



# DORCHESTER NEWS

DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL



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## MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR

The Town Council is now 50 years old, and this special edition of the newsletter celebrates some of its successes since it was created all that time ago. I hope you enjoy reading about them. Look out for further articles in future editions of Dorchester News.

As well as looking back we are also looking forward by way of asking for your views on the Council's draft Corporate Plan. Everybody is pressed for time and so we have kept the survey as brief as possible but if you could spare five minutes to help that would be fantastic.

## SHAPING DORCHESTER

We need your views.

Inside this newsletter you will find a short survey that we could really use your help on. The Council's Corporate Plan is due for revision. This Plan is what identifies our priorities and where we should spend our money and our Councillor and staff time.

We would like to know if we are heading in the right direction and if you could spare some time to complete the survey it will help us check that we are on the right lines with our current work and also help us adapt what we do in the future.

A full copy of the draft Corporate Plan can be found on the Council's website at [www.dorchester-tc.gov.uk](http://www.dorchester-tc.gov.uk)

## A GLIMPSE INTO DORCHESTER'S LOCAL GOVERNMENT HISTORY: FROM NEOLITHIC ROOTS TO MODERN GOVERNANCE

Dorchester has been continuously occupied for nearly 6,000 years, with evidence of human settlement dating back to the Neolithic period. However, it wasn't until the Roman invasion of AD 43 that the first towns began to take shape. Dorchester, known then as Durnovaria, was one such settlement, and its modern name derives from this Roman origin.

Fast forward to the early 14th century, and Dorchester began its journey as the administrative heart of Dorset. In 1305, King Edward I granted the town a charter for the construction of a prison, establishing Dorchester as the official county town. Soon after, in 1324, Edward II gave the town the power to manage its own affairs, a privilege that was made permanent by Edward III in 1337.



*Letters patent of Edward I.  
Held at the Dorset History Centre  
referenced DC-DOB/A/1/1*

As Dorchester's local governance developed, byelaws were introduced in 1414, laying the groundwork for the town's first formal municipal structure. This system included the appointment of 24 burgesses (similar to today's councillors), a Bailiff (akin to a Mayor), two constables, and a Town Clerk. Over the next century, the town's authority grew with additional grants of power from monarchs such as Richard III, Henry VIII, and Elizabeth I. Notably, Elizabeth I granted Dorchester the right to hold a three-day fair during Candlemas, cementing the town's role as a regional hub of commerce and governance. Along the way, monarchs also gave towns the right to have a market.

A turning point came in 1610 with the first formal Charter of Incorporation under James I, which created a common council of 15 capital burgesses and established a Court Record and Recorder. This marked the beginning of Dorchester's self-governance as a "Body Corporate," though the governing body, including the Mayor, was appointed rather than elected. In 1629, Charles I expanded these powers, officially creating the office of Mayor and establishing Dorchester as a fully incorporated town. For the first time, the town had a Mayor, two subordinate Bailiffs, and a council to manage its affairs—though, it remained an oligarchy with no elections.

Dorchester's transformation into a more democratic body came much later, with the passing of the Municipal Corporations Act in 1835. This legislation introduced the concept of an elected town council, consisting of a Mayor, aldermen, and councillors, tasked with overseeing local governance based on property ownership. This marked the first time Dorchester's leaders were chosen by at least some of the town's residents.



Subsequent legislation, such as the Municipal Corporations Act of 1882 and the Local Government Act of 1933, further developed the town's governance. By 1933, one significant change saw the Mayor being elected from within the council, a departure from the old system where anyone could be appointed.

During this time, the council's responsibilities expanded to include oversight of vital services such as police, fire, water, sewerage and electricity, marking a period of significant municipal activity.



The old Police Station sign still in position at the Municipal Building

However, the biggest shift in modern times came with the Local Government Act of 1972, which redefined local governance across England and Wales. As a result, Dorchester Borough Council was dissolved in 1974, with many of its functions transferred to the newly formed West Dorset District Council. Dorchester Town Council was created in its place, continuing to serve as the civic body for the town, albeit with a more focused set of responsibilities. This nearly didn't happen though. The first draft of the Local Government Act abolished Town Councils completely but there were representations from many places including Dorchester. Here, pleasingly, this wrong was soon put right.

Despite this, some places didn't fare so well as Dorchester. For example, Yeovil Town Council's authority was entirely transferred to a new District Council. However, to preserve ancient civic customs and dignities' a body known as the Charter Trustees was permitted, but it possessed no local government powers. This state remained until 1982 when the former borough was granted the status of a parish council. This happened in many towns.

While the past 50 years have seen additional changes in local government, the fundamental structure established by the 1972 Act remains in place today. Dorchester's civic journey—from its Roman roots to its modern-day town council—reflects a rich history of adaptation and growth, grounded in centuries-old traditions of governance that continue to shape the town's future.

As Dorchester navigates contemporary challenges, its long-standing commitment to local governance remains a testament to the enduring spirit of this historic town.



