



Too Little - Too Late

**A review of
The Dorset Climate and Ecological
Emergency Strategy**

11 November 2020

Executive Summary

- The strategy is well structured but not ambitious or urgent enough to respond to the emergency. It lacks targets and priorities - in the cash strapped world of local government this is a recipe for doing too little, too late.
- Potential impacts of the emergency and current emissions tend to be understated, eg. rise in sea levels, emissions from aviation.
- The urgency of the situation requires action in parallel with research, not after it.
- There is an underlying assumption that government support and funding for local action will be limited; this needs to be challenged because the UK has no chance of meeting its commitment to reduce emissions without ambitious and urgent action locally.
- More commitment is needed to lobbying and clearer priorities for achieving it, for instance zero carbon building.
- Recycling and energy from waste are areas where the Council can and should take a lead role - the strategy needs more emphasis on these and other practical measures for early action.
- There should be a commitment to tree planting and rewilding, including on Council land; the strategy refers only to "developing guidance"
- Provision of high speed broadband to rural locations should be a target to help reduce car use as well as for economic benefits.
- The strategy understates the importance of spatial planning, which is one of the Council's most fundamental responsibilities. This is key to creating sustainable communities, reducing car use and reducing carbon emissions from dwellings and employment. Initiatives like co-location of different types of development cannot be achieved if policies are not in place until 2023, by which time the new local plan will already be in place following 2 years of consultation.

Introduction

The Dorset Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy consultation documents were published in July 2020 and present a considerable body of work by specialists and much of that work is admirable. This review has been prepared for Action4Alderholt and reflects its concern that the undeniable emergency that we face requires immediate action both locally and throughout Dorset. This review concentrates on those where mitigation options are not considered or included in the strategy and the lack of urgency shown in turning policies into actions.

The first three sections of the strategy documents set out the approach to Dorset's contribution to the worldwide task of tackling the Climate and Environmental Emergency. The interconnectivity between the major elements of climate and the environment appear well understood and separating actions into Direct, Indirect, Partnering and Lobbying is a sensible strategy that could allow all aspects of the problems ahead to be talked.

At first reading the approach appears sensible and coherent, but the Foreword reveals the false basis upon which much of the work is based. Councillor Ray Bryan states that his preference is *to do the investigation and information-gathering first before setting out our strategy*, rather than do as other councils have done whereby targets are set and *then have to work out how to achieve them*. This may be a creditable approach where the outcomes are not as serious as the situation that we now find ourselves in. The consensus view of climate scientists is that the Climate Emergency presents an existential threat to mankind which does indeed call for an understanding of what needs to be done and then work towards ensuring that the threat is averted.

In the Introduction it is correctly stated: *Recent reports note that we must act swiftly to cut emissions if we are to avoid the worst impacts of climate change, caused by global temperatures rising above 1.5 degree*. What is not said is the consensus view of climate scientists is that *to stay below a 1.5°C increase in global temperature by the end of the century it means that carbon emissions will need to be halved by the end of this decade and in practical terms that means a reduction of 7.6 % every year throughout this decade*.¹ The strategy does not set this as a goal although, sadly, the Covid-19 crisis has allowed this to be achieved in 2020.

The Climate Emergency

The brief summary of Climate Emergency correctly notes that *we have only 8-10 years at the current rate, within which serious action is required to avert this crisis and avoid the worst impacts*. This reinforces the importance of setting targets and then striving to achieve them.

The summary of impacts provided appears to understate some aspects. It notes that sea level rise may be in the range 27 - 115 mm by 2100; however, in November 2019 a report from the Institution of Mechanical Engineers advised government to prepare for a 3 m rise by 2100. Furthermore, in 2015 an eminent group of climate scientists advised that a 3 m rise could occur as soon as 2050. Clearly these predictions would make the impacts on the six key areas that are identified much more severe.

The Ecological Emergency

No comment

Action Against Climate Change

The Paris Agreement is misquoted. It states that it the agreement was *to keep global warming below 2°C* whereas Article 2(a) actually said:

¹ Hope in Hell, Jonathon Porritt, Simon and Schuster, 2020

Holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, recognizing that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change.

This means that the following paragraph on the IPCC is misleading. 2°C was never the target and IPCC was effectively endorsing the intention of the Paris Agreement (which was a fudge to appease some countries which did not want to commit to 1.5°C).

