

DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL
CORPORATE PLAN
2025 - 2029

First draft

5 July 2024

INTRODUCTION

Dorchester Town Council is the parish authority for Dorchester. The Town Council was created in 1974 as the successor to the former Dorchester Borough Council. There has been a history of local government in Dorchester dating back to Anglo Saxon times and Dorchester has been the County Town since 1305. It has elected a Mayor since 1629.

The Town Council supplements the provision of local government services in Dorchester and provides a wide range of social and recreational facilities, while promoting the town in its representations to other bodies. The Town Council works in partnership with Dorset Council, which covers the whole of Dorset except Bournemouth, Poole and Christchurch and whose main responsibilities include education, children and families, support for adults, highways, strategic and Development Control, Local Plans, libraries, environmental health, refuse collection, economic development, tourist information and major recreational facilities such as 1610 sports centre.

The Town Council has 20 Members, usually elected for a term of four years. The next Town Council elections are in May 2029. The Mayor, who also acts as Chairman of the Council, and the Deputy Mayor are elected annually by the Council in May.

The Town Council operates a committee structure. Each committee has specific functions, meets regularly and submits reports and recommendations to Council. Agendas are available to the public on the Town Council's website three clear days before the date of the Committee meeting. Meetings are usually held in the Council Chamber (upstairs in the Corn Exchange building) and the public are encouraged to attend and may put questions or make statements on any matter in a public period at the end of every full Council meeting.

The Council's main committees are:

- Management
- Planning and Environment
- Policy

In addition the Council appoints a number of Panels and Task and Finish Groups which meet as and when required to discuss particular issues. Members of the press and public are welcome to attend these meetings unless there is a need to discuss confidential matters.

The Town Council employs a team of 25 staff headed by the Town Clerk.

The Council Tax paid by Dorchester residents includes the spending requirements of Dorset Council (including Adult Social Care), Dorset Police and Crime Commissioner, Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority and Dorchester Town Council. Dorset Council is the charging authority responsible for collecting your Council Tax. Unlike Dorset Council the Town Council receives no revenue support from Government.

WHY PRODUCE A CORPORATE PLAN

The Town Council produces a Corporate Plan every four years following the Town Council elections in order to:-

- Give clear direction for financial planning and budget setting decisions
- Assist in prioritising Capital projects
- Promote transparency by being clear about what the Town Council's priorities are and what actions will be delivered over the plan period
- Provide a basis for securing external funding
- Guide discussions with the community and partner organisations
- Aid in the assessment of grant requests from the community

This document should be read alongside the Town Council's Medium Term Financial Plan, its Annual Budget Report and the High Level Focus of the Corporate Plan presented to the Policy Committee every six months.

Whilst the Town Council is committed to delivering on the priorities set out in this Plan, it can only do so within the constraints of the resources available.

DORCHESTER – NOW AND IN THE FUTURE

Dorchester has a population of 21,500 (2020 data) in around 10,019 dwellings (2021 data). The town has grown significantly over the last twenty plus years and is likely to continue to grow for the next five years.

The town's population is significantly older than the national average, with an over 65 age population of 27.5% (9% higher than the national average). This age profile will increasingly create major problems for public service delivery over the next decades.

The town's economy is built around its role as the administrative, health and school hub for the surrounding area, with 56% of the 17,500 jobs in the town working in the public sector. Retail, Food and Accommodation provides around 17% of jobs, with a further 18% of jobs being provided in the professional and other services sectors, consistent with the town's role as a commercial hub. Unemployment levels are low with long term unemployment affecting only a small number of residents.

Over half of the jobs in the town are carried out by workers who come from outside the town. Historically a number of major employers in the town did not provide enough car parking on site, couple this with the need for patients to visit hospital (this has improved with the constriction of the hospital multi storey car park, visitors coming to town to shop and carry out business, and pupils coming in to one of the largest secondary schools in the country, traffic and parking are already a major issue. Despite growing numbers of people working from home the situation will worsen as the town's population grows while its road infrastructure does not.

While the town is relatively affluent there are small pockets of deprivation. Around 16% of residents receive either or both Housing and Council Tax Benefits. Property prices are very high relative to salaries earned, making it particularly difficult for those on low income or starting out on their careers to live within the town.

There is a vibrant community structure in place in town, using good recreational and social infrastructure, with an improving cultural infrastructure. Much of the town's economic, community and cultural activity is taking place within the boundaries of a roman town, while the population continues to grow at some pace, creating tensions for the heritage of the town and the environment that surrounds it, in such a way that preserving and accessing the town's heritage becomes increasingly difficult.

In summary Dorchester's success might at the same time threaten what makes it special. The growth of population and housing, with plans for more, a strong economy with potential for greater retail and tourism growth, and its attractive environment and vibrant community, are all creating needs which the infrastructure of the town is struggling to cope with. While there are clear visions for parts of the town, for example Poundbury and Brewery Square, there was, until recently, no clear vision for the town to work towards.

