

Beacon Ward Report to Parishes

Dorset Council

Cllr Jane Somper

APRIL-MAY 2025

Flooding Issues

I continue to follow up on localised flooding concerns raised by residents. While some minor works have taken place, longer-term solutions remain unclear. I am pushing for better communication from Dorset Council and greater urgency in addressing drainage and infrastructure maintenance.

Transport Challenges

There remains significant disappointment over the lack of progress in securing viable rural transport options for our ward and the wider area in the north of Dorset. I have raised these concerns at multiple levels, but unfortunately, no tangible solutions have yet been proposed. All we seem to have gained from recent announcement is a Saturday bus service from Shaftesbury to Gillingham. That's great if you live in Shaftesbury but how are you supposed to get there and back? I will continue to press for action, as this issue deeply affects the quality of life and access to services for our communities.

Compton Abbas Airfield

Last month, a meeting of the Compton Abbas Airfield Consultative Group was held, during which it was confirmed that there will be no air show this year, although the possibility remains for its return next year. In the meantime, the airfield will be focusing on enhancing its hospitality offering and hosting a range of smaller events throughout the year. Spitfire experience days will continue, but these will be grouped over a few select weekends rather than spread across the season.

Support for Local Businesses

With recent changes in national government policy affecting all businesses, I've been engaging with local business owners to understand their concerns and what support they might need. The question of Dorset Council is, what are they doing to explore additional local schemes or discretionary Business Rate reliefs that may help sustain our local economy. This should be fundamental in the policy paper coming forward soon on 'Economic Regeneration'!

Accountability from Dorset Council

You will know it remains a top priority for me to hold Dorset Council to account on decisions affecting the rural villages in the Beacon Ward and wider north Dorset communities. Transparency, communication, and responsiveness are not always at the level we should expect, and I continue to challenge this where necessary.

Local Plan Progress

On 25th February, the Cabinet agreed to a new timeframe for the Local Plan, aligning with central government deadlines. The revised scheme will be published shortly, with consultation set for August 2026 and potential adoption in 2027. Given the tight timeline, it is crucial to stay informed and engage during consultations.

Public Health Reorganisation

Following BCP Council's withdrawal from the joint public health arrangement, Dorset has appointed a new Director of Public Health and Prevention, effective April 2025. Public Health Dorset focuses on prevention, and I highly recommend taking advantage of services like LiveWell Dorset's health checks.

Dorset Council's New CEO

Dr Catherine Howe has been unanimously recommended by the cross-party Staffing Committee as Dorset Council's new Chief Executive, and approved at by Dorset Full Council.

She will succeed interim Chief Executive Sam Crowe, following the departure of Matt Prosser earlier this year. Catherine is currently Chief Executive of Adur and Worthing Councils, where she has led major financial restructuring and climate and organisational design programmes. With a strong background in local government and previous senior roles at Cancer Research UK and Capita PLC, she brings extensive experience in managing complex change, digital transformation, and community-led initiatives.

For any ward work, please contact me at CllrJane.Somper@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk.