



DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT 2008/09

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 17,500 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. The next Town Council elections are in May 2011. 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.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kate Hewitt".

Town Mayor

REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Councillor Andy Canning

It has been another busy year for the Town Council's Management Committee that has seen a number of projects being developed.

A major theme has been that we have continued to add to our facilities and events for the town's young people. Play facilities have continued to be improved at a number of sites including Sandringham, Castle Park and Poundbury Crescent. At the first site we have installed a number of items that can be used by children with disabilities. We have also continued to support the development of the town's first purpose built skatepark which has now been opened to great acclaim. In addition we have worked with Youth Extra to get a first Youth Shelter on the Great Field with a second one being installed on Kings Road. They will also be running a number of new events this summer that are aimed at young people including a Treasure Hunt, Punch and Judy

Show and Wildlife events in the Borough Gardens during Love Parks Week, a 'play trail' around the town on Playday and a Youth Festival in Maumbury Rings. We would particularly like to thank Dorchester Youth Extra who have proved to be very productive partners for many of these events.

The Borough Gardens continues to go from strength to strength and are looking better than ever this year. As in previous years we have arranged a whole series of concerts and other events throughout the summer to take full advantage of this beautiful area.

We have also continued to support the town's outdoor recreational activities. We have a strong partnership with Dorchester Cricket Club who are building a score box at Weymouth Avenue Recreation Ground. On the Great Field two football pitches have been marked out and an all weather cricket pitch will be laid down soon. We are pressing the Duchy to ensure that all issues about drainage from the Great Field have been sorted out.

Our allotments continue to be significantly oversubscribed. As a result we are looking to develop two new sites – one at Red Cow Farm and the other by Poundbury Cemetery. Both are on Duchy land and we will continue to press them to bring on these sites as soon as possible.

The number of bookings for the Municipal Buildings, Borough Gardens House and the Weymouth Avenue Pavilion are greater than ever before and have notably exceeded our forecasts. We have spent much of this year developing plans to replace the stairs, install a lift and modernise the toilets in the Municipal Buildings. All of the plans have now received approval and the work will take place in the early part of 2010.

In addition we continue to provide both summer and winter hanging baskets in the town centre and we supplied a large number of Christmas trees to local shops. Our staff also deserve praise for maintaining all our open spaces and the Walks to a very high standard.

REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE *Councillor Fiona Kent-Ledger*

I would like to thank my fellow Councillors who sit on or attend the Planning and Environment Committee for all their help and support in the last year. For their considered and useful opinions and for their understanding on what can be quite a trying committee to be a member of. Thank you also to Councillor Susie Hosford as my Vice-Chair for all her support and for being able to stand in when needed and to the Clerk to the Committee Sue Cheeseman for all her hard work and patience.

Since my last report a year ago, Dorchester saw an initial increase in major development within the town; with an increased level of planning applications for housing, which is sorely needed. However as the financial "credit crunch" turned into a full blown recession work on some of the town's developments has either slowed down to a crawl or appeared to cease completely. Either due to developers being taken over by another firm, financial difficulties due to being unable to sell properties or simply going bust.

We saw the brewery site move on at a quick pace early in the year, but rather disappointingly after the initial clearance of the site and some conversion work that too has slowed down. But the new medical centre has been completed and provides the residents of the town with quite a striking frontage on which they can debate over its design. Several flats within the development have been sold both on and off plan with several residents already moved in, which is a positive and healthy sign of interest. The completion of the shops facing onto Weymouth Avenue has been tastefully done and is attracting some interest by retailers keen to get in early on the development.

The Charles Street Development by Simons Developments is hoping to re-submit a planning application this year. West Dorset District Council is keen to vacate their High West Street premises and one option is to move the offices to this development (with the brewery site as another) although no decision has been made as yet. It will be interesting to see the re-submitted application and what changes they plan.

The development of Poundbury is moving at a slower but steady pace. The Great Field is still undergoing drainage surveys, however the open space is being used by people of the town and recently the much awaited youth shelter was finally completed. The Local Fire and Rescue headquarters was also completed this year giving Dorchester another "statement" building at the western entrance to the town. Local residents have a clear line of communication with the developers which has resulted in more consultation not just in Poundbury but also in other areas of the town where the Duchy own land. The recent application for the development of land off St George's Road and Little Britain that the Duchy submitted was well thought out and an innovative use of the land, the design of which came from public and local consultation.

Due to the current downturn in the economy you would expect the number of planning applications to have dropped off, but surprisingly the number seems to have increased slightly, on average the Committee is seeing

more applications for extensions and renovation projects on residential properties rather than larger scale developments, with people perhaps wishing to stay where they are rather than move.

On a final note about the economy and the effect it is having within the town I should mention the sad fact that several of the town centre shops are empty and we have lost quite a few major stores; it is not all bad - these things come in cycles and although we are probably a while off the “boom” of the last few years things can and will get better – empty shops will be filled again with new, different stores giving local residents more choice; maybe the local landlords will consider lower rents to entice new business in, rather than having empty premises losing them money. Who knows but sometimes good things come out of bad times.