A VISION FOR DORCHESTER

Some time ago the Town Council recognised that, with the growth of the town, with the pressure on local government funding and with the ability of other tiers of government to focus on local issues diminishing, it needed to take the lead in defining a vision for the long term future of Dorchester.

During the life of the last Corporate Plan, a vision for the town was drafted, consulted on extensively with its residents and their feedback used to help shape the final document which is set out below.

The Town Council will work constructively with the statutory authorities to achieve its vision for the town, recognising that they have a role across wider Dorset that occasionally requires them to consider other needs than those of the town, but also requiring those authorities to recognise that the Town Council will focus on the needs of the town.

In due course, taking account of external factors such as the political environment, the changing face of local government, and key events such as the creation of a new Local Plan, the Town Council will decide what actions it should take to achieve recognition of its vision by other parties.

The vision set out below was agreed by the full Council of Dorchester Town Council on 28 November 2022.

The following vision is a product of Town Council and wider public input, to provide a more appropriate vision for Dorchester than the vision that was included in the January 2021 draft Local Plan. It sets out general aims for the town as a whole, and whilst many of these may apply to other towns and villages across Dorset, reflects the priorities of our residents and distinctive elements of Dorchester.

In 2038 Dorchester will:

- Have risen to the challenge of climate change, with designs based on zero carbon solutions, and wildlife friendly green spaces and tree-lined corridors that encourage walking and cycling.
- Have a balanced but diverse mix of housing and workplaces, in particular helping young people to afford to live and work locally, and flexible, adaptable premises to help businesses respond to changing economic circumstances.
- Have a vibrant and accessible town centre that people want to visit and walk around, to access local services, explore its rich history, culture and arts and enjoy its shops, museums, its historic market and its hospitality.

- Have a strong sense of community with a wide range of social and sports opportunities for all ages, accessible local centres and recreation spaces, supporting a range of inclusive and community-run enterprises.
- Have outstanding health and social care, education and training, with its schools, colleges and hospital providing choice and opportunities for a better way of life.
- Be easy to get to and around, with an extensive network of safe and attractive walking and cycling routes, linking to a network of transport hubs for trains and buses, with car and bike sharing facilities, all using low emission technology.
- Still recognise and celebrate its rich literary associations, including Thomas Hardy's Casterbridge, and the town's medieval, Roman and neolithic heritage.
- Link to the surrounding countryside, both visually and physically, valuing the tranquillity, biodiversity, productivity and timelessness of the landscapes that surround the town, including north of the water meadows.

STRATEGIC AIMS

Historically the Town Council played the role of delivering a range of important operational services, including the Borough Gardens and Municipal Buildings, Cemeteries, Allotments, Play Areas, Open Spaces and Sports Pitches.

During the life of the last two Corporate Plans the Council found itself increasingly focused on developing community partnerships to deliver some of these services, in particular collaborating with local sports clubs and Dorchester Arts. It has also moved into new areas, often in response to changes in service provision at other Councils, examples including Dorchester Youth and Community Centre, Shire Hall Historic Courthouse Museum, Keep 106 and the Tourism Development Partnership.

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
 - 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 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 on August Bank Holiday, 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

HOW WE WILL FOCUS ON THE COUNCIL'S VISION WITH ITS STRATEGIC AIMS

To achieve the Council's vision we need to focus on the items in **bold**. Our key actions to support the Council's vision and its strategic aims are set out below:-

Local Economy, Transport and Tourism

Actions to achieve a more diverse Economy

- We will continue to work proactively with the developers of Brewery Square and Poundbury to deliver an effective retail environment and night time economy that is in keeping with the Town Council's vision for our heritage and environment
- We will work actively with business representatives to ensure that Dorchester is marketed to attract knowledge based small businesses to the area, and also to ensure that Dorchester is marketed to attract heritage based tourism to the area
- We will continue to work with the Tourism Partnership to develop the town's tourism offer and implementation of the Council's Tourism Strategy
- We will work with the Dorchester Markets Informal Joint Panel to deliver and improve the Wednesday market offer
- We will work with Dorset Council on matters relating to traffic and car parks including responding to consultations, commenting on TRO's, requesting highway changes and 20mph schemes

Housing

Aiming to achieve a more Varied Housing mix including affordable housing

- We accept the need for the further growth of the town over the long term, beyond that already planned for
- We will actively assist the process of identifying and bringing forward sites for new dwellings within the Dorchester bypass boundary
- We are opposed to development outside and adjacent to the bypass, and would expect all other parts of the County covered by the Local Development Plan to take a share of new development
- While there should be a mix, we would like a particular focus on smaller 1 – 2 bed units, including flats, designed to attract those aged under 35 to live in the town
- We will encourage the Dorset Council to take available steps to reduce the number of dwellings not in use
- We will work with Dorchester CLT to help bring forward new affordable housing schemes

Climate Emergency

In seeking to reduce the Council's carbon footprint and working with partners and the community to reduce theirs

- To ensure that the Council honours its pledge taken in 2019 to be carbon neutral by 2030
- We will work proactively with our partners, especially those that have taken on assets and responsibilities from the Council, to reduce their carbon footprints
- We will support and encourage community groups to take practical steps either to deliver their own initiatives or to give them a voice to advocate changed behaviours to the wider population of residents, workers and visitors
- The Council will consider nature recovery in all of its decision making

Community, Wellbeing, and Cultural

In seeking to support all sectors of our community

- We will support the implementation of the priority areas of work set out in the Council's Community Implementation Plan 2023 – 2028
- We will support initiatives to record all community groups, and all community infrastructure, available to the residents of Dorchester
- We will use our resources to bring opportunities to engage in the community to the attention of all residents
- We will use our partnerships and other facilities to stimulate and support new community groups to fill any identified gaps in the range of opportunities on offer
- Promoting our open spaces as venues for community events, markets and festivals.

