



DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL - ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our Annual report. The Town Council is the parish authority for Dorchester. We are the most local tier of government, and work closely with the county council and the district council. With a population at around 20,000 we provide a range of social and recreational facilities, while also promoting and representing the town with other national and statutory bodies. We provide most of the public open space and sports grounds in the town, three cemeteries, over 300 allotments, we operate the Municipal Buildings and support many of the town's community and civic events. This year we have particularly been supporting community organisations, through the allocation of grants and officer time, as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic. We are very grateful to those organisations and volunteers which have stepped up in so many different areas where there was a need identified, from making facemasks to helping deliver food to the more vulnerable in our community.

There are 20 Members on the Council who are usually elected for a four year term, the most recent period starting in May 2019 was for a five year period to bring our elections in line with the newly formed Dorset Council. 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; Management, Planning and Environment and Policy, and reports from the chairmen on the work of these Committees are set out in this report. In normal times Agenda for the Council and its Committees are available online three clear days before meetings, which are held in the Council Chamber (upstairs in the Corn Exchange building) and residents are welcome to attend and speak at any of these meetings. During this past year the Council has had to move to online meetings via Zoom due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Agenda and Zoom links to the meetings are posted on the Council website and we are still welcoming members of the public to our 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 welcomes your help to highlight any problems around the town – whether the responsibility of this Council or not – let us know what the problem is. 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 welcome any response you might make.

Town Mayor

REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE - *Councillor Fiona Kent-Ledger*

During this year the Committee has continued to do its duties and conducted its meetings in public online via the Zoom platform. The meetings have been held every other month with the Chairman and Deputy Clerk arranging ad-hoc meetings as an issue arises, or a meeting is needed to discuss issues with our partners and tenants. At every Committee meeting a detailed report is prepared by the Outdoor Service Manager – Carl Dallison, he has attended the meetings and always seems able answers the members questions and turn requests into reality, I would like to take this opportunity to thank him for all his hard work and willingness to share his knowledge with us.

In the Borough Gardens the staff have worked hard to create a new literary themed Rose Garden next to the new tennis courts and shield beds will be planted this year to thank all those volunteers and people working hard during the Covid-19 pandemic. Salisbury Fields has benefited from a new adventure trail and some imaginative work was welcomed to turn a tree stump, of a diseased tree that had to be felled, into a seat, rather than it being removed by Dorset Council this was much better than having them ground out. The Great Field is moving much closer to its completion with tree planting, interesting layouts of brush and scrub planting, new pathways and routes across the field have brought much enjoyment to many Dorchester residents who have taken to using the field for their daily exercise during lock down. Wildlife is already making itself at home there with quite large flocks of Gold finches, sparrows and other birds that grab your attention as you walk by.

As a Committee we decided that we would be unable to hold most of our regular outdoor events this year and decided early on to not plan anything but rather to leave it to ad-hoc events that others might wish to put on. One of these events was a Folk concert organised by Keep 106 the local radio station. It was nice to see people venture out in a safe way. King's Road playing field had a significant number of trees planted on it this year and it was hoped that we could have held an event in the summer to celebrate the community response to Covid-19 with a public event, unfortunately due to the need to plant in "season" and the Coronavirus restrictions this was not meant to be.

The Council is responsible for several play areas on its land and therefore all play equipment sited there. Site visits are normally undertaken by the Committee, this was something we were unable to do this year, however it has not stopped us acting on the Clerks' recommendations and replacing equipment or upgrading items where needed. Holmead Walk has had new equipment this year and Salisbury Fields has benefited from a new adventure trail.

At each meeting the Deputy Clerk has presented us with the Municipal Building reports, whilst we have not had public use, work still goes on. We have managed to bring to fruition some long standing plans for the upkeep and maintenance work on the Corn Exchange with the Town Hall Keepers completing extensive repairs to the Corn Exchange floor. Along with cleaning and painting and catching up with a huge list of outstanding internal issues. There are not many people who would be able to ignore the massive scaffold, complete with its own roof, that has been erected to remove the Corn Exchange and Council Chamber roofs and deal with repairs. Many of you have been up to look at the ongoing work as it is an opportunity that hopefully none of us will get to see again. I for one found it fascinating and amazed to see just how little insulation there was up there. But also, how itself the condition of the roof was not in as poor state as we had imagined.

As most of you know the Council has some major plans for the future of the Municipal Buildings and provision of a community offer, I feel very proud that we are taking the Corn Exchange along with us and making it fit for future generations. I am looking forwards to what we can do to work towards a more sustainable future, sometimes we can make huge leaps forward but often it is little steps to get there. This year has seemed to be a mixture of both.

Before I end this report, I would just like to thank all the staff for their hard work this year, they work hard every year and are a dedicated team of people but this year has been harder than most. I would also not be able to do this role without the support of the Deputy Clerk Steve Newman whose seemingly unflappable demeanour has helped calm me down and see some reason to navigate our way through some seemingly huge issues this year. Thank you for your vision as Councillors and the support you give me as a Chairman at each meeting, thank you for the work you all do in your wards to make certain projects happen.

REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE - *Councillor Robin Potter*

This year has been different to say the least! The coronavirus restrictions have meant that all our meetings since last March have been held using Zoom. This did at first pose a few problems but, thanks to the willingness of councillors and visitors to learn and to be understanding, and to the expertise of council staff, we have mostly coped very well with the changed dynamic of a meeting, meaning that I have to be aware of a couple of pages of faces who may wish to speak. In this I am helped by Ralph Ricardo who stepped in as an additional vice-chairman when Tim Harris became unavailable. Tim is, of course, missed, but we are managing.

