE NEXT AGENDA:

14. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING – Tuesday 1st March 2022 at the Fox Inn, Lower Ansty.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 19:49

Signed(Chairman) Date

Report to the Parish Council November/December 2021

Jill Haynes, Chalk Valleys Ward

Dear Councillors

Please find my report for the end of the year.

Budget

We are about two thirds the way through the budget setting process now. This year for the first time it appears all directorates have been asked to not just report what savings they can make but also review what it actually costs to run a service. This brought out some interesting information and in particular that many activities on the Place budget were underfunded. This included some £2M for SEN transport as well as issues in Highways, Waste Collection and Environmental health and Planning. The total shortfall for this area was over £10M and was not really a surprise as this is the area that was traditionally cut to fund the tow big overspend areas of adults and children's social services. The real crux of the matter is that we are underfunded as a rural council by central Government both our leaders at Dorset Council and our MPs are pressing for additional funding. However, we have set a balanced budget using some small amount of reserves. This year as Directorates have agreed what it is that they need to run the services they will be monitored very closely to ensure that they are keeping on track. This is an area that I will be reviewing in the transformation part of my new portfolio.

We have had two budget café all day sessions in house for councillors to question and understand the budget. We will now have scrutiny public meetings for both People and Health and Place and Resources before recommendations go forward to the Cabinet in January and Full Council in February. We are still working a bit in the dark as we have not yet had the government settlement for Adult social care. Worst case is an additional £4M and best case is £8M, at the moment we have £5M in the figures and I sincerely hope that the genuine need for this is recognised centrally.

Covid and Working Remotely

We are yet again struggling to contain Covid numbers. Dorset has a particularly high rate at the moment, higher than both the SW and the national average. Central Government has asked that people who can work from home. This does not help councils who are supposed to meet in person in order to make decisions. At Dorset Council we are continuing to meet remotely with the decisions on a "minded to" basis made by individual Cabinet members or in some cases senior officer having heard the remote debate. I have been contacted by a number of my parishes concerned about having meetings in rather restricted places. I would say firstly that you can do the same and meet remotely give a minded to decision to the Clerk to enact. Some however are looking at hybrid meeting which is what Dorset Council is looking to do from mid-January. This then brings up the issue of internet connections in village halls. However, I have looked into this with others, and it is possible to purchase a dongle which will provide the connection for about £40. Don't get the cheap ones! This way at least the public could Zoom in and fewer people would be in one place. Certainly, food for thought and I already use this system with two of my parish councils, it also covers that Climate Change issue of people driving about when they don't need to.

Spend to save schemes

I said in my last report that I would provide further information on some of the spend to save schemes which are in our transformation process. These are very varied and are in place to have an effect on the medium-term budget primarily, but some are just the right thing to do. Increasingly

government is putting out funding for councils to bid for and we need to be ready to act very quickly to take advantage of a bid process. To this end we have decided to appoint a corporate Director for Climate Change and the Environment. We did extremely well to get £19M from Central Government in the first round of climate change funding (the third highest amount given out) this was because we had a fully agreed strategy in place. With the money we were able to put solar on many of our buildings and schools, start to roll out charging points in our towns for electric cars and change from oil fired heating to air source heat pumps in many buildings as well. Several billion pounds will be available for bids next year and hence the need for a senior member of staff to lead and secure further funding going forward also showing our commitment as a council to the climate and ecological emergency agenda.

I have written previously about our purchase of St Mary's school at Shaftesbury to for a centre of excellence for both children with special educational needs but also as a training hub for staff involved in this area from right across the country. This is now going back to the original name of the house which is Coombe House and is due to open early next year. Already there is considerable interest in the concept, and we are looking to start taking booking soon for courses for visiting staff which will bring in additional income. Meanwhile the children attending should be travelling less far for their education to what is a truly superb site. You may remember that Dorset Council was able to purchase this at short notice and at £9M fully equipped it provides fantastic value for money.

At cabinet last week it was also agreed to fund the expansion of Beecroft Special Educational Needs school near Wimborne by a further 80 places into the former Wimborne first school which is next door so that a sixth form could be provided for 16-25 in the vicinity. There is still work to be done on the site but the saving of doing this will reduce individual post 16 placement currently from an average of £55K per young person per year to around £18.5K at Beecroft. This will be a saving of about £3M per year with still excellent provision when up and running.