Respecting of, but taking advantage of, our heritage and environment

In seeking to get the balance right between protecting our heritage and promoting it we will

- Work with our heritage providers to encourage visitors to their establishment
- Promote the town's heritage tourism offer:
- Develop an understanding of what communities from outside Dorchester are looking to gain from a visit to the town
- Continue to provide a wide range of green spaces for different uses within the town
- Promote a sustainable approach to the development of the town

HOW THE COUNCIL WILL FOCUS ON ITS OPERATIONAL SERVICES WITH ITS STRATEGIC AIMS

To deliver a range of operational services efficiently and effectively we will

- Ensure that the Council considers the impact of all its functions and decisions on crime and disorder in accordance with its obligations under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.
- Continue working with partners and directly to maintain and improve the Council's sports grounds, pleasure grounds, allotments and children's play areas.
- Work with the Duchy of Cornwall to ensure the green spaces due to be handed over to the Council are completed with appropriate leases.
- Ensure that maximum advantage is taken of sources of financial assistance to improve the facilities which the Council provides and to reduce wherever possible the costs of projects falling to be met by the Council Tax payers of Dorchester.
- Ensure that the resources at the Council's disposal are used to the most effective degree possible and to the greatest possible benefit of the town and its people subject to maximising the value for money obtained.
- Endeavour to ensure that the demand for allotment plots is balanced and that tenants make best use of their plots.
- Ensure that the external and internal maintenance of the Municipal Buildings is to the high standards set on its refurbishment to enable the greatest practicable future use of the building.
- Support and develop the existing twinning links with Bayeux and Lübbecke. We will keep under review the link with Holbæk which is currently in abeyance.
- Regularly review and update where necessary the Council's governance arrangements, including risk management, insurance, policies, standing orders and financial regulations.
- Actively promote the Council's grants pot.

WORKING WITH PARTNERS

Most of our work can only be achieved by working closely with a range of public service, private sector and community partners. The table below identifies our main partners by area.

Policy Area/Service	Partner	Why do we work with them?
STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR DORCHESTER		
Local Economy	Dorchester BID, Dorchester Chamber for Business Dorset Council	Representatives of Business community Strategic responsibility
Housing	Dorset Council Duchy of Cornwall, Brewery Square Limited Dorchester Area CLT	Statutory Housing Authority Major developers Local small project delivery partner
Traffic, Roads, Transport & Parking	Dorset Council	Highways Authority Landowner of major car parks
Community, Wellbeing and Cultural	CCG, NHS, Dorset Council Dorchester Arts Centre Wide range of Community organisations	Key health providers Key arts provider Core service providers eg DYCC, Citizens Advice, MIND, Sports Clubs, Sawmills partners
Environment & Heritage	Dorset Museum & Art Gallery, Shire Museum, Keep Museum Dorset Council Dorchester Civic Society	Key providers Strategic responsibility and common interest Key advocate
OPERATIONAL SERVICES		
Allotments	Allotments reps	Client representatives
Parks & Open Spaces	Duchy of Cornwall, Dorset Council / DTYFC / Bowls Club / Rifle Club	Land owner / Sport provider/enabler Planning Authority
Cemeteries	Funeral Directors	Client representatives
Municipal Buildings	Dorchester Arts	Leaseholder

Culture & Twinning	Bayeux & Lubbecke Societies Veterans representatives	Lead Twinning deliverers Remembrance event organisers
Markets	Dorset Council	Partner

DORSET COUNCIL

Dorset Council is the principal authority for Dorchester and is responsible for:-

- Adult Social Care
- Council Tax collection and benefits administration
- Countryside services including rights of way
- Children and Families
- Economic Development
- Education
- Emergency Planning
- Environmental Health
- Leisure services
- Libraries
- Dorset History Centre (archives)
- On-street car parking
- Car Parks
- Planning
- Public Health
- Registration Service – Births, Deaths and Marriages
- Refuse collection and recycling
- Roads and footpaths
- Street Sweeping
- Trading Standards

The Town Council works closely with Dorset Council on a number of matters and one-off projects including:-

- Providing addition highway verge cutting in the town
- Highway improvements such as the bottom of South Street, resurfacing the Town Walks
- Commenting on planning applications
- Activities/music in South Street
- Local projects
- Considering changes to traffic management and on street parking
- Supplementing the town's highways tree management regime

WHAT DO WE PROVIDE AND WHERE?

