

## **Report to Parishes**

### **Dorset Council**

#### **Hill Forts and Upper Tarrants Ward**

### **Cllr Sherry Jespersen**

Autumn 2021

---

#### **Funding agreed for SEND Strategy**

Dorset Council has agreed £37.5m over the next five years to help deliver its new strategy for children and young people with special needs and disabilities (SEND). The funding will support the new Centre of Excellence, the former St Mary's school in Shaftesbury, expansion of existing special schools and expansion of facilities in mainstream schools, such as Inclusion Hubs. The aim is to ensure more of Dorset's SEND children can attend a local school, rather than having to travel great distances, sometimes out of county, to receive the support they need. Independent provision costs about £60,000 per year per pupil whereas provision in one of Dorset's own schools costs around £22,000.

The SEND Sufficiency Programme will ultimately deliver 100 extra places in Inclusion Hubs in mainstream schools. The new Centre for Excellence will open in 2021/22 with 60 places, rising to 280 places in subsequent years and the expanded Beaucroft Special School will add an additional 75 places by 2022/23.

This is an ambitious plan, but the intention is to provide better support for Dorset's children and better value for money for taxpayers.

#### **Grant to develop former council office buildings**

Dorset Council has been awarded £2.3m following a bid to the Government's Brownfield Land Release Fund. The money will be used to enable work on two key sites owned by former District Councils - North Quay in Weymouth and Furzehill in Wimborne. These redundant office sites will be released to create almost 200 new homes, open spaces, community facilities and workspaces, all subject to planning permission. £385K will be set aside for sites in North Dorset.

The capital from the sale of these assets will be available to Dorset Council for much needed capital projects.

Meanwhile, South Walks House, the Dorset Council office in Dorchester, is to become an NHS Outpatient Assessment Centre for six months. This initiative will bring a range of outpatient services together under one roof as well as health and wellbeing advice and information services. The SWH centre is part of a Dorset wide Think Big initiative to help reduce waiting times and bring diagnostic services closer to the community and is one of the first of its kind in the country.

### **Funding to improve insulation**

DC has also been awarded £98,000 of Government funding to insulate the most poorly insulated rented homes in Dorset. In the coming months landlords with properties with low EPCs will be invited to apply for grants for improvements such as insulation, solar panels and more efficient boilers.

### **Green Flag awards**

In the Silver Jubilee year of Green Flag Awards Dorset marked its best success with six countryside sites, including The Milldown and Stour Meadows in Blandford, receiving awards. The Green Flag is the international quality mark for well managed parks and open spaces. A tribute to our excellent Ranger service.

### **Help for self-employed carers**

Dorset Council, Community catalysts and HelpAndKindness are working together to support people to set up Micro care businesses – offering advice, training and support promoting their work. Micro providers of care and support are a growing resource in Dorset. They can provide all kinds of help to complement the professional care services offered by larger agencies. Micro providers work within a framework called Doing it Right and are supported to provide high quality service. HelpAndKindness signposts residents and other partners to these independent, self-employed carers who work in the community. More information is available on the Dorset Council website /adult-social-care.

## Consultation to shape library services

The Council is holding a consultation, from 25 October to 7 January 2022, into the future of library provision. There are 23 council-run libraries and eight community – managed services. The consultation seeks to look at how the library service can best meet the changing needs of residents. The last review was in 2010 since when there have been significant changes in public behaviour and technology. Following this initial consultation, a draft Strategy will be produced for further consultation in summer 2022. To find the survey go to the DC website and check /lets-talk-libraries. Support is available for those who cannot respond online on the Customer Services line 01305 221000.

## Help improve Rights of Way

The Dorset Local Access Forum, an independent statutory body concerned with Public Rights of Way and green spaces, are recruiting for new volunteers. Their work helps improve and keep open public paths and bridleways and they work with a wide range of bodies, including Dorset Council. Anyone interested, especially our own parish council footpath officers, is welcome to contact DLAF directly or through [tara.hansford@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:tara.hansford@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk).

## Road construction in Gillingham

Work has been underway all summer on a new, 1.3km residential road in Gillingham. This road, funded by a grant of £6.31m from Homes England, will enable progress on the Gillingham southern extension housing development. This is a key part of the North Dorset strategic plan to build 1,800 new homes south of Gillingham, plus a new primary school, health centre, sports and play areas, shops and open spaces. The delay in building out this major development is a key contributing factor the lack of a North Dorset's five-year housing land supply in North Dorset, so moving these much-needed homes forward will benefit not just Gillingham but all North Dorset.

## Paving in Blandford

As I write, the project to replace the paving on Blandford's pavements is nearing completion. The old paving stones had become slippery and were dangerous in

wet weather so have been replaced with smart new slabs. The engraved paving stones have been retained and reused and the Highways Team took the opportunity to carry out some repair work around the church. The town will be reopened and looking good in time for Christmas shopping.

## **Budget Pressures**

You will have noticed how many of the initiatives reported here rely on grant funding from central government. This is the new funding reality for Local Government, competitive bidding on a project-by-project basis. This has the advantage for government that it directs scarce funding exactly where it is most needed, but it makes planning and budgeting doubly difficult for councils. Dorset Council has a successful record in securing funding, which is just as well given the current and future pressures on the budget. The council is predicting an in-year increase in the gross cost of care services of 7% or £10.3m. This is due to a combination of more people needing care and an increase in the unit cost of care charged by providers of services to the Council. The funding recently promised by government will be welcome, but it is not due until 2023 and there is much uncertainty around it. The Leader of the Council takes every opportunity to lobby Ministers and Dorset MPs on the funding crisis faced across local Government.

## **Keeping in Touch**

As always, there is a mass of 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](mailto:cllrsherry.jespersen@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk).

---