



DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL - ANNUAL REPORT 2014-15

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our Annual report - The Town Council is the parish authority for Dorchester. We are the fourth tier of government after parliament, the county council and the district council. Our legal powers are granted and regulated by various government acts. With a population of over 19,000 we are the largest town in West Dorset. We supplement the provision of local government services in Dorchester and provide a range of social and recreational facilities, while promoting and representing the town with other national and statutory bodies. For example we provide virtually all the public open space and sports grounds in the town and provide the hanging baskets in the town centre; in short we do most of the things that make Dorchester the special place it is.

There are 20 Members on the Council who are elected for a four year term with the next elections being held in May 2015. The Mayor is elected by the Council every year in May and also acts as Chairman to the Council.

This Council operates a Committee structure with each Committee having specific functions. We have three Committees; Policy, Management and Planning and Environment and reports from the chairmen on the work of these Committees are set out in this report. The Council also appoints a number of Panels which meet as and when required to discuss particular issues and report back to the appropriate Committee. Agenda for the Council, Committees and Panels are all available to the public three clear days before the meeting at the Council offices. Meetings are usually held in the Council Chamber (upstairs in the Corn Exchange building) and you are welcome to attend and speak at any of these meetings.

It is important for us to receive your comments, queries and complaints on the services provided by the Town Council so that we can endeavour to serve you well. The Council has a feature in its regular newsletter asking for your help to highlight any problems around the town – whether the responsibility of this Council or not – let us know what the problem is and if it's our responsibility we will endeavour to sort it out and if it's not we will contact the appropriate authority on your behalf.

Thank you for your time in receiving and reading this report and we would accordingly welcome any response.

Town Mayor

REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE - *Councillor Robin Potter*

The past year has been as busy as ever, with our regular meetings supplemented by the work of panels which oversee particular themes and projects designed to keep Dorchester as good a place to live, work and visit as we can make it.

The Borough Gardens staff continue to provide award-winning facilities - a Green Flag for the seventh year in a row is something to be proud of and I thank them very much. The new fob system for using the Tennis courts seems to be working well and we look forward to increased use. The plans for turning part of the old Bowling Green into a grass-free lawn are well advanced, with over 100 trays of seedlings being cultivated all over Dorchester by many different groups and individuals, ready to be brought together on Easter Monday for planting. Once these are established, we will be thinking about what to do with the rest of the area.

Adjacent to the Gardens are part of the Walks system, where staff continue to monitor the condition of the magnificent trees in case they become vulnerable to the diseases we read about which are spreading across England. Safety is paramount, but we will certainly keep the avenues in good shape by managing and replacing trees if necessary. Thomas Hardy's statue near Top o' Town also has new lighting.

With a little less rain this year, our Allotments are recovering well with the vast majority of plots looking good with plenty of produce. The development of the new road near Red Cow Farm is causing some reluctance to take on plots in our St. George's Road site so there are some spaces here for keen growers!

Our Community Activities Panel has been especially busy this year, with World War I centenary events to add to their ongoing civic and twinning celebrations, which have included visits from Lubbecke footballers and Bayeux musicians. The panel has already overseen several commemorative events around WWI's centenary and more are being planned as the years move on. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission asked to put their plaques on our cemeteries and we were, of course, happy to oblige.

We remain committed to maintaining, improving and enhancing our Play Areas in the Town and this year we have been able to help Dorchester Rugby Club with a grant to improve their facilities, in particular for their female players! Shortly after you read this, following a request of some younger Dorchester residents, Parkour (Free Running) equipment is to be installed at Sandringham Field.

The Corn Exchange Buildings continue to host many groups and events. We have been consulting with Dorchester Arts about them joining us in the buildings in order to improve the ability of Dorchester Arts, Dorchester Town Council and other groups to use the municipal buildings to promote Arts provision in the Town, while ensuring that our other hirers continue to get what they want.

On a personal note to finish, I was grateful to be given the opportunity during the year to appear on BBC television's Street Patrol programme to explain how Dorchester's Skate Park has been a boon to allowing our young (and sometimes not-so-young!) skaters to show off their prowess while reducing problems for non-skaters, and how the Town Council supports and continues to support it. It was very pleasing to see how well Dorchester came across as a friendly place always ready to help.

REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE - *Councillor Susie Hosford*

The Planning and Environment Committee has faced another challenging year with a full workload of Agenda Items to consider, consistently high numbers of Planning Applications for comment and active involvement in a variety of strategic issues affecting the Town. At our December meeting we discussed new ways of working and several modifications are being trialled to see if the workload can be handled more efficiently. The Committee needs a high level of commitment from its Members and from May there will be a requirement for Members to attend training on planning issues.