Carbon Emissions and Achieving Net Zero

The sector breakdown for 2017 carbon emissions is restricted to transport, business, residential, agriculture, waste management, exports and other minor contributors. There is no dispute with these figures, but the data are misleading. In the same year emissions from the UK Arms industry were estimated to be 1.46 Million Tonnes and a very similar amount was caused by domestic flights within the UK. While Dorset Council does not have control over these two sectors, it should be engaged in lobbying our MPs and the government for reductions in the sectors, without which greater reductions will be required in those which it can influence. Covid-19 has of course massively cut the emissions from flights, but political lobbying is needed to create a framework that will retain at least some of these gains in a post-pandemic world.

Carbon Budgets Pathways & Trajectories

No comment.

Areas for Action

This document explains how the eight areas for action were identified. A task force was set up for each area and each is reported in subsequent sections of the consultation, including summary action sheets. Actions listed are describes as Direct (D), Indirect (I) and Influence & Partnership (P). Lobbying was also identified as an essential role for the DC to achieve its goals and this is not included in the action plans as a separate group of actions, but somewhat lost in the Influence & Partnership lists. The action plans should be revised to include lobbying (L) as a stand-alone list of actions as otherwise it would be likely that this work would be forgotten. It is also often unclear who should be lobbied. DC can, for example, directly lobby its own MPs and government departments directly, or influence policy in The Association of County Councils. DC could also lobby suppliers of services and their trade bodies. There is a wide range commercial enterprises and non-governmental bodies which could be lobbied. How the lobbying with be undertaken should be stated.

Renewable Energy

Action plan includes as an objective: *Establish a positive planning policy frame-work and toolkit for maximising the use of renewable energy within development.* It is unclear what developments are included. Is residential development included? Are there any targets that define “maximise”? The timescale for this lacks any urgency and it is incomprehensible that 20 months are allocated to develop this policy. Dorset Council is preparing a consultation draft of its Local Plan and such a fundamental policy should be included in the consultation.

Lobbying is identified as required action to ensure new building, including residential, are carbon neutral.

No mention is made of Energy from Waste which is an important source of renewable energy. Waste should be considered as a resource not a problem and state of the art methods for treating it must be considered. This issue impacts on housing, special planning, waste and renewable energy and a separate section of this review addresses EfW.

Buildings

It is noted that 18,000 homes will be built in the next 10 years and that these will need to be zero-carbon. It is also noted that current planning legislation that prevents setting zero-carbon standards for new builds.

The action plan includes an objective to ensure new buildings in Dorset are zero-carbon. The actions to achieve this are listed as I (indirect) and do not include lobbying government to alter planning rules to allow zero-carbon to be required. The timescales for developing planning policies are far too long and lack any sense of urgency. It should not take 2 to 3 years to develop policies and strategies when the technology already exists. For example, Norwich City Council won the 2019 Sterling Prize for its ultra-low carbon housing project and design measures should be adopted by Dorset.

Food and Drink

While minimising packaging is acknowledged in the Waste strategy, it should be an integral part of the food and drink strategy.

Economy

No Comment

Waste

Little is said about practical measures to increase recycling. In the technical paper it states the need to *Increase the proportion of Dorset’s waste that is recycled* and indicates that

improving the facilities at communal sites will be part of the strategy. However, in the action plan under the objective to reduce the amount of waste produced it simply states the intention to *Develop targeted campaigns to reduce the amount of waste produced in Dorset and increase recycling and reuse*. Considerably more can be done to increase recycling. The rural nature of Dorset means that many villages are remote from recycling collection points and much more could be done to ensure that villages have collection banks for materials that are not currently collected in the household scheme, for example by establishing local recycling hubs. The objective should be maximise recycling while minimising car mileage involved in transporting waste to collection points.

Natural Assets

The technical paper indicates that there is an opportunity for increased tree planting and that guidance should be developed to ensure community tree planting initiatives are ecologically robust and sensitive to the local landscape. However, the action plan is restricted to developing guidance on suitable tree planting on and does not commit to any planting on Dorset Council land. This commitment should be strengthened and immediate action both possible and necessary.

Transport

It is stated that transport alone is responsible for an estimated 765 kilotons of CO₂e each year, making it the single biggest contributor to the county's footprint. A significant shift will be needed to make active travel and public transport the first transport mode of choice. Two of the areas of action noted are (a) to ensure access to sustainable transport is considered in planning applications and (b) improve quality & availability of public transport to make services more attractive to the travelling public.

