

**Gillingham Ward Monthly Report**  
**Cllr Belinda Ridout – March 2024**

**Local Transport Plan Survey** – It was great to chat to the many residents who gave their time to come along to the drop-in event at the Chantry Office, Gillingham on Thursday, 29<sup>th</sup> February, where myself, Cllr Pothecary and Cllr Walsh were present to listen and record comments and help individuals to complete the on-line survey. Results of the survey will be published in due course.

**Climate Change** – members recently received an update on what Dorset Council is doing to help Dorset become a climate and nature friendly county. Full details can be found on the Dorset Council website: Climate and Ecological Emergency – Progress so far. Just a few highlights:

**Climate Emergency:**

- **Decarbonizing Dorset Council’s buildings (including schools)** – improving the energy efficiency of buildings, replacing all oil and gas heating systems with low carbon alternatives and generate any energy used from renewable sources.
- **Supporting others** – Low Carbon Dorset helps businesses to reduce their carbon footprint; To date, £7m worth of low carbon projects have been supported through the programme, with over 200 grants awarded to Dorset based organisations.  
Healthy Homes Dorset offers free loft and cavity wall insulation and replacement heating systems to Dorset residents. Litter Free Dorset works to reduce the impact of litter in the county. Establishing a ‘Public Sector Decarbonisation and Ecology Group’, bringing together partners such as the NHS, Police, Fire and Rescue Service, Bournemouth University and BCP Council to share best practice and work together.
- **Transforming how we travel** – using funds awarded from the government’s Transforming Cities Fund, working with BCP Council to invest in sustainable transport across south-east Dorset; increasing the number of electric vehicle charging points across the county; reducing the environmental impact of our highways by use of environmentally friendly, low-energy asphalt for road surfacing; replacing Dorset Council’s fleet with electric vehicles; engine emissions reduction – over 140 Highways vehicles have been fitted with a telematic system, leading to a 40% improvement in driver behaviour, preventing over 200 tonnes of carbon emissions and saving over 28,000 litres of fuel; working on a new Local Transport Plan with BCP Council, that will set out the long-term vision for moving around Dorset safely and sustainably; developed a Bus Service Improvement Plan, setting out the plans and policies that will deliver a transformation across the Dorset Council area, focusing on revitalizing the local bus network, reversing the decline in passenger use, meeting the aspiration of the public, making Dorset the centre of excellence for rural transport provision; sustainable travel initiatives including a Careshare scheme for employees, encouraging remote working where possible and maintaining hundreds of cycling and walking routes across the county.
- **Reducing Waste** – good progress over the last decade has increased recycling rates year on year. Waste sent to landfill has decreased from 71% to 2%. Recycling rates have risen from 29% in 2004 to 59.8% last year, ranking it at 11<sup>th</sup> place out of 351 local authorities. Food waste is now processed within Dorset to produce biogas and electricity.

- **Generating renewable energy** – to address the climate emergency, all energy currently provided by fossil fuels for heating, transport and electricity will need to come from a low-carbon source. It is estimated that Dorset will need around 60MW of solar to cover energy demand once efficiency measures have been taken. An online map shows you exactly where renewable energy schemes have been installed on council owned buildings.

### **Ecological Emergency**

**Managing Green Spaces** – with over 80 countryside sites, nearly 3,000 miles of Public Rights of Way, long distance trails and just under 5000 miles of highway verge, below are some of the things Dorset Council is doing to tackle the ecological emergency:

- **Changes to countryside management** – allowing natural grasses and wildflowers to grow on roadside verges; helping to protect and restore rare heathland across Dorset; implementing a range of positive approaches in the Council's Pollinators Action Plan to protect bees, butterflies and other pollinators by cutting hedgerows less frequently, planting flowering trees and shrubs and enhancing the ecological value of roadside verges.
- **Switching to battery-powered tools** – in 2021, nearly all two-stroke petrol engine hand tools were replaced with battery driven equivalents and solar panels installed on the roof of the depot where the tools are recharged, has eliminated the carbon emissions from the tools and saved an estimated 43 tonnes of CO2 a year and £10,000 in annual fuel costs.
- **Going peat-free** – Dorset Council now only uses peat-free compost which is great for the environment and the climate. Peat bogs, including those found in Dorset Heathlands are important carbon stores preventing the release of carbon dioxide.

Climate & Ecological Emergency Strategy progress reports can be found in detail on the Dorset Council website.

**Extra Funding for Road Maintenance** – an extra £4+ million funding from the Department for Transport over the years 2023/24 and 2024/5, (reallocated HS2 government funding), will be dedicated to carriageway maintenance in the council area. Dorset Council is also allocating an additional £6.03 million from its own budget for highway maintenance. To be invested in more proactive maintenance of Dorset's roads.

**Council Tax Premium on Second Homes and empty houses in Dorset** – Dorset Council approved proposals for a council tax premium on second homes and an amendment to agree an earlier commencement date for the existing Long Term Empty Homes premium - new flexibilities for councils under the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, 2023. This means, for those properties classed as Long Term Empty and Unoccupied, a 100% premium from 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2024 will be applied after one year rather than the existing 2 years. The introduction of 100% council tax premium on second homes will come into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2025, making a total council tax charge of 200%. Unlike empty dwellings, there is no requirement for a property to have been used as a second home for a fixed period of time before the premium is applied, so it becomes chargeable from day one that a property becomes a second home.

**Dorset Council Local Plan** - a revised approach to the drafting of Dorset's Local Plan, in anticipation of a new plan-making system to be introduced by central government at the end of 2024, will be considered by Cabinet on 12<sup>th</sup> March. The council will take due regard of all previous feedback from residents and other stakeholders to shape the new-style plan. To continue under the current 'old' system, the council would need to publish its draft new Local Plan late 2024 and submit a final draft to government by June 2025. This would lock the council into a plan process that is due to be replaced imminently. Dorset Council is therefore looking to follow the new plan-making system, to be introduced November 2024. This will include a streamlined 30 month production timetable. The proposed changes will remove the need for certain policies through the introduction of a national set of development management policies. The statutory Duty to Cooperate, (which expects authorities to consider meeting unmet needs from neighbouring areas), has also been removed, along with the 5-year housing land supply (provided the council has an up-to-date plan). The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act has put measures in place to aid in addressing nutrient neutrality by requiring the upgrade of wastewater treatment works with a nutrient sensitive catchment. Under the new system, initial scoping and early engagement would take place in September 2024, before the bulk of work begins in November. There would be further engagement in 2025 and 2026, before submission for examination in November 2026 and, subject to results, potential adoption of the new Local Plan, May 2027.

**St Martins Extra Care Scheme, Queen Street, Gillingham** – as local ward member, I have been notified that the completion of this project will now be Summer 2024, owing primarily to labour and supply shortages and a delay to the electricity provider confirming the date for power connection. The scheme will provide 55 one and two-bedroom apartments for rent with communal facilities developed for people who have care needs and require additional support as they get older, while living in a supportive environment in a town center location.

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**For those residents not on line, who have important questions or concerns, call Dorset Council on 01305 221000, 8am to 8pm, 7 days a week or email: [communityresponse@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:communityresponse@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk). All minutes of meetings can be found on the Dorset Council website: <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk>**