During the year the Committee has received useful updates on a wide range of topics from Officers of DCC and WDDC, representatives of local interest groups, potential developers and local residents who are organising excellent voluntary projects within the Town. The Committee also continues to receive regular reports from the Dorchester Area Community Partnership and we would like to thank them for all their efforts in co-ordinating work on improvements to cycle routes and safer routes to school in conjunction with local parishes.

The two major developments in the Town at Poundbury and Brewery Square are progressing well. They have already made significant contributions to retail, business, entertainment and housing provision with much more to come over the next few years. We are pleased to have secured the option for the maximum amount of parking on the proposed Charles Street Development but our remaining concerns for the development include good pedestrian links to South Street as a gateway to other retail areas within the Town, heritage and archaeology within the Site and the provision of alternative parking during construction.

Following the public response to the Dorchester Traffic and Environment Plan proposals to re-route traffic through the Town, the plan has now been extensively revised. The Town Council led the public consultation on the new proposals by hosting a series of workshops for interested residents, businesses, local groups and those with a professional interest in traffic management. These were well attended and supported the new proposals to improve exiting traffic flow through the Town by the installation of synchronised traffic lights, improvements to key junctions and the introduction of some parking and loading restrictions. The work will be phased over the next four years and will also include improved pedestrian links between Brewery Square and South Street. The Town Council has also expressed a preference for spending on environmental enhancements to be prioritised in the southern end of South Street and outside the Shire Hall in High West Street.

The Committee continues to receive regular requests for support for parking restrictions in residential streets. The difficulties are caused by the high cost and limited availability of off street parking for Town Centre workers who solve their problem by parking in residential areas within walking distance of their place of work. There is an urgent need for a strategic plan which addresses the different parking needs of residents, workers and visitors, taking an overview of on and off street parking provision and other possible alternatives. The Town Council will continue to urge DCC, WDDC and Dorset County Hospital to join them in pursuing this important objective.

Things have moved rapidly at the Prison Site since the short notice closure of the prison facility just before Christmas 2013 and as soon as the Site was marketed we kept in close contact with the Ministry of Justice agents over the progress of the sale of the site. This is a key site in the heart of the Town Centre Conservation Area with unique challenges presented by the limited vehicle access and adjacent residential amenity to consider. We had hoped that West Dorset District Council would produce a

Design Brief for the Site but unfortunately they did not have the capacity to undertake this important piece of work due to staffing shortages. At our June meeting Dorchester Civic Society gave an inspiring presentation of their vision for the future of the Prison Site and the decision was taken to work with them to produce a Joint Position Statement which was adopted at Full Council in September. This document, which focuses on a mixed use development on the Site with public pedestrian and cycle access, was circulated by the site agents to all potential purchasers. A preliminary meeting was held in February between representatives of the Town Council and the Civic Society and the new owners of the Site at which we were able to re-iterate our aspirations for this important town centre site.

The Committee can look forward to another busy year ahead. We have started looking at the benefits of producing a Neighbourhood Plan for the Town, will continue to influence the consideration of sites for a new Household Recycling Centre and will be ready to respond to the Revised Local Plan when the Inspector's findings are published. The provision of Affordable Housing remains high on our list of priorities and we will continue to resist 'piecemeal' applications which seek to minimise the affordable housing element of proposed developments. When necessary we will also continue to support WDDC in taking enforcement action to secure the maintenance and upkeep of some of our Town's unique listed building heritage.

Finally, I would like to thank our Committee Clerk Louise Dowell for her support to the Committee on the wide range of issues which it covers and for her professional skill in communicating our planning objections to WDDC. I would also like to thank our Town Clerk Adrian Stuart for his vision and enthusiasm in progressing the more strategic issues which fall within the Committee's remit.

REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE POLICY COMMITTEE - *Councillor Trevor Jones*

The last year has seen a sea change for the Town Council. We had come to the end of many years of delivering Council specific projects in the town, driven by the last Town Clerk. Dennis did a first class job, so much so that all of the things we wanted to do had been done. It has been the first full year of his successor, Adrian Stuart, who has redirected our energies into trying to get others to do things that are in the interests of the town. Many would agree that this is the harder of the two jobs, as it relies on others to engage in the town's issues and then deliver on them, but we remain optimistic.

After years of no progress we can see a way ahead for the Dorchester Transport and Environmental Plan (DTEP). Funding of £4.0M is in place, and policy objectives agreed by the partners that forget the idea of simply re-routing traffic to different parts of town, instead concentrating on moving it through town smoothly, and deliver environmental enhancements in High West Street and South Street.

We have met the new owners of the Prison site, and will spend time actively encouraging them to comply with the development brief that we commissioned last Autumn from a consultant when West Dorset District Council were unwilling to produce one.