Public participation is welcomed by the Committee, and indeed we regularly have local residents attend our meetings where they are able to express concerns on planning applications and the impact upon themselves or the town. Sometimes I have been surprised at the number that may attend a particular meeting, as we may not be aware that there is an issue or how strongly people may feel. However it always pleases me to see them there no matter how heated a discussion might get, as it proves that democracy is alive and well in Dorchester.

So I feel it has been a good and productive year for the Committee, I feel that we should feel proud that we have had a hand in helping shape the look of the town.

REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE POLICY COMMITTEE

Councillor Trevor Jones

I am pleased to be able to continue the practice of recent years and report a very satisfactory state of affairs in that:

- the Council has determined its priorities for the next few years; and
- has enough money to deliver them.

Over the last twenty years or so the Council has delivered a string of projects for the benefit of the Town:

- the ongoing refurbishment of the Municipal Buildings, probably West Dorset’s highest quality and best-used suite of public rooms with, not all that long ago, the installation of new sound and projection facilities in partnership with Dorchester Film Society;
- the refurbishment of the Borough Gardens;
- the significant improvement of Weymouth Avenue Recreation Ground and the provision of the new pavilion there;
- the modernisation and improvement of all the children’s play areas in the town;
- the successful partnership with Dorchester Bowling Club to deliver together the excellent facilities which are available at Sandringham Sports Centre;
- the creation of a new cemetery at Poundbury which should meet Dorchester’s burial needs for fifty years or so;
- the provision of a new building at Maumbury Rings which facilitates their use for public events;
- the provision, with partners, of a permanently-monitored CCTV system in the town centre;
- the creation of a bright new website;
- the enlargement and modernisation of the Council Offices at 19 North Square;
- the development of a new depot for our outdoor staff and equipment.

I may have forgotten something, but it is a pretty impressive list by any standard.

The total cost of all these good works comes to well over £4 million, some of which was met by grants, most notably a contribution of £950,500 from the Heritage Lottery Fund towards the costs of the Borough Gardens refurbishment. We paid most of the balance outright but, as in financing any such programme, some £1,050,000 has been borrowed over a period ending in 2028-29. This ensures that the burden on Council Tax payers is not disproportionately high over a short period but spread out over the longer term.

Proper provision for the repayment of capital and interest is embedded in our financial planning and, as a safeguard against the unexpected, we have reserves of just over £800,000. Our finances are healthy.

Meanwhile the Council is currently progressing schemes to improve Maumbury Rings and the River Walk along with significant improvements to the Municipal Buildings including a new staircase and at long last a lift to enable disabled people to access the Council Chamber and Town Hall.

Last but by no means least – and, indeed, a high note – the skatepark has been completed and opened.

DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL BUDGET

The precept, which is the amount we raise to pay for the services to be provided by the Council, for 2009/10 represents a Council Tax of £154.19 for the average property. This is an increase of 4.25% on last year.

The cost of the Town Council's Services can be summarised as follows:

2008/09 Actual			Service	2009/10 Estimate		
Expenditure	Income	Net cost		Expenditure	Income	Net cost
14,548	4,407	10,141	Allotments	14,724	4,566	10,159
624,989	78,188	546,801	Parks & Open Spaces	662,337	70,414	591,924
333,772	83,331	250,441	Buildings & Cultural Activities	442,361	76,115	366,245
274,744	252,944	21,800	Corporate Management	308,989	235,871	73,118
96,826	0	96,826	Democratic Representation	73,866	0	73,866
6,640	0	6,640	Twinning	10,172	0	10,172
21,118	0	21,118	Planning	21,771	0	21,771
67,918	0	67,918	Joint Burial Committee	70,974	0	70,974
1,440,555	418,870	1,021,685	Net Expenditure	1,605,194	386,966	1,218,228

You will be able to view the Council's draft final accounts for the year ended 31st March, 2009 online at www.dorchester-tc.gov.uk or at the Council Offices as from 13 July, 2009.

DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCILLORS

East Ward

Mark Allwood 29 South Walks Road DT1 1ED	259991
Tim Harries 9 Brookhouse Street DT1 3GL	07970 653796
Stella Jones Syward Cottage, Syward Road DT1 2AJ	264335
Fiona Kent-Ledger 28 Olga Road DT1 2LX	250253
Tony Lyall 13 St. George's Road DT1 1PA	266254

North Ward

Richard Biggs 20 Bridport Road DT1 1RS	260156
Vicki Black 4 Ashington Street DT1 3GJ	261574
Andy Canning, 11 Alfred Road DT1 2DW	261592
Kate Hebditch 8 Friary Hill DT1 1JG	268603
Les Phillips MBE 17 West Mills Road DT1 1SP	264030

South Ward

Carolyn Biggs 20 Bridport Road DT1 1RS	260156
Susie Hosford, 1 Meadow Cottages, Martinstown DT2 9LJ	880102
Tess James 70 Monmouth Road DT1 2DG	262359
Robin Potter 22 D'Urberville Close DT1 2JT	264416
Molly Rennie 13 Alington Road DT1 1NS	268572

West Ward

David Barrett 41 Holmead Walk DT1 3GE	259269
Anita Harries 9 Brookhouse Street DT1 2GL	261354
Leonard Heath 1 Maen Gardens, Culliford Road DT1 1PU	757313
Trevor Jones OBE Syward Cottage, Syward Road DT1 2AJ	264335
Peter Mann 13 Beech Court DT1 1DX	266796