**Report to Annual Parish Meetings**

**Hill Forts and Upper Tarrants Ward**

**Dorset Council**

**Cllr Sherry Jespersen**

**May 2025**

I am pleased to offer a brief report to the Annual Parish Meetings across Hill Forts and Upper Tarrants Ward.

I have focused on a number of issues which I know are of continuing interest to many residents.

**The new Dorset Local Plan**

The current government is making changes to planning regulations to further their intention to build more houses. Many of these changes are likely to make it even harder for local councils to control speculative development and government are also looking to strip away the powers of planning committees to make local decisions. The government’s housing target for Dorset is 3,219 homes each year, more than double the previous target.

So, the new Local Plan for Dorset will be critical. This plan sets out where the 3,219 homes should be located and what physical and social infrastructure will be needed alongside these new homes. But the local plan is not just about housing -it also sets out policies for employment and retail sites, reviving town centres, community facilities, conservation and environmental protection and building design and sustainability standards.

The final draft of the Dorset Local Plan will be published for consultation over the summer. It is really important that we all engage with the consultation. It will be our last chance to influence the plan before it goes to the Secretary of State for implementation in 2027. I will make sure you know about the consultation and I urge you to participate.

In the meantime, we continue with the current policies which we know from experience offer little protection from speculative development around our villages. I will continue to serve on the planning committee and do my best for North Dorset.

**Fight to Keep Local Day Services**

Dorset Council is reviewing Day Care Servicesand is proposing to close the Blandford Day Centre and the Trinity Centre in Shaftesbury which will leave residents of north Dorset badly under served. These services are a lifeline for those who use them. A campaign, led by local residents and supported by local councillors and Simon Hoare MP, is underway to persuade the administration at DC that these services must be kept open. A public consultation on this issue runs until 9th June so please make your views known.

On a more positive note, the new Vale Family Hub has opened in Sturminster. The Hub offers support for families including health and midwifery, breakfast and homework clubs and help with problems such as housing and debt. It is a really welcoming space with a play area and great café.

**Support for Dorset Businesses**

I am supporting a call to Dorset Council to increase support for Dorset’s beleaguered businesses. While many of the levers to improve economic performance rest with national government there is more the council can do to support businesses as they face unprecedented challenges. Conservative councillors have put forward a ten-point plan which will put economic recovery at the heart of the council’s decision making and signal a clear intent to support the moral as well as economic case for economic growth.

**Road Safety Success**

I have been working, with the Police and Crime Commissioner, for over two years to improve the data used by the police and the council to assess road safety. So often, I request road safety measures on local roads only to be rejected on the grounds that there is no evidence to support my case. Residents tell me about near misses, collisions and damage to property but until now neither DC nor the police have kept records of non-injury collisions. I am pleased that we can now report damage only, non-injury incidents and near misses online to Dorset Council. This data will help me make your case for road improvements.

Meanwhile, I will continue to support applications for reductions in speed limits through villages. There have been a number of notable successes including Child Okeford and Pimperne, while work continues for a number of other problematic roads.

**Highways Maintenance**

Dorset Council maintains 2,400 miles of roads, fills 20,000 potholes a year and cuts hundreds of miles of verges, so it stands to reason that work to maintain our roads must be prioritised. Our Community Highway Officer inspects roads for urgent work but not all faults will get picked up.

Residents all have a part to play in reporting issues as soon as they arise - the sooner and the more often a fault is reported the sooner it will be fixed. It is very easy to report issues on the Dorset Council website.

**Rural Transport**

Dorset Council was awarded £3.3m in government funding for improvements to buses services but chose to allocate almost all of this to towns in the south of the county.

Poor public transport is a persistent concern for rural residents, impacting the local economy, reducing choice for work or study and increasing isolation. I have raised this issue with the Portfolio Holder at Dorset Council and I will continue to press to ensure rural Dorset gets a fair share of investment to meet crucial transport needs.

Thank you to all our Parish Councils for their hard work on behalf of their communities and thank you to residents for their engagement. I am your representative to Dorset Council and am always here to help, so please get in touch on Cllrsherry.jespersen@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk.

Thank you