We have been Government funding to be one of three councils to do some trial work on the Gigabit rollout. We have been looking at the use of this technology on sea conditions and a buoy prototype is currently afloat just off Lulworth. Not only can it give real time information on wave height and currents, but we have been looking at how these might also give indication on unexpected boat movements and hence intercept illegal immigrant boats. The same team are looking at farming and aquaculture and how using the phone signals we might remotely work in many agricultural settings. We have also set up 5G trials in Lulworth and also a Winfrith at the Battle Lab. This is an amazing but secret project that I was able to visit last week. Basically, many micro or small suppliers to the MOD are encouraged to work with each other to solve problems at the request of the MOD. They take small units on the secure site and are using the fully encrypted secure 5G network to work together. This is a unique setting as they can trial the solutions at Lulworth ranges where there is secure land sea and air space the only one in the country. The land is a Dorset Council site and we still have much more space to develop and support this superb innovation park, which in the well-paid jobs we so badly need.

Just to give an idea of other areas that are coming through the transformation hub we are looking to work with the government on the new rural bus strategy, it's early day yet but I hope to be able to give more information on that early next year. We are considering options to build our own dementia care homes. There is such demand locally that there are insufficient severe dementia places, and we are paying very high prices for placements which are sometimes not even in Dorset. We are looking to do some big changes to the council customer service provision not only opening up in our libraries but reducing all those different phone numbers and email addresses so that people can have their own secure on-line account, don't have to provide all that information each time they contact the council and like Amazon get an acknowledgement when they contact us with a timeline for the response. Many more exciting things just getting going and I will report on them as we get into next year.

Finally, a few good news things to end the year

We had an amazing result in the recent Children's OFSTED.

Overall Effectiveness GOOD

Experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers GOOD

Experience and progress of children who need help GOOD

Impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families OUTSTANDING

The ethos that "we will give every child a brighter future" shines through

You can park for free in Dorset Council Car Parks if you are a volunteer or are getting your Covid booster

The Verification process for planning applications is now up to speed and there is no backlog

All the planning systems from the old district councils have been migrated to one system

The search times are at last reducing. Not because there are less houses being sold but that the 7 new staff are now fully trained and working hard to catch up. Times are down from 61 working days to 48 and I expect there to be a further reduction before Christmas.

So still an amount of work to be done to make the six councils into one unitary but things are changing rapidly now and we are starting to work on what we need to do to make better outcomes for people as we look into the medium term of 3,5- & 8-years' time.

Wishing you all a safe and Happy Christmas

Best wishes Jill

HILTON PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the Parish Council held on Tuesday 1st March 2022

PRESENT: Cllrs Justine McGuiness (JMcG) (Chairman) Catherine Langham (CL) (Vice Chairman) Shulla Jaques (SJ) Rodney Northover (RN) Marion Walbridge (MW); (JH), Clive Jones (CJ) George Sotiriadis (GS) Unitary Councillor Jill Haynes (JH)

IN ATTENDANCE: One member of the public and Mr. David Green, Clerk (DG)

1. **WELCOME & APOLOGIES:** The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.
2. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS:** The minutes of the previous Parish Council meeting held on the 4th January 2022 were agreed and signed the Chairman.
3. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:** None
4. **MATTERS ARISING:**

4.1 Telephone Box

The Chairman confirmed that painting of the box will resume when the temperature rises, after which the information signs, maps and tourist information notices can be installed. It should be ready well in time for the Jubilee.

4.2 Ash Die-back

CJ reported that the majority of problem trees had now been removed. He is still keeping an eye on a tree by Ansty Cross.

4.3 Ford Signage

The Council agreed to the purchase of two warning signs for the Ford. CL will place the order and use suitable fixing points.

4.4 The Knapp

The Chairman confirmed that the Community Highways Officer (CHO) has advised that 'unsuitable for HGV' signage could only be located on private land, the verges in the Knapp being too narrow. SJ reported that the two residents of the Knapp, although they would prefer there to be no street furniture, were prepared to agree to have signage on their land.

It was noted that £ 780 plus VAT quote from Dorset Highways was a considerable charge, although these could be installed at Dorset Council's expense when funding is available.

JH questioned the suitability of the proposed signage and felt that 'Except for access' may be more appropriate. JH will enquire with the CHO as to whether any more informative signage could be considered.

