



DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL - ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23

INTRODUCTION BY THE TOWN MAYOR – *Councillor Janet Hewitt*

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 unitary Dorset 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 own the Municipal Buildings and support many of the town's community and civic events.

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. 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. Details of meetings and their agendas are posted on the Council website and we are still welcoming members of the public to our meetings.

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

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

The Management Committee oversees the work of maintaining the councils' recreational facilities including the Borough gardens, Weymouth Avenue recreation ground, Sandringham sports centre, The Walks, Salisbury Fields, Fordington Green, 13 play areas and 6 allotments together with the 3 cemeteries and the Corn Exchange. It also responsible for supporting the Twinning societies and maintaining the Civic Twinning links and organising civic visits to and from our twinned towns of Bayeux in France and Lubbecke in Germany.

The Committee ensures that Member visits are made to Council run properties and facilities, these are normally conducted in Spring and Autumn. All members of the council are encouraged to attend and familiarise themselves with all the facilities the Town Council manages.

During this year's Spring visit, we were welcomed by volunteers from Transition Town community farm at Poundbury and the 'The Gap' project allotment on Lubbecke way and given a tour of the sites and facilities they have. The Gap project is on a small plot of land that runs along the river adjacent to the Lubbecke Way Allotments and was created as part of the Duchy's Red Cow Farm development.

Probably one of the most visible works undertaken this year was the removal of the two large conker trees that at the Fiveways Junction, during a routine survey it was discovered that they were both seriously rotten and posed a danger to pedestrians, building and traffic, they were replace with more suitable smaller specimens of multi stem white Birch and a Liquid Amber. Our outdoor services team did a fantastic job of facilitating and overseeing the removal of these trees. One of the problems with having such a wonderful legacy of trees and tree lined walks is that a lot were all planted at roughly the same time and therefore they have matured and started to either decline or succumb to disease. The outdoor services team has created a new tree nursery to grow both seed and hardwood cuttings that were collected from local trees. This will help maintain the genetic makeup of the local tree stock, meaning the trees planted in the future are from trees known to have thrived in the Town. It also helps reduce the risk of imported diseases that have devastated the town's trees in the past.

After a lot of planning and consultation work, the committee agreed to replace the heritage lamp posts in South Street enabling the reintroduction of hanging baskets. This has also provided some inspiration to revamp the Pump area and add some improved seating and planting in the area and open up the Bow to make it more welcoming.

The last year has been filled with events connected to the Royal family. For the Queen's Platinum Jubilee there was a full weekend of free activities with a family fun day in the Borough Gardens and the beacon lighting in Salisbury Fields, followed the next day by a big screen live stream in the Gardens of the Platinum party at the palace in London.

In September it was with much sadness that we received the news of the death of her majesty Queen Elizabeth II. The Town marked her passing with a book of condolence and the Bandstand in the borough gardens being used as a public memorial where local people could leave flowers and wreaths for the queen and her family. There was also a public service of reflection held in the borough gardens. The Proclamation of King Charles III was made by the Mayor at the Town Pump.

The cost-of-living crisis has hit Dorchester just as hard as anywhere else in the Country, but the Town Council has endeavoured to help those residents who need a bit of extra support where ever it can by supporting groups that directly help to make the cost of day to day living expenses a bit easier. Whether it be with food, mental health support or activities for children and families during the holidays. The Management committee has supported many local charities who support the people of Dorchester. We have even been able to support families in and from Ukraine with the summer of sunflowers campaign.

The Town Council's digital presence is increasing all the time with a much greater use of our social media to promote activities, events, and partnerships, and making it easier for residents to find out what is happening in the town. We also continue to produce a paper quarterly newsletter that goes out to every household in Dorchester.

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

It was expected that a large item in this report would concern the next stage of the Dorset Council Local Plan for future development in the county, but this has been delayed by Dorset Council. This was partly due to the number of consultation responses to be assessed but also due to the Central Government White Paper currently being considered at Westminster. This would give a little more leeway to local planners by changing the requirement for new housing numbers to advisory status, reducing the need to help with overspill from neighbouring authorities such as Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole and enhance the status of input from the local area, such as from a local masterplan. This committee has continued to work on a Vision for the centre of Dorchester and this has been presented to officers from Dorset Council. It is fervently to be hoped that our vision will form the basis for a more realistic masterplan for Dorchester than the retail-based one first suggested by Dorset Council planners. The Council continues to be firmly against the enormous development proposed for North of the town on account of its disastrous effect on the infrastructure of this part of Dorset and Dorchester in particular, with its use of greenfield sites instead of concentrating on first using brownfield sites such as Dorchester Prison, and commends STAND for its work in this regard.

The committee has welcomed presentations from several sources this year, with recent input about new development on the Dorchester Hospital site and further Brewery Square building stimulating discussion leading to our comments being submitted to Dorset Council. This, of course, also happens with any proposed developments within the town which are looked at during our regular monthly meetings. We also consider matters pertaining to traffic, whether vehicular, cycling or pedestrian and recent topics have included changes to Fairfield Road and to Dorchester South Station. Our comments on these are passed to the relevant authority and we will continue to monitor these and other schemes which would improve the experience of living in, working in or visiting our town. Calls for 20mph speed limits in various parts of the town have arisen recently and the committee now has a framework which will help us to assess any such proposal.

My thanks go to all members of the committee who participate with insight, care and willingness to listen and consider carefully, in particular to my vice-chairman Ralph Ricardo, for stepping in when I was acting in the community play recently, as well as to our clerk, Gina Wakely, who again has kept us up to date with information on all matters and to those clerks who temporarily replaced her during her injury-enforced absence.

