

## Making the best of a Covid Christmas

Normally at Christmas the biggest threat to the Mayor of Dorchester is to their waistline, from an assault of mince pies and roast turkey at countless social events. This year was a bit different when Richard Biggs donned a mask on the Saturday before Christmas at the Thomas Hardy School canteen.

On his re-election as Mayor in May, one of Richard's commitments for his year was to use part of his Mayoral Allowance to support those most affected by the pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns.

Local charity, Dorchester Family Support, provide essential food and advice to families who qualify for free school meals when school is not open. They were already planning to provide some Christmas basics (Crackers, Mince Pies, Chocolates and Sweets) that families struggle to afford at an expensive time of the year. Alongside Richard, this year they raised enough money for a small gift of cash to help parents to buy a present for their children.

Richard says "I was so impressed with the way that Dorchester Family Support distributed parcels to 200 families with over 400 children. It was incredibly well organised and Covid secure. Dorchester is very fortunate to have groups like this working in our community, as well as local businesses and residents willing to dip into their pockets to provide what is needed".

In another initiative the Town Council joined Dorchester BID and a number of local businesses in supporting the production of the film Dorchester at Christmas 2020.

550 DVDs were given out to those needing a Christmas boost: in hospital, the hospice, care homes and sheltered accommodation and the film has also been viewed on [You Tube](#) (where it can still be found) over 2,500 times.

Local shops stocked the DVDs, raising £3500 to support five local charities: Dorset County Hospital, Dorchester Family Support, Dorchester Poverty Action, Home-Start West Dorset and Weldmar Hospicecare.



## Council supports Yeovil Freewheelers

The first grant the Council gave in response to the pandemic was to an urgent plea from a group that provides emergency courier relief to NHS organisations across Dorset and Somerset, carrying blood, medicines, samples and medical equipment between hospitals, care homes, patients and laboratories. Yeovil Freewheelers is a fleet of eight motorcycles, delivering free of charge to the NHS.

The Council gave a grant of £250 when it heard that the charity's income, which mainly comes from fundraising at outdoor events, was under threat.

At the peak of the pandemic, the team took on double the workload for the County Hospital and other surrounding hospitals, including the daily delivery of 1000's of COVID-19 swabs for testing; covering 25,000 miles a month compared to the 10,000 they were doing pre-COVID.

Freewheelers Chairman, Ian Piper said: "I am so proud of how our team responded to an enormous increase in workload at a time when their own lives were in turmoil. I am also grateful to Dorchester residents; your money helped us to continue to provide the service at a critical time. Fundraising is still a challenge but, thanks to many kind donations from members of the public who see our social media and website, [www.yfwbloodbikes.org](http://www.yfwbloodbikes.org), we are now better able to cope with any future peaks of infection."



# Dorchester News

Dorchester Town Council  
19 North Square Dorchester Dorset DT1 1JF  
☎ 01305 266861 ✉ [admin@dorchester-tc.gov.uk](mailto:admin@dorchester-tc.gov.uk)



Spring 2021

## Town Council says NO to Dor13 North Dorchester development

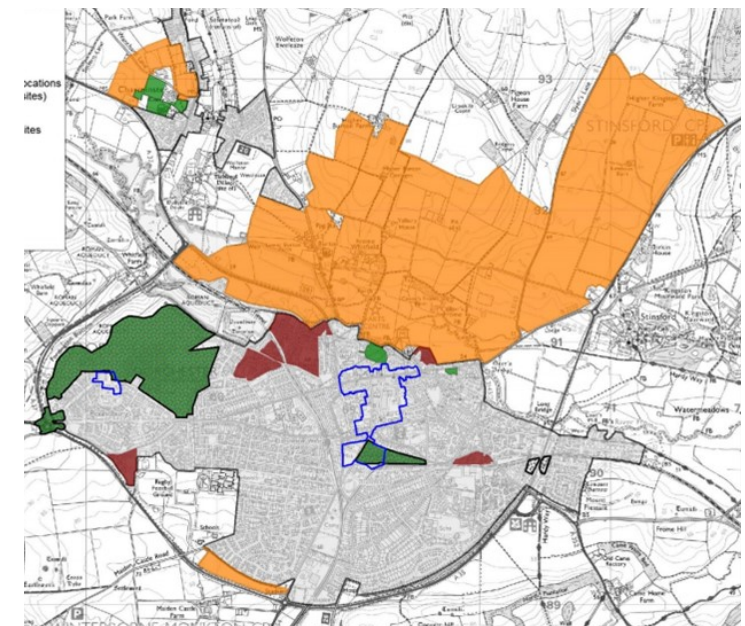
As Poundbury nears completion the planning authority, Dorset Council, are developing ideas for a further phase of growth to the north of the town across the water meadows, repeating a proposal made by West Dorset Council in 2018. Back then the Town Council challenged the idea commenting that: -

- Because of significant infrastructure requirements the site would not be financially viable;
- Increasing the town's population by around 35%, over 7,000 new residents, would place enormous pressure on a town infrastructure already unable to cope with traffic and other demands;
- The environmental and heritage damage of such an approach was significant and irreversible
- No other sites in the wider area had been properly considered - Dorchester had been selected as the easy option simply to meet a national housing target

Dorset Council now propose the same scheme again - 3,500 homes, 25 acres of employment land, plus new healthcare facilities and schools across the orange area on the map above and titled Dor13.

The level of growth proposed goes well beyond what Dorchester itself needs to remain a viable community. The town and its surrounding landscape is being threatened to solve a Government-led housing numbers problem relating to the whole county.

