**Gillingham Ward Monthly Report**

 **Cllr Belinda Ridout – JUNE 2022**

I hope everyone had a great Platinum Jubilee weekend. All the events put on were a real credit to their organisers, it was a very memorable occasion. Having a family wedding the weekend following the Jubilee has kept me a little preoccupied, hence the late report.

**Building Regulation Changes** – as reported in my May report – if you are planning a new build, an extension or conversion of your home, then the changes to the building regulations will affect you. From 15th June changes to the nation-wide regulations aim to improve the energy efficiency of homes and buildings across the UK. As a recap, the changes include:

* Ventilation: changes to improve air quality and ensure properties receive the necessary ventilation.
* Conservation of Fuel and Power: changes will primarily impact the energy efficiency requirements for buildings.
* Overheating: new regulations aim to limit overheating in properties by introducing passive measures such as fitting shutters for shade and glazing design in new houses.
* Electric Vehicle Charging: new residential properties will require the installation of electric vehicle charging points.

**Building Control** – is working hard to help clear a huge surge in applications due to the national change in Buildings Regulations. The surveyors will continue with urgent site visits in the mornings and concentrate on plan checking in the afternoons. Technical support and surveyors will be available at all times for technical enquiries, fee quotes and to register new applications.

**New Funding for Dorset households** – vulnerable people in the Dorset Council area can apply for new support to help with rising costs. Applications are being taken from 6th June from pensioners and working age people in receipt of qualifying benefits or in fuel poverty. DC has been awarded funding from the Government’s Household Support Fund to provide short-term financial assistance in the form of supermarket vouchers, issued to residents with savings of less than £10,000 and meet the following criteria:

* Pensioner in receipt of Pension Credit;
* Working age and in receipt of a means tested benefit, or
* A pensioner or working age resident not in receipt of a means tested benefit who is in fuel poverty.

Vouchers will also be provided during the school holidays to families in receipt of free school meals.

To apply on line go to the Dorset Council webpage: Household Support Fund, to complete an application form. Alternatively, applicants can get help to complete their form from a volunteer Dorset Digital Champion at their local library. To book an appointment, tel. 01305 221048, Mon to Fri, 10am to midday. Local Citizens Advice offices are also offering assistance. Contact 01305 221027 for opening times.

**Cost of Living Help**  - residents who wouldn’t usually ask for help are being encouraged to reach out for support early as the cost of living rises. Cost of Living Help is a new webpage which puts advice and support on money, access to food, housing, support for children, mental health and wellbeing and employment, all in one place. People can check their eligibility for benefits, free school meals, low tariffs for utilities and charitable grant schemes. There’s also advice on housing and employment. Specialist help is also available over the phone, in person and online from Dorset Citizens Advice, providing free, confidential and impartial advice on money, consumer, housing and other issues and is available for everyone. Dorset Citizens Adviceline: 0800 144 8848. Older residents are being supported by Age UK which the council also works with to ensure older people can access advice and financial help. enquiries@ageuknswd.org.uk or call 01305 269444.

**5G underwater cameras** – this is something I find fascinating and amazing, happening on Dorset’s coastline. 5G RuralDorset project partner JET Engineering System solutions has successfully deployed and demonstrated live streaming underwater cameras on one of its 5G connected buoys near Portland. Two cameras below the buoy stream live footage of seaweed at Jurassic Sea Farms, who have been supporting the aquaculture trials. Analysis of the live video and environmental sensor data, with artificial intelligence developed by Exeter University, will help build a better understanding of seaweed growth and biofouling, to meet the pivotal point between seaweed quality vs quantity and to optimise harvest scheduling. It will also enable live alerts of any issues to the farm. With further research, such a system could have big benefits for the wider industry, not only maximising the economic benefit seaweed can offer, but also the environmental and social contributions it can bring through carbon capture and as a healthy food source.

**Reducing Dorset Council’s Carbon footprint** – as part of Dorset Council’s drive to reduce carbon emissions, Avon Heath Country Park now has newly installed solar panels on the roof of its café, classroom and toilet block, expecting to produce around 20,000 kWh of electricity a year, saving around five tonnes of carbon emissions each year. Funding for the panels comes from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme, a scheme set up by the Government to reduce the emissions of publicly owned buildings across the UK. Last year the council installed solar panels at Moors Valley Country Park along with battery powered tools for their Greenspace team, saving the council up to £10k in energy costs and reduce its carbon footprint by more than 43 tonnes of CO2 every year. There are plans to continue the roll-out of renewable energy at all country parks, work currently underway to increase the number of solar panels and introduce low-carbon heating at Durlston Country Park in Swanage.

**Dorset Innovation Park (DIP)** – Dorset Council has an ambitious plan for the DIP near Wool, which includes £3.1m for the immediate delivery of 10 new light industrial units at the site, as well as a future £11.5m 4-year capital investment plan to deliver a new social hub for on-site workers; the potential to develop two medium sized industrial/office units (around 600sqm), providing a further 145 jobs to the Park with annual income to the council of around £453k; improve the existing entrance to the Park, enhancing security and looking to purchase an additional 6 hectares of land to allow for further expansion. These Plans go before Cabinet on Tuesday, 21st June and if agreed, work will begin on the 10 new units later this year. The Park, delivered in partnership with Dorset Council and the Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership, offers office space, workshop facilities and fully serviced commercial employment land. Currently there are 34 businesses located at the Park, providing almost 800 jobs. These businesses operate within the defence/security and advanced engineering and associated sectors. I have reported previously on the success of the Defence Battlelab facility on site, developed in partnership with the Ministry of Defence. The aim of the Park is to create 2000 new jobs by 2042.

**Cllr. Belinda Ridout, Councillor for the Gillingham Ward**

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**For those residents not on line, who have important questions or concerns, call Dorset Council on** **01305 221000, 8am to 8pm, 7 days a week or email:** **communityresponse@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk****. All minutes of meetings can be found on the Dorset Council website: https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk**