



Dorchester Civic Society

An Independent Voice

Registered Charity No. 268636

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NEWSLETTER and Notice of AGM July 2014

Dear Fellow Members

Celebrating 40 Years of caring about Dorchester

It is 40 years since the Society was established. On 27 February 1974 a meeting took place in the Dorset County Museum with a view to forming a civic society for Dorchester. The meeting took place two months before the reorganization of local government in the UK that locally established West Dorset District Council and saw Dorchester lose its status as a municipal borough and become a town council. The following May a public meeting, attended by some 150 people, formally resolved to set up Dorchester Civic Society to be registered with the Civic Trust. Perhaps the timing was coincidental but possibly it was felt that, looking ahead, the town could benefit from the existence of a society that would speak up for Dorchester itself given it was now one of several settlements within the new district council's area.

Then, as now, the Society saw itself as an independent and non-political organisation. Its role included drawing the public's attention to matters that affected the appearance and well-being of Dorchester; encouraging good design; identifying potential conservation areas and listed building at risk; encouraging sound transport policies; and promoting environmental improvement schemes including tree planting.

Over the years the Society has worked hard to promote what it believed was in the town's best interests. For example, in 1975 it lobbied to get a by-pass built and, ten years later, gave evidence to the public inquiry strongly supporting a road south of the town as opposed to a northern route. In 1981 a consortium of developers and landowners launched the 'Coker's Frome Scheme' that, on completion, would have resulted in a satellite community north of the Frome water meadows extending from Stinsford to Charminster: the Society opposed this supporting the principle of development to the west of Dorchester, within the line of the proposed by-pass, at Poundbury. Over the past 40 years, the Society has been involved on all the major development projects affecting the town including Brewery Square, Charles Street and, of course, Poundbury. In 2001 it produced a town strategy for Dorchester; it has participated in debates over town centre traffic management; it has fund-raised, erected blue plaques, reviewed the condition of listed buildings, commented on and contributed several local plans, and reviewed thousands of planning applications.

The 1960s and 1970s were the heyday of civic societies if membership of the Civic Trust is the yardstick. Some 1,300 associations were affiliated to the Trust in the late 1970s and at the time civic societies formed the nucleus of the environmental movement at a local level. In contrast, currently only 325 societies are members of Civic Voice and, as elsewhere, our Society must now operate in a more crowded field of environmental-related and other local groups. This said, our membership has increased by some 30% over the past year and, partly as a result of re-establishing the Society's talks programme on Autumn 2013, we have established closer links with a number of local associations and organisations including, significantly, Dorchester Town Council.

Notice of Annual General Meeting

Please regard this newsletter as the formal notice of our AGM that will be held at the Dorford Centre, Top O' Town, on Tuesday 23 September at 7.30pm. The agenda will follow the usual format:

- Minutes of 2013 AGM
- Chairman's and Treasurer's reports
- Election of Officers and Committee

Dorchester Civic Society exists to stimulate people's interest in the town and its setting; promote high standards of architecture, urban design and planning; safeguard buildings and areas of historic interest; and promote civic pride.



- Any other business and questions from the floor
- Speaker: Dr David Evans (Director of Environment, West Dorset District Council and Weymouth & Portland Borough Council): *Principles of Placemaking – Examples from West Dorset and Weymouth & Portland*

Since last year's AGM three members, Martin Graham, Alan Kerr and Patrick Vickery, have been co-opted onto the Committee: we hope that all three will agree to stand for election at the AGM. However, other long-standing committee members are no longer able to actively contribute to the Society's work. If we are to sustain our current momentum we need more volunteers willing to devote some time to our work. So if, for example, you have an interest or expertise in architecture, property development, town planning, the local economy, the environment, housing, leisure and tourism or transport; or you have administrative, IT or desktop publishing experience; or you are interested in reviewing planning applications as part of teams of three or four members please let us know.

Dorchester needs a thriving and vocal civic society to help address the pressures for change and growth affecting the character and shape of this unique and special town. Can you help in some way?

Talks Programmes

We chose the 'Visions for Dorchester' theme for the 2013/2014 programme of talks with the aim of appealing to a wide audience, promoting public discussion about the town's future and highlighting the Society's concerns and activities. The programme succeeded in meeting these objectives and our thanks to the four speakers - Steven Bee, Mike Clarke, Joe Doak and Alistair Parker. The venue was filled to capacity on each occasion and we were delighted to welcome town and district councillors at some of the talks. Three of the four presentations can be downloaded from the Society's website dorchestercivicsociety.org.uk: a copy of Steven Bee's presentation can still be obtained by emailing the Chairman at dorchestercivicsociety@gmail.com.

The theme for the 2014/2015 talks programme is 'Making a Difference'. Once again, the talks will take place at the Dorford Centre starting at 7.30 with refreshments from 7.00pm. The speakers are:

Tuesday 21 October 2014

Neil Howlett, Solicitor, a past President of the Frome & District Chamber of Commerce, and a member of the Frome Town Team

Frome – Experiments in localism

Tuesday 25 November 2014 – a joint meeting with the Dorchester Association

Debbie Dance, Director, Oxford Preservation Trust

The history and regeneration of Oxford Castle (site of the city's ancient county gaol and its more recent prison)

Tuesday 17 February 2015

Garry Charnock, Climate change & community engagement specialist; and project founder and co-chair
Ashton Hayes going carbon neutral project

Tuesday 17 March 2015

Caroline Kay, Chief Executive, Bath Preservation Trust

The work of the Bath Preservation Trust, past, present and future

May/June 2015

Possible Saturday visit – date and destination to be decided

Membership Communications

Your Committee has been discussing ways of keeping more in touch with you and facilitating, hopefully, a greater exchange of views on issues affecting the town. About two thirds of the membership is now on email.

At present we distribute one or, at best two, newsletters each year. However newsletters are essentially a one-way communication. The Committee is keen to encourage a dialogue over, for example, development proposals affecting West Dorset's former Stratton House Campus site; the future development of Dorchester Prison; Dorset County Council's Dorchester Transport and Environment Plan; and Broadview Energy's Slyers Lane wind farm proposal.

To this end, we are introducing a regular electronic bulletin perhaps entitled 'Dorchester Civic Update'. Initially this may be little more than one page summarising some of the key issues discussed at our monthly Committee meetings and inviting your comments and suggestions. This e-bulletin will be launched this Autumn following the AGM and hopefully one will be issued every two-months. Longer term the possibility of using Twitter could be explored. Meanwhile, please remember to let us know if you change your email address at any time.

Subscriptions

Last year's AGM agreed to increase the annual subscription for membership of the Society, which had remained static for over ten years. The new rates for the coming year will be £10 for single and £15 for joint membership (at the same address).

We are grateful that most of you pay your subscriptions by standing order. If you have a standing order set up to pay the subscription, will you please arrange for your next payment to be adjusted to the new rates from 1 September 2014 - or another date between 1 August and 1 September if that is more convenient for you. You may be able to do this on-line if you use internet banking, or by phone if you have a telephone banking service. If you are able to do so, there is no need to send us a membership renewal form.

If you do not pay by standing order, please complete the enclosed membership renewal form and send it with a cheque to our Membership Secretary at 9 Hessary Street, Poundbury, Dorchester, DT1 3SF: alternatively bring these with you to the AGM on 23 September.

Some other news

A new Local Plan for West Dorset and Weymouth & Portland

In June 2013, the draft West Dorset, Weymouth & Portland Local Plan was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for examination. In December 2013, the Inspector informed the two councils that he would hold an Exploratory Meeting to discuss a number of issues that could affect the 'soundness' of the plan. Following this meeting, held in January 2013, the Inspector advised the councils that the outstanding issues concerned future housing provision. To address the Inspector's concerns the two councils have undertaken additional work on housing land requirements and housing supply.

The results of, and the recommendations stemming from, this significant review were reported to the District Council's Policy Scrutiny and Executive Committees in June and are due to be debated at Full Council on 3 July. The overall housing requirement across the two council areas has been increased from an average of between 615 - 665 per annum over a 20 year period to 775 additional homes each year; the plan period has been shortened by three years to 2028; and in order to identify enough land and the major sites to accommodate the full extent of this growth, the 'new' plan will have to be reviewed relatively soon after its adoption.

To enable the current, albeit revised plan, to progress to examination within the timetable agreed with the Inspector, a potential oversupply of housing land during the next ten years in Weymouth & Portland is being set against an identified shortfall of land in West Dorset: this means that when the plan is reviewed there will be a greater emphasis on identifying new housing sites in West Dorset. A number of sites within West Dorset, including a proposal to develop land south-east of Dorchester outside the bypass, were subject to consultation leading up to the submission of the draft plan and subsequently taken out of the plan: it is said that the majority of these would all need to be brought back into the plan if the housing requirements are to be fully met. The amendments to the plan are to be published for public consultation between July and September.

Dorchester beware: once again, there will be pressure to accommodate major housing development around the town!