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

Since May 2022 it has been a relief to move forward from the restrictions of the COVID emergency and to be able to return to more normal operational practices, including meeting in person. Post COVID activity in the Town has flagged up some significant changes, particularly with many people continuing to work from home for part of the week. This has had an economic impact on the Town Centre but it is encouraging to see that for some businesses this impact has been balanced by the benefits of increased tourism and visitor numbers and also by more events taking place.

At the beginning of the Council year we were delighted to welcome Steve Newman to the role of Town Clerk following a competitive recruitment process. Steve brings with him a wealth of experience from his various roles in Local Government and in particular from his previous role as Deputy Town Clerk. His appointment has provided an opportunity to review the senior staffing structure and in November changes were approved which will allow for greater flexibility and resilience whilst also providing more opportunities for Officer development.

The Council continues to be committed to actively responding to the Climate Emergency both within its own operations and also through working in partnership with local organisations. In July approval was given for further environmental improvements at Weymouth Avenue cricket pavilion funded from the Climate Emergency Fund and grant applications. These improvements will make the building virtually carbon neutral.

The September meeting of the Committee was cancelled due to the death of HM Queen Elizabeth II. At the November meeting, the Committee considered funding options for completion of the Municipal Buildings building and renovation project. The Committee had previously supported the option of an application to the Public Works Loans Board to cover the funding shortfall for the project. This decision was reviewed in the light of increases in the interest rate payable on a PWLB loan and also the levels of reserves held by the Council and it was decided to fund the project internally from the corporate projects reserve.

The Committee has continued to review the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan at its meetings. Affordable Housing remains a key priority in the Corporate Plan and it was therefore disappointing when studies revealed that it was not feasible to deliver units of affordable housing on the Poundbury Cemetery site or at the Council's Office premises at 19 North Square. Another item in the Corporate Plan, the project for improvements at Cornhill, has been delayed due to COVID and negotiations with Dorset Council Highways and it was decided to put this important project on hold for consideration by the new Council in 2024. Work to improve the street scene in other ways is being progressed and a Task and Finish group was established in January to consider options and deliver improvements.

Progressing major projects can become problematic towards the end of a Council term if the work proposed will impact on a new Council following elections. At its March meeting, the Committee reviewed the proposal to dispose of the Council's office accommodation at 19 North Square. It had not proved possible to progress the option of using the building to deliver affordable housing, but the building had proved to be a useful community resource providing temporary accommodation to staff from Dorset Museum and Shire Hall and also for costume production and storage for the Community Play. It was recognised that the building may continue to be an invaluable community asset, particularly in the current economic climate. The Committee recommended that 19 North Square should remain the operational base for office staff and be available for appropriate community use, with a review in three years at which time a new Council would be established.

In setting the budget for the coming year, the Committee was pleased to see that as a result of continuing good financial and operational governance, the Council remains in a strong financial position. At its January meeting the Council adopted the Committee's recommendation of a Council Tax Band D charge of £206.21, an increase of £4.04 (2%). Consideration had been given to freezing the charge at its current level, but it was felt that continuing with a modest increase would allow the Council to continue to deliver valued services whilst allowing flexibility to develop new areas of work and continue to support valued partner organisations in various ways. The recommendation also recognised that there may be a need to address gaps in service provision which may arise as Dorset Council continues to review its discretionary services.

DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL - OPERATIONAL BUDGET SUMMARY

	2021-22 Actual	2022-23 Budget	22-23 Actual	Under/ -over Budget
Parks & Open Spaces	533,057	569,660	603,813	-34,153
Allotments	4,131	131	4,704	-4,573
Municipal Buildings	318,606	408,645	447,864	-39,219
Cemeteries	65,122	59,615	33,086	26,529
Cultural & Twinning Activities	74,400	70,760	70,179	581
Corporate & Democratic Management	235,279	247,939	250,897	-2,958
Other Services	267,394	224,919	139,062	85,857
Operational Budget	1,497,989	1,581,669	1,549,604	32,065
Precept	1,516,277	1,581,669	1,581,669	0
Transfer to General Reserve	18,288	0	32,065	32,065

Our draft Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2022-23 will be available at www.dorchester-tc.gov.uk

DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCILLORS TO MAY 2024

EAST WARD			
Tim Harries 8 Fordington Hill House DT1 1LZ	07970 653796	Fiona Kent-Ledger 78 Casterbridge Road DT1 2AG	01305 250253
Stella Jones MBE Syward Cottage, Syward Road DT1 2AJ	01305 264335	Tony Lyall 13 St Georges Road DT1 1PA	01305 266254
Rory Major Dove Cottage, Compton Valence, DT2 9ER	07758 914767		
NORTH WARD			
Sue Biles scbiles@aol.com		Andy Canning 11 Alfred Road DT1 2DW	01305 261592
Alistair Chisholm 9 Orchard St DT1 1JH	07419 589005	David Taylor	
POUNDBURY WARD			
Richard Biggs 20 Bridport Road DT1 1RS	01305 260156	Frances Hogwood 8 Hintock Street DT1 3FB	fmhog@onetel.com
Susie Hosford 1 Meadow Cottages, Martinstown DT2 9JL	01305 880102	David Leaper 33 Peverell Ave East DT1 3RH	01305 757047
SOUTH WARD			
Gareth Jones 21 Martel Close, Broadmayne DT2 8PL	01305 854915	Robin Potter 22 D'Urberville Close DT1 2JT	01305 264416
Molly Rennie MBE 13 Alington Road DT1 1NS	01305 268572		
WEST WARD			
Barry Armstrong-Marshall 20 Fordington Dairy, Athelstan Rd DT1 1FD	01305 269921	Les Fry	lesfry.lf@gmail.com
Janet Hewitt 6 Garfield Avenue DT1 2EX	01305 266175	Ralph Ricardo 25 Shaston Crescent DT1 2EB	01305 584878

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