4.5 Recent Storms

The Chairman noted that recent storms had been very disruptive with Hilton village suffering a 5-day power cut. SJ noted that Dorset Council had made contact on the Tuesday after the weekend and two representatives had visited the village that afternoon and shortly after power had been restored. Although grateful it was felt that there could have been more accurate information from SSE which could have enabled an earlier response from Dorset Council. Local 'WhatsApp' and Facebook groups had raised awareness in Hilton and most

residents had been able to make alternative arrangements. It was suggested that a list of vulnerable people and a register of useful contacts could be considered.

SJ had identified some links concerning compensation claims:

<https://www.dorsetecho.co.uk/news/19941940.claim-compensation-ssen-loss-power/>

https://ssen.custhelp.com/app/answers/answer_view/a_id/1000018

The Parish Council wished to thank the Wallis Family for allowing residents to use their showers during this difficult period.

5. UNITARY COUNCILLORS REPORT:

JH has submitted a written report prior to the meeting which is produced below. JH mentioned the Capital Leverage Fund and how important this could be local communities. It was felt that the Brewery Hall, for example, may benefit from the scheme.

6. OPEN FORUM:

CL gave notice that the annual litter pick and lunch would be held on 20th March. The Parish Council agreed to provide £ 50 towards costs. A resident noted that there had been a recent increase in the number of beer cans on local roadsides.

JMcG reported that a resident had raised a concern regarding impending changes to the specification for domestic central heating boilers, whereby oil-fired types must be replaced by electric versions. CL noted that there was also a particular problem for landlords who are required to make category 'C' rated carbon efficient improvements by 2026. It was agreed that discussion of this issue should be an agenda item for the May meeting.

7. PLANNING APPLICATIONS, DECISIONS & ISSUES

7.1 New Applications

a) P/FUL/2022/00705 - Aller Farm, Aller Lane, Lower Ansty, DT2 7PX

Change of use – proposed siting of 2 holiday cottages & parking

There were no objections to this proposal but the Council agreed that a substantial increase in the number of similar holiday dwellings of this type in the area could constitute over-development and the situation needed to be monitored.

b) P/PABA/2022/00264 – Moonfleet Farm

Erection of two agricultural buildings – legal determination referral did not require the PC to comment. The PC understands that this has been approved.

c) P/HOU/2021/05718 - Newton Cottage Aller Lane

Erect side extension - support comments had been submitted to Dorset Council

7.2 P/FUL/2021/04887 Higher Melcombe Manor

It was noted that this proposal had been referred to Melcombe Horsey PC, and not Hilton PC for comment. The Clerk had complained to Dorset planners concerning this and had not received a reply. The Chairman will consider whether a letter to the Chief Executive of Dorset Council is warranted.

7.3 Hawkes Field

It was noted that there had not been any decision in relation to the recent CLUED application relating to the parking of heavy goods vehicles.

The PC noted correspondence from a resident in relation to the failure by Dorset Council to take enforcement action in relation to the office and barn development.

8. COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW

The Chairman noted that the recent Melcombe Horsey planning issue, which had arisen because of the division of Melcombe Bingham between parishes, had highlighted the benefit of moving to a grouped parish structure. In addition, the lack of any representation for Stoke Wake residents was a concern.

JH noted that Group parish structures work well in the Piddle Valley, the Cerne Valley and Cattistock; however communities considering such a change do have some concerns. JH confirmed that there would not be any increase in Parish precept (and thereby Council Tax) arising from the change to a grouped structure.

Each parish involved in the proposed 'Group' must hold its own separate meeting and the decision of one Parish must not be allowed to influence others; the venue for a meeting needs to be carefully considered.

JH has held discussions with the Melcombe Horsey PC Chairman and understands that a Parish meeting will be arranged in either April or May. This will be notified in the Village News for the benefit of the whole community.

It was agreed that the residents of Stoke Wake should be provided with information concerning the proposal and asked to submit expressions of interest in holding a Parish meeting to the Hilton Clerk. It seemed likely that any meeting to discuss the issue could take place in April.

The PC agreed that its own Annual Parish Meeting would take place on Tuesday 5th April at the Brewery Hall when the proposal would be considered.

9. COMMUNITY SANDBAG STORE

Councillors were uncertain as to how a Community Sandbag Store would work, whether this involved the distribution of filled bags or the DIY filling of bags. It was agreed that the Floods officer should be asked to clarify the question.

