



Dorchester Civic Society

An Independent Voice

Registered Charity No. 268636

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NEWSLETTER and Notice of AGM July 2015

Dear Fellow Members

Annual General Meeting

The notice of our AGM that will be held at the Dorford Centre, Top o' Town, on Tuesday 22 September at 7.30pm, is enclosed.

The formal business will follow an open meeting, lasting for about one hour, at which John Ungley, a retired High Court judge, will chair a public discussion; this will follow brief presentations by a panel including Lucy Armstrong, Margaret Barker, Clare Davidson and David Upsall highlighting what is it about Dorchester they are proud of and what embarrasses them.

Also enclosed is a nomination form for you to propose a member to stand for election as an Officer or Committee member for the coming year. We already have nominations for Peter Mann as Chairman, Alan Rowley as Vice-Chairman, Paul Smith as Honorary Secretary and Patrick Vickery as Honorary Treasurer. Tim Bullick, Alistair Chisholm, Ian Gosling, Alan Keel, Len Heath, Mark Lane, David Moss and Keith Wilson, who are currently either elected or co-opted committee members, are willing to stand for re-election.

Talks Programmes

We chose the theme of *'Making a Difference'* for the 2014/15 programme of talks with the aim, as with the previous year's programme, 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 although, disappointingly, overall attendance was down on the previous year. Our thanks to the speakers – Garry Charnock, Debbie Dance, Neil Howlett and Caroline Kay.

Before the Society's programme of talks starts in November, you are invited to a joint meeting with the Dorchester Association. This is on Friday 11th September at 7.30pm with refreshments from 7.00 pm at Dorset County Museum. David Forrester will give an illustrated talk on Fordington: *'Keep away, don't go there!' It's 1950 and you wouldn't expect part of Fordington in Dorchester to be out of bounds! However, Mill Street had a reputation, and despite many changes for the better, this reputation was not easy to shake off.* David will be exploring the reasons why.

The theme for the Society's 2015/16 talks programme is *'Lessons for Dorchester?'* As usual the talks will take place at the Dorford Centre starting at 7.30 with refreshments from 7.00pm. In contrast to the last two years, the four speakers all live or work locally. They are:

Tuesday 3 November 2015

Roland Tarr, Cyclists Touring Club, West Dorset: *Getting around in Dorchester*

Tuesday 1 December 2015

Jo Witherden, Principal, Dorset Planning Consultant: *What could Neighbourhood Planning do for Dorchester?*

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.



Tuesday 2 February 2016

Peter Bellamy, Principal, Terrain Archaeology: *Valuing Dorchester's historic urban character*

Tuesday 8 March 2016

Candida Blaker, Programme Co-ordinator, Communities Living Sustainably in Dorset project: *Living sustainably in Dorchester*.

Membership Communications and Subscriptions

In last July's Newsletter we said that, as a majority of our membership used email, we planned to introduce a regular electronic bulletin entitled '*Dorchester Civic Update*'. Sadly, changed circumstances have meant that we have had to shelve this proposal at least for the time being. Nevertheless the use of email has enabled us to keep in touch with many of you about issues and events in Dorchester.

We are grateful that most of you pay your subscriptions (currently £10 for single and £15 for joint membership) by standing order. If you do not pay by standing order, please complete the enclosed membership renewal form and send it with a cheque to the Honorary Treasurer, Patrick Vickery, at 2 Sheepdown Road, Poundbury, Dorchester DT1 3RY: alternatively bring these with you to the AGM on 22 September.

Some other news

The past year has seen significant changes in the senior planning team at WDDC. Dr David Evans (Director of Environment) and John Greenslade (Development Services Manager) have both retired. Stephen Hill has been appointed Strategic Director for North and West Dorset District Councils and Weymouth & Portland Borough Council with responsibility for development management and planning policy amongst other matters; Jean Marshall is the new Head of Planning for West Dorset District Council and Weymouth & Portland Borough Council. Several other longstanding planning staff have resigned and, in a few cases, set up as independent consultants. Other recent resignations include the joint Councils' head of spatial policy and implementation and the senior design and conservation officer. The loss of local experience is concerning and could have consequences at least in the short term: for example, a recent report on the Charles Street development to the Council's Executive Committee noted that ... *The Council's corporate project knowledge of the project has significantly changed and diminished recently following changes in management and leadership of the project.*

A new Local Plan for West Dorset and Weymouth & Portland

The story continues! The draft West Dorset, and Weymouth & Portland Local Plan was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for examination in June 2013. Inspector's concerns resulted in the two councils having to undertake additional work on housing land requirements and housing supply: the overall housing requirement across the two council areas was increased from an average of between 615 - 665 per annum over a 20 year period to 775 additional homes each year and the plan period was shortened by three years to 2028.

The Local Plan Examination Hearings took place in November and December 2014 and two members of your Committee attended the session focusing on policies and proposals relating to Dorchester and its surroundings. Following the Hearings, the two councils consulted on the implications of new, government-published, household projections and submitted comments to the Inspector at the end of March 2015. The councils also consulted on proposed modifications to the submitted plan in consultation exercises in February, April and May 2015: these modifications were intended to address issues raised by objectors and others during the Hearings. The Inspector is now considering responses to the councils' proposed modifications before issuing his final report. Each authority will then consider the Inspector's report, prepare a final adopted version of the plan and take it forward for formal adoption. The Society submitted comments at all stages of this attenuated process, most recently in April 2015.