# OUR DRAFT CORPORATE PLAN AMBITIONS

The Town Council has the following strategic aims:

To work with others and do all that it can to implement the vision for the future of the town, in particular focusing on:

- Encouraging and promoting the economic and commercial viability of the town including transport and parking.
- To do what it can to encourage the provision of a housing mix that meets the needs of our residents.
- The need to rise to the challenge of climate change by ensuring the Council honours its climate change pledge and encourages the community to do all that it can do to reduce its carbon footprint.
- The need to support and develop the unique character of Dorchester while paying respect to its history and heritage, its environment and culture, and its community spirit.
- Implementing the Dorchester tourism strategy.

Delivering and supporting the delivery of a range of operational services as effectively and economically as possible, including:

- Parks and open spaces - The Borough Gardens, The Great Field, Maumbury Rings, Salisbury Field, The Walks, Kings Road, plus town infrastructure including statues and memorials.
- Recreation facilities - Sports pitches at Sandringham and Weymouth Avenue, the Skatepark, 14 equipped play areas and six allotment sites.
- Meeting places at the Municipal Buildings, Weymouth Avenue Pavilion and the Borough Gardens.
- Opportunities to come together as a community - delivering and supporting a wide range of civic, cultural, twinning and community events including live music in the Borough Gardens, Anonymous Youth Festival, Love Parks event, community lunches, Remembrance Day and Christmas Lights in the town centre.
- Open and closed burial facilities across three cemeteries.
- Regular and one-off grant support for community and cultural services delivered by partners, including Arts, Youth, Advice and Sport.
- Proper Governance arrangements – Council and Committee arrangements, back office systems, communications and joint working with partners.

## CORPORATE PLAN

## QUESTIONNAIRE

We are drawing up our Corporate Plan which will guide the work of the Council for the next five years. The Plan sets out our strategic aims and identifies specific actions we will take to fulfil those aims. A full copy of the Plan can be viewed on the Town Council website. We would like your views on our strategic aims.

In broad terms, do you agree with the Council's strategic aims?  Yes  No

Is there anything else that you would wish to add to these aims?  Yes  No

1.

2.

3.

Which if any, of the aims, would you remove?

1.

2.

3.

Our medium term plan is that our part of the Council Tax (presently £210 per year for a Band D) will only rise by 2% per year with any savings we make being used to develop our other services.

Do you agree with this?  Yes  No



<https://forms.office.com/e/ZcJzHMAvsc>

How to return this survey: Please use the QR Code or link to access the online survey. Or you can take a photo of the survey with your mobile phone and send it to: [enquiries@dorchester-tc.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@dorchester-tc.gov.uk)

Or post to DTC, 19 North Square, Dorchester, Dorset, DT1 1JF

Results from the survey will be considered when the Council finalises its Corporate Plan later in the year.

## COMMUNITY ENTERTAINMENT



Teddy Bears Picnic 2008

While it might not be the Town Council's greatest achievement, one of the more widely-appreciated innovations of the last 50 years is a programme of free public events and entertainments.

Until 1987 the only use that the bandstand in the Borough Gardens was put to was occasional concerts by the Durnovaria Silver Band, and other events were organised elsewhere by local organisations, usually to raise money for good causes.

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### TOWN BOUNDARY EXTENSION

We are all now used to the Poundbury development sponsored by King Charles III who, at the time the development started, was the Duke of Cornwall. The development attracts visitors, residents and businesses from far and wide.

The Town Council though, was responsible for extending the town boundary to include this new development which meant that those living there would help to pay for facilities and amenities not just in the new development but right across the town as a whole.

This is, of course, laudable but it meant that not everyone in the town was able to attend so the Town Council decided that it would organise a free Teddy Bears Picnic in the Borough Gardens which would be accessible to every family regardless of their financial circumstances.

The first one took place in 1988 and was supported by a wide range of local organisations and individuals who gave up their time and skills to provide a variety of activities and entertainments for children.

The Teddy Bears Picnic ran annually until 2013, but it was only the start of a policy which expanded to include a range of free weekend concerts in the Borough Gardens over the summer showcasing a variety of musical styles and other community events organised by the Town Council. Since the Borough Gardens were refurbished in 2007, they have been made available to a range of local organisations for them to stage their own events which always prove very popular.

The Borough Gardens were originally designed as a focus for the recreation of the townspeople and their use today builds on that initial concept. This is not the only Town Council site which is used to enrich community life in Dorchester. Salisbury Field is the venue for occasional beacon lightings in support of national celebrations or commemorations and Maumbury Rings is also the focus for larger events as it has been since Roman times. If you are interested in organising your own event at one of these locations contact the Town Council on 01305 266861.

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### YOUTH PROVISION AT SAWMILLS

Although there is no sign of it these days there used to be a sawmill on Weymouth Avenue just south of the cricket ground.

The sawmill was long gone by the time that Tesco and the other shops were developed. The Town Council felt that the site would be a good one for the provision of youth facilities. The Duchy of Cornwall as the freeholder of the site preferred to lease to one landlord rather than several, so in 1985 the Town Council took the head lease and sublet the area to the Sawmills Development Association, who in turn issue licences to the various youth organisations that use the site.

This arrangement continues to this day with the rent to the Duchy being paid fifty fifty by the Sawmills Development Association and the Town Council.



### 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)