10. FINANCIAL MATTERS:

10.1 Finance report:

The Clerks report showed that the financial position is still healthy, with the bank balance at 31st January being £ 11,047.76 and the general reserve being £ 8,709.69

10.2 Retrospective payments authorised:

Date	Amount	Payee	Reason
07/01/2021	£ 50.00	David Stevens	Mowing War Memorial
12/01/2021	£ 176.00	HMRC	PAYE
14/01/2022	£ 500.00	Hilton PCC	Grant

28/01/2022	£	85.40	A J Ross	Queens Jubilee (bunting)
31/01/2022	£	236.00	David Green	Pay Jan 2022

The Clerks expenses of £ 18 were approved.

10.3 Grant application – Hilton PCC

CL, on behalf of Hilton PCC, thanked the Parish Council for the grant of £ 500 towards electrical work.

SJ noted that the Council's budget makes provision for the award of grants totalling £ 800 which had not been fully spent in the current year and if unspent would just add to reserves.

The PC agreed to award Hilton PCC the balance of the cost of the electrical work, a sum of £ 258.07.

The Chairman noted that this is a community use building and therefore the further grant is wholly appropriate.

11. HIGHWAYS & RIGHTS OF WAY:

It was noted that the recently filled potholes along Aller Lane have reappeared due to the use of seemingly poor-quality materials.

Another issue was reported concerning flooding across Aller Lane between Vixens Retreat and Aller Green Farm. RN understands that a land drain may need to be installed to divert water away from the ditch.

These issues will be reported via the CHO.

The PC has received an offer from a resident to replace an oak fence in Duck Street, Hilton, with a bespoke metal version. The PC noted that the proposed fence appears to be rather high and the Clerk will clarify the offer with Dorset Highways before support for the initiative is given.

12. CORRESPONDENCE:

The Clerk had received correspondence which had been circulated:

- 25/01, 01/02, 09/02, 16/02 - Dorset Deserves Better newsletters re the Local Plan for Dorset
- 20/01 – CPRE – comment on the DC Local Plan
- 25/01 – Dorset Council – ‘Bus back better’ consultation
- 11/02 – Green Lanes Environment Movement (Gleam UK) – re HM Govt consultation concerning the use of Byways Open to all Traffic (BOATs) or unsealed unclassified roads (UURs) by motorised vehicles
- 15/2 – a resident – re signage/road surface at The Knapp
- 24/02 – a resident – re oak fence at Duck St Hilton (as above)

CL noted that the issue concerning the redesignation of footpaths as byways-to-all-traffic or unsealed unclassified roads and their subsequent use by motorised vehicles is of general concern to the Parish within the AONB. CL will respond to the consultation on behalf of the PC.

The Clerk noted that the ‘Dorset Deserves Better’ campaign appears to have been rather effective in highlighting county-wide objections to the Dorset Local Plan, and may have influenced the decision of Dorset Council to announce that the Plan in its present form is

not suitable in terms of housing numbers, meeting local housing need or in the specification of construction types. It was noted that the Council is now expressing support for fewer but larger scale developments such as that planned north of Dorchester. Dorset Council is now discussing revisions to the Plan with HM Government ministers.

CL also noted in the Cotswolds for example, all new developments have to be consistent with the local vernacular, in terms of materials used, a condition that does not appear to be applied in Dorset.

13. ITEMS FOR THE NEXT AGENDA:

- Changed central heating boiler specifications (PC meeting)

14. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The Annual Parish meeting will be held on 5th April 2022 at the Brewery Hall. The Annual Meeting of the Parish Council and a Parish Council meeting will be held on Tuesday 3rd May 2022 at the Fox Inn, Lower Ansty.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 20:50

Signed(Chairman) Date

Report to the Parish Council January/February 2022

Jill Haynes, Chalk Valleys Ward

Dorset Council's budget proposals for next financial year

The budget was approved at Full Council and was not changed from that described in last month's report.

Land searches (When moving House)

The number of working days to respond to land search requests shot up during the pandemic due to a variety of reasons including a massive increase in the number requested and a major shortage of skilled staff who were also being poached from Local government. The response rate is now down to 28 days from 63 last October. It is still some way off the target of 10 days, but we hope to achieve that soon.

