**Beacon Ward Report to Parishes**

**Dorset Council**

**Cllr Jane Somper**

APRIL/MAY 2023

**Road Maintenance/Potholes**

Dorset Council welcomed £2,914,000 from the £200 million set aside by Chancellor Jeremy Hunt during his Spring Budget announcement. Dorset Council monitors and maintains approximately 2,400 miles of road.

**Parking Fines**

The Police and Crime Commissioner and the Leader of Dorset Council recently wrote to the Transport Minister asking them to consider increasing parking fines particularly in rural and seaside areas. Currently they are low in comparison to London and other big city charges - holiday makers sometimes abandon their cars and view the £25 fine as worth it. In coastal areas and some rural beauty spots this can cause severe disruption and can prevent emergency vehicles from getting through

**Conserving The Natural Environment**

At the recent Dorset Council Cabinet meeting the Portfolio Holder responsible for the Natural Environment, Cllr Ray Bryan presented an report on the natural environment, climate & ecological strategy for approval, this is following a presentation to the Overview Committee which recommended approval. Below is a link should you wish to read through the document which outlines the points of focus and details the approach being taken. These points are 1. Renewable generation, 2. Heat decarbonisation. 3. Road transport decarbonisation & modal shift 4. Sustainable development and construction, 5. Sustainable consumption, waste & circularity 6. Sustainable food production, 7. Natural assets and nature based solutions 8. Resilience & Adaptation

[Cover report - NECE Strategy 2023 refresh - Cabinet 28 March.pdf (dorsetcouncil.gov.uk)](https://moderngov.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/documents/s33869/Cover%20report%20-%20NECE%20Strategy%202023%20refresh%20-%20Cabinet%2028%20March.pdf)

Another important decision was made ‘**The Natural Environment Decision Wheel’** a decision tool which will be woven into decision making at Dorset Council. It will provide a robust and transparent process that will support the delivery of the NECE strategy and the councils ambitions enabling policy makers to understand the wider implications on the environment of decisions being taken.

[Env Climate and Ecology decision wheel - Report and appendix A.pdf (dorsetcouncil.gov.uk)](https://moderngov.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/documents/s33889/Env%20Climate%20and%20Ecology%20decision%20wheel%20-%20Report%20and%20appendix%20A.pdf)

I am sometimes contacted by residents who are looking for information on what they can do in their own communities, homes and villages to help preserve their local environment. There are many sources of information available on the Dorset Council dedicated web page. On this page you will be able to calculate your community’s carbon footprint, find information on rewilding outdoor spaces, gather information on tree planting and sources of funding for community woods, reduce the carbon footprint of building, find information on community energy schemes, AND where you can seek information on what grants and funding may be available for communities This is also a very useful tool for Town & Parish Councils who want to be better informed and find ways of what they can do to conserve their natural environment.

 [Climate and Ecological Emergency - Dorset Council](https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/protecting-our-environment)

**Electric Vehicle charging points**

Dorset Council aim to provide access to charging points within a 10 minute drive for most residents within 10 years. That’s the target set by Dorset Council who have ‘ambitious plans’ to expand the charge points into villages and rural locations across the local authority network. The announcement comes as part of the council’s ‘Charging Ahead’ policy which switches the focus from the county’s ‘main towns’ to supporting households in areas that aren’t able to charge electric vehicles at their homes. The plans, which will play a key part in preparing the county for the government’s 2050 net-zero target, will see as many as 200 electric vehicle charge points installed in communities across the Dorset Council area over the next three years.

Funding for the new charge points will mostly come from the government’s local electric vehicle infrastructure (LEVI) scheme and Mer, a European EV charging company, with additional contributions from the council. If your community could benefit from a ChargePoint, you can suggest possible locations by submitting a suitable location [Electric vehicle charge points in Dorset - Dorset Council](https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/w/electric-vehicle-charge-points?p_l_back_url=%2Fsearch%3Fq%3DEV) on the website or by contacting me for more information.

**Second Homes Council Tax**

Dorset Councillors have been discussing proposals for council tax premiums on second homes and empty properties, in anticipation of the new flexibilities for councils in the forthcoming Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill. At that time, it was hoped that the Bill would receive Royal Asset by 1 April 2023. Councillors were due to vote on proposals at a rescheduled Full Council meeting on 30 March in order for the change to be introduced from April 2024, as the council was required to make the decision a year in advance to notify property owners providing a years notice of change.

However, we now understand from government the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill has not go through the parliamentary process and could therefore not become law before the end of March and a decision on this matter could not be taken by Full Council on 30 March as planned.  The proposal to introduce council tax premiums on second homes and empty properties continues to be something Dorset Council are keen to explore, following constructive discussions at Overview committee and Cabinet. We will watch the progress of the government’s new Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill closely and bring this to Full Council once the legislation has passed