It is recognised that the rural nature of the county generally makes the private car the transport mode of choice for most in the rural areas simply because it is the only option. However, for many areas this will always be the situation as it will be uneconomic to provide public transport suitable for commuting throughout the villages in the county. Measures are outlined to make public transport more attractive to use, but where public transport is not a realistic option the two main ways of reducing car mileage are (a) removing the need to commute by encouraging home working and (b) preventing additional journeys. The action plan does mention home working and stated that it will work with Digital Dorset to promote the use of ICT to individuals and businesses. It must be noted that this is only committing to produce promotional materials in a one year timescale, which is disappointingly slow. However, no mention is made of increasing the provision of high speed fibre broadband to rural locations. This should be a priority as it has the potential to yield the greatest reduction in commuter car miles. Lobbying for this should be included in the actions as a priority as costs are low and benefits could be considerable.

Preventing new, unnecessarily long private car journeys is noted in two actions. To improve low-carbon transport, access to sustainable transport will be considered in planning applications. This is to be welcomed, but it is difficult to comprehend why the target date for this is the end of 2023, when it could be included in planning assessments with immediate effect. Secondly, it states that *Through the Local Plan ensure (as far as possible) developments are located in sustainable locations close to key services & the need to travel by car is reduced*. Again this is welcomed. It is noted that the target is to have policies

developed and agreed by 2023. This is the date that the Local Plan is due to be published, but for this to happen it is essential that the Local Plan Options Consultation must include this commitment.

Energy from Waste

The waste section does give the Waste Hierarchy pyramid, but does not include energy from waste in it. It should be lower than Reduce, Recover and Recycle, but is notably more desirable than disposal by landfill. Energy from Waste (EfW) is also regarded as a renewable source of energy, but is also not mentioned in the renewable energy section. Modern EfW plants are usually linked to district heating systems, which provide efficient heating for significant numbers of houses, but it is not mentioned in the buildings section either. This omission is inexplicable. In July 2020 Policy Connect published its report "No Time to Waste"² and Recycling Magazine describes the report by stating "*prioritising energy-from-waste policy will cut costs and carbon for UK taxpayers in a "win-win" for economic & environmental recovery*". This urgently needs to be considered and included and if rejected the reasons must be fully explained.

EfW plants do operate in the UK and currently account for 10% of municipal waste; however Denmark is the leading country in Europe with 56% of its waste being incinerated for EfW. In Denmark EfW plants operate virtually carbon free and are often located within towns. Landfill is heavily reduced and hazardous wastes can be included treated by EfW. In 2019 the Amager Bakke plant in Copenhagen handled 451,321 tons of waste, which embarrassingly included 30,000 tonnes imported from the United Kingdom and Ireland. That produced enough electricity to power 30,000 homes and to heat about 72,000. The UK should not be exporting its waste problem and our own EfW programme can solve that. The EfW process inevitably produces waste heat which can be recovered in other industrial processes and, therefore, these plants should be co-located with industries capable of using this waste heat.

WfE addresses the landfill and renewable energy issue, while also having the potential to address transport issues.

The Next Steps

It is welcomed that it is intended to carry out an annual performance review of the actions adopted in the strategy. It is stated that: *We will be heavily reliant on policy and financial support from the government as well as further technological advancements particularly in the field of hydrogen, battery storage and smart technologies. We will keep track of these rapidly changing developments and adjust our strategy and action plans accordingly.* However, the statement to do this *at a minimum we will update our strategy and refocus as required every 5 years*, lacks commitment and indicates a lack of understanding of how quickly technical developments are taking place. The default position should to adopt all new technologies as soon as they are available and practicable.

Conclusions

Much of the material contained in the Dorset Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy is welcomed, but it is of considerable concern that developing policies are portrayed as

² https://www.policyconnect.org.uk/apsrg/sites/site_apsrg/files/policy_connect_-_no_time_to_waste_-_final.pdf

“actions” and the timescales are generally lacking in any urgency. An example of this is that at a meeting in November 2019³ for councillors it was stated that any strategy would necessarily include an urgent transition from carbon fuels to renewable energy. Notwithstanding this understanding of the need for a move to renewable energy there appears to have been no implementation of new renewable energy schemes and the strategy for renewables is largely one of developing policies over the next three years.

³ Dorset Town & Parish Council Climate Emergency Advice Seminar, South Walks House, Dorchester, 19 November 2019