Dorset Tourism Award - Moors Valley

Moors Valley in Ashley Heath won the Dorset Tourism Awards Large Visitor Attraction of the Year <https://www.dorsettourismawards.org.uk/winners> This is a fantastic achievement for the team and great recognition for the work Dorset Council have undertaken with regards to large open spaces / visitor provisions throughout the pandemic. One of our daytime cleaners, Christine, also won the Unsung Hero Award for her efforts throughout the pandemic in ensuring our facilities were clean and hygienic. Christine isn't actually employed by Dorset Council and works for Churchills, who are contracted for our cleaning provisions, but was nominated by our ranger team for her exceptional efforts and attitude over the last 2 years.

Vulnerable women – help available

Vulnerable women in Dorset will benefit from a new scheme which supports them to develop new skills and responses that can help them create a more positive future. Dorset Council has

committed to a nationally evaluated programme, called Pause, which works with women who have experienced, or are at risk of, repeated pregnancies that result in their children needing to be removed from their care. The programme aims to give women the opportunity to pause and take control of their lives, breaking a destructive cycle that causes both them and their children deep trauma. There are women in every local authority in the UK with complex and challenging needs to whom many children are born but who are unfortunately subsequently removed into care. Dorset is no different. The mothers are typically disadvantaged and living with social, emotional, environmental and health related challenges. In Dorset, most shockingly, women who are eligible for Pause support are 36 times more likely to die earlier compared to women of the same age. This includes death because of suicide or domestic violence but also preventable or treatable physical illnesses. Children who are removed into care are more likely to experience outcomes significantly poorer than their peers

Maintenance of highway verges

Maintenance of highway verges is an important but costly undertaking for Local Authorities. It is necessary for safety as well as aesthetic reasons. With the squeeze on public finance, we have much less money to satisfy this demand. Dorset Council are taking an innovative ecological approach to managing our verges, reducing soil fertility through the collection of grass cuttings, introducing species of flowering plant which restrict grass growth and ensuring low nutrient soils are used in road construction. The result, slow growing, beautiful wildflower verges which attract and sustain pollinating insects, and lower costs as the need to cut verges is reduced.

When designing a new road scheme, or as part of works to existing roads, we make sure the finishing layer of soil is as low in nutrients as possible - or leave it as bare mineral and add some wildflower seed. The ecosystem established will never require high levels of maintenance. This methodology has been introduced successfully on the Weymouth relief road and on the Blandford bypass with fantastic results where verge cutting is required only twice a year compared to the seven cuts previously carried out. Wildflower coverage has increased significantly along with the associated pollinating insects. Since these pilot studies this method of highway verge maintenance has been rolled out across many of our urban verges. It does take a couple of seasons for the results to start to be seen which can make it difficult for members of the public to accept the change particularly where they are used to numerous cuts happening over the summer months. However, the long-term results are aesthetically pleasing, great for the environment and significantly reduce costs.

Climate Change

Dorset Council is delighted to welcome Steven Ford as our new Corporate Director for Climate and Ecological Sustainability. Steven has over 18 years' experience of working in public policy related fields and joins us from Cornwall Council where he is currently Head of Environmental Growth, Climate Change and Heritage. In this role, he was tasked with delivering their carbon neutral action plan as well as the wider environmental growth and landscape management agenda, working with a multitude of partners.

Steven's primary objective at Dorset Council will be the successful delivery of our vital Climate and Ecological Emergency (CEE) Strategy, ensuring that ecology and sustainability are placed at the center of shaping and influencing the climate debate. He will play a leading role in developing natural solutions to address climate change and ensure our ambitious plans for reducing our carbon footprint are fully developed and kept on track by working closely with councilors', senior officers and services across the entire organisation.

New Government resource to help keep children safe from sexual abuse

All children have a right to be safe from sexual abuse, and we all have a role to play in keeping them safe. It's estimated that one in ten children in England and Wales will experience sexual abuse before they turn sixteen. That is equivalent to three in every classroom. Most children won't tell anyone at the time of their abuse. That's why it's important for everyone to know how to spot the potential signs of child sexual abuse and where to go to go for support if they are concerned. The Government's new Stop Abuse Together website can help you learn to spot the signs and have regular conversations with your child which can help keep them safe and know when it's right to reach out for more support. If you feel something isn't right, then you can call the NSPCC hotline (0808 800 5000). No matter what's happened, there is always someone who will listen to you and take what you say seriously.

