

Report to Parishes

Hill Forts and Upper Tarrants Ward

Cllr Sherry Jespersen

Spring 2021

COVID Update

The Dorset Council area saw a slight fall in cases in the last week of March and we are now below the average for the South West and well below the average for England. While this is good news the strong advice from Public Health Dorset is to remain vigilant. As the lockdown restrictions begin to ease it is important to continue to observe the guidelines if we are to avoid a third wave and further lockdowns. The key message remains: keep your distance, wear a mask and wash hands frequently.

The guidance for people shielding changed from 1st April, but support from Dorset Council is still in place for anyone who was shielding or is self-isolating and needs help, for example with shopping or travel to medical appointments. Request help online or by calling the Dorset Together helpline on 01305 221 000.

Meanwhile, Dorset Council did its best to ensure a Happy Easter for children in most need by distributing more than 1,500 “Holiday Bundles” with food and fun activities for children.

Highways and C13/ Dinah’s Hollow Funding

Dorset Council Cabinet, at its meeting on 5th April, agreed the Capital Strategy which included £6.3m for investment in highway infrastructure assets. This increase in funding for highways was recommended by the Highways Executive Advisory Panel, of which I was a member, and is intended to go some way to make good the historic underfunding of the Highways budget.

Cabinet also agreed £4.463m for the work to stabilise the slopes at Dinah’s Hollow on the C13. This work, which is currently scheduled for 2022, is essential to make the road safe. It will, however, inevitably necessitate the closure of the C13 for a period of months which will have a severe impact on residents on and

around the A350. I am keeping a very active watching brief on these plans and I took the opportunity, at the Cabinet meeting, to formally request DC to undertake every possible measure to mitigate the impact of the road closure and to keep local residents informed. I was assured that the impact of the road closure will be monitored and that the communication strategy will be timely and full. I also received assurance that the advisory one-way route, which serves to share the HGV load between the A350 and the C13, will be reinstated once the roads are reopened.

Climate Change Grant

Dorset Council has secured a £18.7m from the Government's Public Sector Decarbonisation grant scheme, to support our Climate and Ecological Emergency strategy. This very significant funding will help achieve zero carbon by 2040, by delivering low carbon options across the council's properties. This programme of work will lead to considerable carbon and revenue savings for Dorset, estimated to be in the region of 3-3.5 tonnes of carbon each year (10% of Dorset Council's footprint) and revenue savings from reduced energy use of approximately £400k per year.

Local Heritage Asset Funding

A joint bid by Dorset Council and BCP for funds to create a list of local heritage assets has been successfully secured from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

The funds will be used to create a Local Heritage List for each council compiled using information gathered from Dorset residents and local partners. This information will be used in planning decisions affecting identified assets across the county.

Information collected from communities and Historic England guidance will help shape the criteria for inclusion on the Local Heritage Lists.

An extensive and wide-ranging Community Engagement Strategy will involve local people of all ages and backgrounds to understand what they value about their local heritage and why and what threats it faces.

The project, which will start later in the year, will begin with a public survey to collect communities' views on the campaign and their local heritage.

Love Your Verge

Dorset Council has joined forces with the Coast and Greenspace Service and Litter Free Dorset on a campaign explaining how DC are managing verges and thanking people for taking their rubbish home. The #LoveYourVerge campaign is a county wide effort and you will soon be seeing friendly signs on particular verges featuring fun and friendly wildlife characters; bumble bee, mouse, grass-snake, hedgehog and grasshopper.

The campaign aims to encourage residents and visitors to Dorset to value verges and open spaces and raise awareness of how open spaces are individually managed due to the specific local habitat, and their contribution towards tackling the Climate and Ecological Emergency

<http://www.litterfreedorset.co.uk/current-projects-and-campaigns/love-your-verge-2020/>

Dorset SEND Funding and St Mary's School

£37.5m has been agreed for the next five years to help deliver Dorset Council's aim of providing the best education for Dorset children and young people with SEND (special educational needs and disabilities).

These include the creation of new special schools with the best facilities along with the expansion of high-quality provision at Dorset's existing special schools. DC also has ambitions to develop new facilities at many mainstream schools, such as special bases.

The SEND strategy will also help reduce some costs by avoiding the need to send children outside Dorset for independent educational provision because there is not enough of this specialist provision here in Dorset. These places can cost around £60,00 a year per child compared to around £22,000 for high quality provision here in Dorset. There are currently more than 250 Dorset children and young people having to attending independent provision costing around £14m a year.

More information is available at <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/children-families/sen-and-disability-local-offer/about-our-local-offer/dorset-send-capital-strategy-2020-to-2025.aspx>

The consultation on the future use of the St Mary's school site is now finished and a over 1,500 local people and businesses responded with views and ideas. There was overwhelming support for the Council's preferred option to use the facilities to provide SEND services for Dorset's children.

Future Council Meetings

Legislation for holding virtual council meetings expires on 7th May. However, social distancing requirements remain until at least June. Dorset Council is considering ways to hold future meetings, including possible hybrid meetings. In the meantime the date of the Full Council Meeting has been moved to 4th May, to allow a virtual meeting to take place. Parish Councils will need to consider their own meeting arrangements since any decisions made virtually after 7th May might not be legal. DATPC will no doubt issue guidance.

Keeping in Touch

As always, there is a mass if useful information on the Dorset Council website. Council meetings, for now still virtual, are live streamed and recorded for the general public to view and agendas and the Cabinet Forward Plan are published in accordance with the regulations. And I am always available to offer any further help and advice, on cllrsherry.jespersen@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk.