Dorchester Prison

The closure of the prison was disappointing news for many people and was the end of an era for Dorchester: but it is also an opportunity for the town. Some of you will be aware of the very successful regeneration of Oxford Castle, site of the city's ancient county gaol: the planning and development of Dorchester Prison needs to be approached with a similar degree of vision and determination. At the end of June, Jones Lang LaSalle, on behalf of The Ministry of Justice, commenced marketing the site as a "Prime Development Opportunity": the firm is also marketing three other redundant prisons in the south-west; the former HMPs Gloucester, Kingston (Portsmouth) and Shepton Mallett.

The Prison occupies a prominent five acre site with landmark buildings at the heart of Dorchester's Northern or Heritage Quarter. 2000 years of Dorchester's history has been played out on the site including the alignment of part of the town's Roman wall, the site of a medieval castle, and the location of two of Dorchester's several prisons. Located in the Conservation Area, only the 18th century prison gatehouse is listed and English Heritage have decided not to schedule the site as a monument. Vehicle access from North Square is limited but there is potential for a footpath access at least from Glyde Path Road.

Following the announcement of the closure of the Prison, the Society's Committee established a working group, to develop a vision for the future of the site. Our vision involves:

- Research into and interpretation of the site's archaeology and history as a basis for planning and redevelopment

- A residential-led mixed-use redevelopment including affordable homes
- Integration of the site with Dorchester's Northern Quarter and its heritage assets (e.g. Dorset County Museum, Colliton House, the Roman Town House and Shire Hall)
- Creation of a distinct sense of place
- Retention and conversion of at least some of the Victorian prison buildings subject to viable uses being identified
- Continuation of Dorchester's Walks linking Northernhay with North Square
- Creation of a small public park with views over the Frome water-meadows and beyond
- Minimising traffic generation.

The Society is advocating that:

- WDDC adopts a pro-active approach to the development of the site;
- The Council prepares a development framework for the site in consultation with English Heritage, DCC (archaeology, highways, etc), Dorchester Town Council, local people & groups and others;
- This framework includes a requirement for developers to submit a masterplan as the basis of any planning applications for the site in the context of its history and surroundings; and
- Development proposals should be subjected to external design-review.

Proposed Wind Farm

In the July 2013 Newsletter we sought your views on Broadview Energy's proposal to build a wind farm on land at Higher Burton Farm, east of Charminster and west of Slyers Lane – the B3183 Piddlehinton road. Since then, Broadview Energy have presented their initial proposals to the Committee; and the Society declined an invitation to join a Community Liaison Group on the grounds that we wished to maintain neutrality pending the expected submission of a planning application by Broadview Energy Ltd later this year.

Earlier this year, Anthony Gannon - a longstanding member of the Society and active in the Society's 1980s campaign against housing development north of the Frome - wrote:

Dear Dorchester, what is your view? The proposed wind farm will be 1.5 miles from your Corn Exchange and visible from Cornhill and North Square. Cornhill lies at 65 metres above sea level. The site's ground level is generally 100 metres above sea level. On this each turbine will rise up 115 metres to blade tip. The mature trees seen from Cornhill, and just south of the nearest wind turbine, are 35 metres tall. Go compare.

This northern fringe of Dorchester is the only farmland visible from the centre of the town. To the east, south and west the centre has been developed to the by-pass' limits. Residents and tourists currently enjoy looking at and walking in the unspoilt valley of the Frome and the rising land beyond. On every day of the year Northernhay, the riverside walk and the footpaths across the water meadows are busy with families, dog-walkers and tourists. The latter are amazed that within 300 yards of the Corn Exchange you enjoy such a free vista of open countryside.

Your town's tourism depends greatly on Thomas Hardy, the Jurassic coast proximity, your museums, your distinctive shops and the delights of your public spaces. Oh yes, and your setting in this countryside. Dare you risk degrading your tourism capital by accepting a wind farm? Acceptance of this wind farm may induce the mentality of "... well we've degraded the view northwards from the town so let's now go one better and urbanise that land by permitting a large-scale housing development. Dear Dorchester, it is your view.

Charles Street, Phase 2 retail-led development

We understand that over the last couple of months Simons have been holding pre-application discussions with WDDC; and they are currently organising a programme of public consultation prior to submitting new or revised planning applications in the near future.

A date for your dairy

Dorset Architectural Heritage Week: 10th to 18th September 2014. For information telephone 01202 888992; or email dahw@edht.org.uk or dahwoffice@gmail.com.

We look forward to meeting many of you again at the AGM in September and at subsequent talks.

Yours sincerely

Alan Rowley, Chairman