In addition to our 2018 arguments the Town Council is today concerned that the plan takes no account of the



growing Climate Emergency and how that will further reflect changing behaviours being identified as a result of the Covid pandemic lockdowns.

Our town centre is suffering from shop closures by national retailers on a previously unseen scale, offices and car parks are empty as workers adapt to new ways of working; many may not return to Dorchester.

A rethink of how our town centre works and what its future role might be is essential before committing to another phase of development on valued green space, based on outdated assumptions. Dorchester should not become Dorset's dumping ground, merely to solve a county-wide housing numbers problem.

## Have your Say



We need your views

Whether you agree with us or not please make sure you have a say in the development of your area.

The **Dorset Council consultation ends on 15 March** and is the last opportunity to comment before the Local Plan is considered late in 2021 by a Government Inspector.

The consultation covers more than DOR13, including policies for the Environment, the Economy and Housing, as well as Dorchester specific policies affecting the town centre, Poundbury and land on the edge of town. Visit [Dorset Council website](#) and look for the logo.

Visit our website at [www.dorchester-tc.gov.uk](http://www.dorchester-tc.gov.uk)



## Our Corporate Plan Thanks for your Feedback

In our Autumn newsletter we invited feedback on the key aims in our draft Corporate Plan. We also asked you for your experiences of Covid.

Just under 100 residents responded to the questionnaire, the key messages being fed back to us being

- The overwhelming majority of respondents supported the general direction of our plan and our approach to setting the Council Tax
- Two new themes emerged around the need to support town centre retail and the need to place a greater emphasis on walking, cycling and public transport. While these are largely out of our control we will investigate what we might do in these areas
- Social isolation and mental health were the biggest concerns that residents had during the first lockdowns; they will be just as difficult to manage as we experience a third lockdown
- On a positive note many respondents recognised improvements in physical wellbeing and a number of you welcomed a reduction in traffic

Thank you to those that took the time to help build a picture of whether we are on the right track.

A number of individual issues were also raised; we will try to deal with these as opportunities arise.

Don't feel isolated this winter - get better connected with the Digital Hotline



- Unsure how to use a smartphone?
- Want to use video calls but don't know how?
- Have a laptop but don't know how to use it?
- Nervous about online shopping or website services?

Our Digital Champions are waiting to help. No problem too big or too small

Call the Digital Hotline **01305 221048**  
Weekdays from 10 am - Noon

## April 2021 Council Tax rise below 1%

The Town Council share of Council Tax will rise by 0.8% in April, a Band D charge of £198.21, up £1.57, raising £1.5 Million from the town's taxpayers.

In setting its budget for 2021/22 Councillors considered a number of specific issues, including:

- A new local Tourism service for the town, plus funding for an extra temporary member of staff to speed up the Council's work on tourism, environment and community projects
- Debt costs associated with the refurbishment of the Municipal Buildings, as well as changed arrangements for running the building with Dorchester Arts once refurbishment is completed
- The wider implications of the Covid lockdown during 2020 and its impact on how Council services are run

The budget also allows for new Christmas Lights (co-funded by Dorchester BID) and a refurbishment of the town's War Memorial, which was installed at South Gate 100 years ago this year.

The full budget can be found on our [website](#).

## Mayors Charity

Richard has at last had a chance to pass on a cheque for £1,300 from his Mayoral year 2019/20, for the Fire Fighter's Charity, to Station Commander Robbie Tompkins at Dorchester Fire Station. Socially distanced, so long arms were a bonus!

Richard raised money at outdoor events and sponsored a charity ball at the Corn Exchange.



## New Tourism Service to support Partners

Over the last 12 months, working with Museum, Heritage, Arts and business community partners, the Town Council has been developing a new tourism strategy for the town.

The timing couldn't be better. In recent years the town has experienced major investments at Shire Hall, the County Museum, by the private sector at Poundbury, Brewery Square and in the High Street, with more to come at the Municipal Buildings and around the town pump at Cornhill.

But the town has also witnessed the effects of Covid and the lockdown on its shops and eateries, as we all get used to staying at home.

In part the service will be a response to concerns regarding the future of Dorchester TIC; the Town Council is not in a position to fund such a service, should Dorset Council choose to close it. The Town Council will instead allocate £30,000 each year to develop a new partnership with local tourism and business providers.

Building on the success of the Love Dorch campaign last year the Council is working with Dorchester BID to provide a better website to market the town, plus a new app to help visitors and locals to enjoy the town when they arrive.

Other projects include new walking routes, a heritage based empty shopfront information scheme and training to help staff and volunteers in many town centre premises to provide basic visitor information when requested.

## Councillor Contacts

Phone and e-mail contact details for Ward councillors for the Town Council and the Dorset Council are available on our website, [www.dorchester-tc.gov.uk](http://www.dorchester-tc.gov.uk)



Keep up to date with what's on in the town: listen to your volunteer run, not for profit, community radio station from Dorchester, covering central-southern Dorset.



## Municipal Buildings Taking the roof off

Work has started on a £2.5M refurbishment of the Municipal Buildings. Phase One involves a new roof, replacing the current slates and leadwork, much of which is 150 years old. An enormous scaffold kit will be in place for the next 4 months.



Later phases will introduce green energy, provide new facilities and offices at the rear of the building and enable better use as a theatre venue.

census  
2021

## Be a part of Census 2021

Census day is 21 March 2021.

By taking part and encouraging others to do the same, you'll help make sure your community gets the services it needs.



Find out more at [www.census.gov.uk](http://www.census.gov.uk)

Follow @Census2021

Office for National Statistics

[www.census.gov.uk](http://www.census.gov.uk)

AdGIP1