

Verwood County Division Report –February 2019

Cllrs. Toni Coombs and Spencer Flower

Purple Haze - Appointment of Contractors – Grundon Sand & Gravel has been announced by the Somerley Estate. However, all matters are subject to the strict conditions included by the Inspector during the Examination in Public [EIP] some five years ago.

We need to get the message out to Verwood residents that certain questions remain unanswered. They should be encouraged to attend the Public Exhibition, which is taking place at the HUB on Wednesday 6 March between 2.30 -8.00pm.

The Inspector made the decision to leave certain matters to be resolved at the planning application stage:

1. Is the mineral above or below the water table? At the examination in public held in 2013 Hampshire CC stated to the inspector it was above – a potential contractor, who attended the hearing stated it was below. This is fundamental to the potential negative impact on the hydrology of the location.
2. The impact on Ebblake Bog and in particular the likely adverse changes to the hydrology, resulting from the removal of minerals, because the bog is at a much lower level must remain a significant concern. This is a SSSI [part of the Dorset Heathland], SPA, SAC, Ramsar site of international importance, which is only 500 metres away from the extraction site. This must surely be protected at all cost.
3. Question mark over the quality of the mineral, which comes from the same ancient river bed as Blue Haze on the other side of the B3081. Hampshire CC claim the mineral to be high quality, which has yet to be proven. Blue Haze is believed to be poor quality mineral, so the likelihood is that Purple Haze would also be of poor quality, so could only be used for low grade purposes. This will affect the market value, therefore potentially the only option to improve the mineral would be on-site washing. This would have a very serious impact on the hydrology at this location and cause permanent damage to the Ebblake Bog, which is very rare acid mire. It is highly unlikely that suitable mitigation measures could be put in place.

The expected increase in HGV traffic using the B3081 and the impact on Verwood residents, from dust and noise, whilst very important, will not carry anywhere near the same weight as the three considerations highlighted above.

I think these are the key [potentially deal breaking] factors, which the inspector stated had to be resolved BEFORE any planning application could be considered or permission granted. The writer has been invited and has accepted the invitation, to support, once again, the No to Purple Haze Campaign Group.

The Somerley HRC - Discussions have continued with Hampshire County Council and representatives from Dorset Waste Partnership [DWP] seeking a way forward for Dorset residents, living in the eastern part of the Dorset Council area, to have continued free access to the Somerley HRC at the point of need.

As Local Councillors, we have requested that all Dorset residents affected by the introduction of a £5.00 per visit charge for non-Hampshire residents from January 2020 be consulted, so that DWP can make informed decisions regarding HRC provision and the potential impact on household waste facilities in Dorset. Resulting from our strong lobbying DWP are now conducting a public survey - return date Thursday 14 March 2019.

Shadow Dorset Council Budget 2019/20 – This first Dorset Council budget will ensure that services previously delivered by the borough, district and county councils will continue to be provided to residents unchanged. In addition there are also significant increases in year of year funding for social care, waste collection and homelessness provision.

As required by legislation this is a balanced budget, which has been achieved, despite facing significant financial pressures in common with many other councils across the country. Dorset has seen a 49% reduction in Central Government grant settlement since 2010, which forms part of the national austerity programme to get the annual deficit and national debt under control. Financial pressures have also come from the key demand lead services, such as social care for vulnerable elderly and disabled people, and critically support for children with special educational needs, as our population profile changes.

Officers and councillors from across the county, district and borough councils have been working together as a Budget Task and Finish Group during the last twelve months to bring the finances of the six councils into one new organisation. The net revenue budget of £295m pa has crucially been achieved without the need for any front-line service cuts.

The creation of the new Dorset Unitary Council in Dorset has as forecasted, enabled significant initial revenue savings to be made such as:

- The reduction in councillors from 204 to 82 with per annum savings of £400,000.
- The reduction in the number of senior officer roles and where there is duplication or overlap across central services like finance, HR, IT and others will achieve annual savings of over £5 million in a full year.
- Significant additional per annum savings on insurance, audit fees and other activities where the council will only pay for one organisation rather than six.
- These savings have been reinvested into council services for residents, protecting them from cuts.

It was also possible and necessary to invest in key front-line services for residents, whilst providing a balanced budget. Dorset Council will see an increase in funding to a number of important services, which include:

- An additional £5.8million per annum for the care and education of children
- An additional £900,000 per annum in funding to boost the number of foster carers.
- An additional £1.372million per annum for rubbish collection, recycling and street cleaning services delivered by Dorset Waste Partnership.
- An additional £1.5million per annum for social care services for vulnerable disabled and elderly adults.
- An additional £150,000 per annum towards tackling homelessness.

Despite some unfortunate headlines in the local media, this is a soundly based, balanced budget, which also includes for Council Tax Harmonisation on day one and no cuts to front-line services. This means that all taxpayers across the Dorset Council area will pay the same Council Tax and receive broadly the same services as now. There is still much work to do in the early years of the new council as we transform services, ensuring that the benefits of service re-design and economies of scale will release further significant efficiencies, which can be re-invested in the key demand lead services and go some way to easing pressure on revenue budgets in future years.