

NORTH DORSET DISTRICT COUNCIL

HILL FORTS WARD

REPORT TO PARISH COUNCILS

March 2019

Cllr Sherry Jespersen: cllrjespersen@north-dorset.gov.uk

Cllr Deborah Croney: d.cronney@dorsetcc.gov.uk

Cllr Piers Brown: padbrown@icloud.com

Dorset Council Budget

As most of you will know, on Wednesday 20 February, the Shadow Council passed the 2019/20 budget for the new Dorset Council. This was an important day and creating a balanced budget, without making any cuts to services, is a considerable achievement. There will be over £16m of savings, but these will all be drawn from converging the back room functions of the six councils. No front line posts or services will need to be reduced. Indeed, the budget includes an essential £1.5m additional funding for Adult Social Care and £5.8m for Children's Services. The new council will start life with a gross spend of over £900m and an income requirement of nearly £242m.

From May there will be only one council, so it follows that that everyone should pay council tax at the same rate. There has only ever been one County Council tax, which is 92% of our bills. But the approximately 8% of council tax which funds Districts Council varies, and it is this which has been "harmonised" around a notional average. Because NDDC has for many years been among the lowest taxing councils in the country our tax will have to come up in order to meet the average. Council Tax would have risen anyway, but harmonisation means that a Band D taxpayer in North will pay £49 more than they would otherwise have paid.

Of course we would all prefer not to see our council tax rise. But delaying harmonisation would cost the Council £6m in lost revenue every year. Given that we have already identified every available penny of efficiency savings, the loss of this £6m could only mean significant cuts to services. And since we cannot cut the statutory, demand led services, most of these cuts would have fallen on the non- statutory services - the very services which we undertook to protect under Unitary.

On the up side, the reason our tax will go up is that for a decade or more residents in North Dorset have been paying less for the same District Council services.

Durweston Bridge

Highways will be carrying out planned work to repair the flood arches on the approach to Durweston bridge between 4 March and mid- August. The timing and logistics of this work has been discussed with local communities, and the Parish Councils of the villages most impacted were invited to a presentation and discussion in February. There is an email communication list held by the Project Engineer so these Parish Councils should be kept up to date with any changes to the programme.

It is anticipated that the road will be fully closed between 22 June and 21 July with partial closures for the remaining time. There will be a diversion route up the A350 and across the A30. Nonetheless, we know from experience that some of the diverted traffic will find its way through local villages. It is not possible for either Highways or the police to prevent traffic from cutting through villages. If a road is open then drivers cannot be prevented from using it. However, we have requested clear signage at all the junctions, to encourage diverted traffic and HGVs to stick to the official diversion routes.

We can anticipate some inconvenience for residents and occasional blockages. But we must ask everyone to be patient, while this essential work is done. Highways and the Community Traffic Team are aware and will keep in touch with Parish Councils should any hazardous or unforeseen difficulties arise.

Affordable Homes at Nordon

Planning permission has been granted to Aster Group to develop the former NDDC site at Nordon, in Blandford. Aster, one of our local social housing providers, will build 40 affordable rent and shared ownership homes on the site, providing much needed low cost homes for local people.

The Nordon Lodge is not part of the development site and continues as a council hub. Residents can access council services face to face and see planning applications at the Hub.

Dorset Council Public Information Campaign

The campaign to inform the public about the new council is now underway, with social media campaigns supported by more traditional communication channels. Work will begin in March to replace some council signs with new Dorset Council signage. Priority will be given to libraries, reception areas in council offices and critical service areas, but most signs will be replaced gradually, in order to keep costs under control.

Improved Land Search Service

Notwithstanding the challenge of reorganisation, Officers continue to run services well. As a case in point Dorset Councils Partnership's Local Land Charges Team have been nominated for "Most Improved Service" at the Local Land Charges Awards for Excellence. The average turnaround time for searches is now less than 10 working days.