A Local Plan that is right for Dorset – Statement from Cllr Spencer Flower, Leader of Dorset Council

Local Plans are a key component of the planning system. They shape how land use and places will change and develop in the future. This is why I have been, and continue to be, in a dialogue with the Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and his officials, offering a constructive, bold and ambitious alternative for the way we develop our new Local Plan – one that is right for Dorset. In my dialogue with Michael Gove, I have been arguing that the current national planning framework is not providing councils with the means to promote sustainable development through their Local Plans but is instead about chasing housing targets. I am seeking reform of this framework and proposing that Dorset could be a pilot for a new way of creating Local Plans, based on sustainability and local needs over the next 30 years, that also recognises the ambitions of our Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy. We must have a Local Plan in place: without one we face the risk of unmanaged development in Dorset, but it has to be the right plan. Our hard-working and innovative planning officers have ensured the draft Local Plan is the best it can be, but it is constrained by current planning legislation.

As a result, of the unprecedented 9,000 responses our public consultation received, many residents share my view that the draft Local Plan chases housing numbers rather than prioritises local needs. I also believe it is better to have fewer bigger-scale new developments in Dorset which bring in the necessary funding and infrastructure, rather than lots of small developments which put further pressure on already-stretched community resources. I have asked Mr. Gove to consider several radical alternatives:

- allow Dorset to pilot a radically different approach to Local Plan making break the link between the housing land supply numbers and the Duty to Cooperate – i.e., the requirement for Dorset Council to accept unmet housing need from neighboring councils
- allow Dorset an extension of two years until April 2026 to give more time for the new Dorset Local Plan to be developed and approved. During this extended period of plan preparation, Dorset should be protected against speculative housing development by suspending the five-year land supply requirement or by other means necessary
- fully recognise the climate and ecological emergency in the planning system, including new building regulations.

We recognise that this is national policy and may require changes to primary legislation, which is not in our gift locally. Representing you is a privilege that I take extremely seriously, and my approach to the Government recognises both my and Dorset Council's commitment to the needs and aspirations of the residents of Dorset. I am a strong advocate for Dorset and remain committed to lobbying for a better deal for the communities of Dorset. Here is the link to the statement on the council's newsroom: <https://news.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/2022/01/26/a-local-plan-that-is-right-for-dorset-cllr-spencer-flower-leader-of-dorset-council/>

Capital Leverage Fund - Dorset Council

Dorset Council has recently launched a new grant fund for voluntary and community groups who are looking to secure funding towards the development, improvement or refurbishment of their facilities, spaces, and community buildings. The Capital Leverage Fund will look to provide successful applicants with a grant of up to 20% of their total project costs up to a maximum of £25,000. Not for profit organisations both small and large who meet the funds criteria are welcome to apply. Applicants will need to demonstrate clearly when applying how they plan to secure the remaining project costs and ensure that if awarded a grant that they can secure the remaining funds within two years of any grant offer. Grants will not be released until all funding is in place.

Full details of the fund's priorities, criteria; eligibility and guidance on how to complete the online application form are provided on the Dorset Council webpage. Furthermore, there is also comprehensive information on what questions applicants can expect to be asked when completing their application form along with details of the assessment dates. The Capital Leverage Fund is an 'open access' fund for organisations in the Dorset Council area and applicants can submit their application at any time between 10th January 2022 and early January 2023. There will be three separate assessment dates throughout the year so please ensure you read the guidance fully and understand what supporting information you will be required to provide when applying. Applications will only be accepted on the council's online application form.

The fund is open to a range of different organisations including Cultural themed organisations such as arts, heritage, and accredited museums. Village halls can also apply to the fund to help with capital projects that might include hall repairs, addressing climate change, new build projects, landscaping or improvements to existing facilities including play areas, multi-use games areas and parking. Sports clubs wishing to improve their club facilities can also apply to the fund. For more details on other projects that are eligible click on the link above.

Places of worship (church buildings) are not eligible to apply. However, the panel will consider 'distinct buildings' used for community activities i.e., a community hall but it must be a separate charity or trust and you must be able to demonstrate extensive community use.

We expect interest for this new grant to be very high, so please can you circulate to any local groups you think might be interested. If having read the guidance you still require further information, or wish to discuss your project in more detail before you apply please contact a member of the teams via communities@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk for Voluntary and Community projects (including play) and LeisureWDWP@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk for Cultural projects (arts, accredited museums , heritage, sport and physical activity) and we'll get back to you.