The year has also seen an unusually large number of consultations to which the Town Council has made response. Central Government's Changes to the Planning System, 'Planning for the future', Pavement Parking and Dorset Council's Climate and Ecology Emergency strategy have all come under consideration and our responses have been submitted in good time, with requests for change where we think there could be improvements, but also support when this is appropriate. There have also been responses to Dorset Council's proposals on policies for Licensing and

for Gambling. Lately, of course, there has been the matter of deciding on our responses to Dorset Council's proposals for their new Local Plan. To say that we were, in many areas, rather disappointed, would be putting it mildly. The Council has sent its response, agreeing with proposals where we can, but expressing our grave concerns in many areas such as the general lack of new thinking in response to the changes we expect to see in the way the internet will accelerate different ways of accessing shopping, work and leisure and in response to the demands of the climate change emergency. And then there is DOR13, where the council has developed, with the help of Dorset Planning Consultant Ltd., a robustly analysed and thoroughly argued rebuttal of the policy. The full responses to these consultations are available to view via the Council's website.

All the above is in addition to our ongoing business of looking at any planning application that is made within the boundary of Dorchester. The majority of these we are happy to pass on without objection, but there are times when we need to draw the planning officer's attention to something we feel is not right. Often our concerns are taken on board with a resulting improvement in the development and, even if this is not the case, we have ensured careful consideration.

I hope that we can now concentrate a little more on the Environment part of our brief and continue to press the Highways Agency about flooding on the by-pass; Network Rail about the hope that they will manage their railways as suitable green corridors for wildlife and improve the areas near Dorchester South station; Dorset Council about the need to improve facilities for cycling and walking instead of using the car and Dorset Council about the need for an updated Traffic and Parking Strategy for the whole of the town.

It is a pleasure that I, as chairman, can recognise the patience, diligence and most useful contributions made to our meetings by all those present, whether councillors or members of the press and public and, most important of all, by our clerk Georgina Wakely for her conscientious note-taking and unfailing efforts to progress the work of the committee.

REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE POLICY COMMITTEE - *Councillor Susie Hosford*

Following the May 2019 elections we were able to hold workshops and briefing sessions to develop our Corporate Plan for 2019-24 before the country went into lockdown in March 2020. Work on the High Level Objectives for the Corporate Plan was overtaken by the COVID 19 Pandemic emergency and the response to supporting all sectors of the Town through this unprecedented crisis and the necessary restrictions introduced to contain it. The Council assisted partners delivering direct assistance to vulnerable groups in our community, while staff provided technical and practical support for various initiatives. A redrafted High Level Plan, incorporating longer term impacts of the pandemic for various sectors of the community, was approved in September 2020.

Despite the pandemic, the Council has progressed its response to the Climate Emergency. We are progressing the implementation of a biomass boiler at the Municipal Buildings to address the challenge of heating this important but very difficult building whilst at the same time significantly reducing its carbon footprint. We have worked with community partners to reduce their carbon footprint, installing a ground source heating system at Weymouth Avenue Pavilion, supporting new LED lighting systems and tree planting.

It became apparent that the Municipal Buildings would remain closed for some considerable time. The Committee accelerated a reroof of the building along with the biomass boiler and plans to reconfigure and extend the space at the rear; we are discussing, with Dorchester Arts, the best, long term use of this important heritage asset as an Arts venue and community resource. The work will also enable us to consolidate our office space and we are considering how to repurpose 19 North Square for affordable housing.

As expected Dorset Council has reduced support for locally valued services and grant funding, presenting us both challenges and opportunities. For example, the Committee is implementing a Tourism Strategy developed by the Dorchester Heritage Joint Committee for the delivery of tourism services within the town by funding a co-ordinator to work with partners, as well as working with Dorchester Arts to mitigate cuts to their grant. Negotiations continue to move administration of the Dorchester Markets Panel to the Town Council.

In setting the budget for the coming year, the Committee was pleased to see that as a result of continuing good governance, the Council remains in a strong financial position. In addition to delivering the Corporate Plan, our Medium Term Financial Strategy allows flexibility to respond to further demands arising, from Dorset Council's discretionary services funding reviews, or, as the Town emerges from the Pandemic. Our MTFS assumed a 2% Council Tax rise in 2021-22, but in the end we settled for a lower 0.8% increase, broadly in line with inflation.

DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL OPERATIONAL BUDGET SUMMARY

	2019-20 Actual	2020-21 Budget	2020-21 <i>Latest (Wk50)</i>	Under/ -Over Budget(<i>Wk50</i>)
Parks & Open Spaces	588,613	561,407	529,917	31,490
Allotments	4,168	3,394	3,346	48
Municipal Buildings	315,152	321,198	329,111	-7,913
Cemeteries	48,997	65,328	45,293	20,035
Cultural & Twinning Activities	68,643	49,132	39,668	9,464
Corporate & Democratic Management	215,965	230,230	225,838	4,392
Other Services	118,502	273,491	269,112	4,379
Operational Budget	1,360,041	1,504,180	1,442,286	61,894
Precept	1,463,971	1,503,515	1,503,515	0
Transfer to General Reserves	103,930	665	61,229	61,894

The report will be updated when the Council's final position is known. Our draft Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2020-21 will be available at www.dorchester-tc.gov.uk soon after the financial year end.

DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCILLORS TO MAY 2024

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NORTH WARD			
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POUNDBURY WARD			
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Susie Hosford 1 Meadow Cottages, Martinstown DT2 9JL	01305 880102	David Leaper 33 Peverell Ave East DT1 3RH	01305 757047
SOUTH WARD			
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Molly Rennie MBE 13 Alington Road DT1 1NS	01305 268572		
WEST WARD			
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