And a third piece of good news comes from Dorchester Market, where after a number of years stuck in the treacle fields a new long term lease has been agreed that will see Ensors make a major investment in the Fairfield site.

And finally, but something we will see very soon, the Council has agreed a partnership deal that brings Dorchester Arts to the Corn Exchange for the next few years. We look forward to this resulting in more arts events and larger audiences, making better use of a building that we invested £1M in some years ago, which deserves a higher profile and better usage.

It's not, of course, an unbroken success story. Members of Council will recognise the one thing above all others which annoys many town residents is the issue of uncontrolled, all day, on street parking. Getting something done about it is, though, the very devil. There are no magic wands and with the advantage of hindsight it is clear that efforts to resolve the problem in one place have merely resulted in moving it, not removing it. We continue to talk to the County Council as Highway Authority and the District Council who run most of the Car Parks and hope to report progress at some point, but I've said that before.

I reported last year that we hoped to reach agreement with the Bowls Club at Sandringham to properly recognise the support we gave in guaranteeing the bank loan that helped them build their facility. I understand that the first payment, of £3,000, is expected any time.

I should give an update on our finances. They continue to improve, and by the end of this year we will have £540,000 in our General Reserve and £400,000 in Earmarked Reserves. And, when setting our budget for 2015/16, we have put an additional £80,000 aside to allow us to take on new services. So if the new Council does want to start supporting, in Dorchester, some of the things currently done by the County and District Councils, then we might be able to. But don't tell them yet. And of course, it all depends what it is.

This is intended to be my last report as Chairman of Policy Committee, so I couldn't be happier than to end it on a high. This year the Minister for Local Government decided to consult on capping larger Town Councils. However, faced with compelling

arguments from colleagues and ourselves I am pleased to advise that the Minister dropped the idea. So for the immediate future at least there will be no capping, and we remain free to continue to manage our own destiny. Hurray.

DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL BUDGET SUMMARY

Actual 2013-14 £	Service	Budget 2014-15 £	Actual 2014-15 £	Worse / Better £
8,050	Allotments	11,564	11,181	(383)
623,722	Parks & Open Spaces	573,195	534,654	(38,541)
62,499	Cemeteries	88,369	62,569	(25,800)
233,301	Municipal Building	142,546	140,143	(2,403)
53,798	Cultural Activities & Twinning	58,865	57,352	(1,513)
185,057	Corporate and Democratic	215,567	197,634	(17,933)
55,694	Other Services	75,750	45,885	(29,865)
1,222,121	Total Revenue	1,165,856	1,049,418	(116,438)
(1,110,439)	Precept	(1,162,423)	(1,162,423)	-
(111,752)	Council Tax Support Grant	(93,317)	(93,317)	-
(70)	Transfer to General Reserve	(89,884)	(206,322)	(116,438)

The Council's full Financial Statement 2014-15 will be available at www.dorchester-tc.gov.uk

DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCILLORS TO MAY 2015

East Ward

Tim Harries 8 Dunnabridge Street DT1 3GL	07970 653796
Stella Jones Syward Cottage, Syward Road DT1 2AJ	264335
Fiona Kent-Ledger 28 Olga Road DT1 2LX	250253
Tamara Loakes 3A Holloway Road DT1 1LG	757526
Tony Lyall 13 St. George's Road DT1 1PA	266254

North Ward

Vivienne Allan 28 Somerleigh Road DT1 1TJ	250023
Richard Biggs 20 Bridport Road DT1 1RS	260156
Andy Canning, 11 Alfred Road DT1 2DW	261592
Susie Hosford, 1 Meadow Cottages, Martinstown DT2 9LJ	880102
David Taylor 4 Normandy Way DT1 2PP	263382

South Ward

Carolyn Biggs 20 Bridport Road DT1 1RS	260156
Tess James 70 Monmouth Road DT1 2DG	262359
Gareth Jones 30 Culliford Road South DT1 2AT	262478
Robin Potter 22 D'Urberville Close DT1 2JT	264416
Molly Rennie 13 Alington Road DT1 1NS	268572

West Ward

Karen Armitage 58 Windsor Road DT1 2JB	251447
David Barrett 41 Holmead Walk DT1 3GE	259269
Trevor Jones OBE Syward Cottage, Syward Road DT1 2AJ	264335
Peter Mann 13 Beech Court DT1 1DX	266796
David Roberts 14 Swanbridge Park DT1 1ND	269394

Adrian Stuart – Town Clerk
19 North Square, Dorchester DT1 1JF

Telephone: 01305 266861 ~ Email admin@dorchester-tc.gov.uk ~ www.dorchester-tc.gov.uk