It is likely, assuming the Inspector confirms that the Plan is 'sound', that the new plan will have to be reviewed relatively soon after its adoption. A number of sites within West Dorset, including a proposal to develop land south-east of Dorchester outside the bypass, that were subject to public consultation in the run-up to the submission of the draft plan were subsequently taken out of the plan: it is said that the majority of these might have to be brought back into the plan if the housing requirements are to be fully met. Your committee was concerned to note that consultants acting for the North Dorchester Consortium appeared at a majority of the Examination Hearings arguing, in essence, that the plan would be unsound unless it included provision for a satellite development on land north of Dorchester. Should the Society adopt a proactive approach to

considering where, if at all, further major residential development could perhaps take place in and adjoining the town? Clearly there are no easy options!

Charles Street, Phase 2 retail-led development

Simons submitted a new outline planning application for a revised scheme in July 2014. The application has yet to be determined and, as many members will know, it attracted considerable public criticism fundamentally because to the impact of the scheme on archaeology and the developer's proposed scaling-back of archaeological investigations. In March 2015 English Heritage (now Historic England) formally objected to the application '*... due to the scale and significance of its heritage impacts.*' In a forthright letter, English Heritage reiterated its support, in principle, for the proposed redevelopment but stated that if West Dorset were minded to approve the application without changes being made English Heritage would ask the Secretary of State to call in the application for determination through Public Inquiry.

The nature of the changes that will be needed to render the scheme acceptable to Historic England (and a great many local people and the Society) mean that the viability, and hence the future of the Simon's scheme, remains in doubt.

Proposed Wind Farm

Broadview Energy Ltd submitted a planning application to build a six turbine wind farm on land at Higher Burton Farm, east of Charminster and west of Slyers Lane – the B3183 Piddlehinton road - in November 2014. It is fair to say that the application, that has yet to be determined, has divided opinion locally. The proposal is supported by Dorchester Town Council for example but the scheme has been criticised or opposed by consultees such as Natural England, the Dorset Gardens Trust, the Dorset AONB Partnership and WDDC's senior design and Conservation officer.

Your Committee recognised that opinion within the Society would be divided on the impact and planning merits of Broadview's application; indeed there are differences within the Committee itself. Whatever your personal view on the scheme, we hope you will accept that the Society genuinely acknowledges and supports the case for sustainable development and renewable energy generation (including wind power) and that we sought to assess Broadview's application with an open mind but having regard to the Society's well-established role, objectives and priorities. As our January 2015 position statement on the scheme noted *... Dorchester Civic Society exists to, among other things, ... secure the preservation, protection, development and improvement of features of historic, natural or public interest ... in Dorchester and its setting.* Hence, the Society has formally objected to the application: see - <http://www.dorchestercivicsociety.org.uk/resource>.

English Heritage submitted a holding statement on the application in February 2015. In response to this and comments, principally on the landscape and visual impact of the wind farm, from some consultees and objectors including the Society, Broadview have now submitted additional information and visualisations and we must await WDDC's decision on the application.

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. The Society adopted a proactive approach to the future development and use of this historically important and prominent five-acre site in the heart of the town's heritage quarter. Working with the Town Council a position statement was drafted in time to be distributed to potential purchasers of the site: your Committee and the Town Council formally adopted this Statement in September 2014.

The Ministry of Justice announced last December that City & Country had been successful in their bid to buy the site: the company has also acquired Shepton Mallet, Kingston and Gloucester prisons. City & Country appear to have a good track record restoring challenging buildings like Dorchester prison. The company's first consultation event was well attended and a second event, when options for the site were displayed, took place at the end of June. The company have indicated that the third consultation event is planned for September; a planning application will be submitted in November; and a final round of consultations will take place in December.

Dorset County Museum, Shire Hall and the Stratton House Campus site

Two excellent bits of news ... and a disappointment! Dorset County Museum has received initial support from the Heritage Lottery Fund for its Collections Discovery Centre project that will provide a new learning centre, better archive and storage facilities and better public access to displays of the Museum's considerable collection. The award of initial Stage One funding of £483,900 will enable a detailed two-year development plan

to be prepared ahead of final submission to the HLF in May 2017. Building work could then commence in 2017 and the new facilities opened to the public by 2020. The Heritage Lottery Fund has also confirmed a grant of £1.5m for the District Council's Shire Hall project: this Grade I listed building will be converted and renovated into a major visitor centre with exhibitions and educational and training resources.

These two projects, like the former Dorchester Prison, are situated in the town's heritage quarter and should prove to be great boosts for the town.

Regrettably, events surrounding the reuse and redevelopment of the District Council's Stratton House Campus site, vacant since the Council relocated to South Walks House, have been disappointing. Both the Society and Dorchester Town Council, supported by English Heritage in its comments on planning applications relating to the site, advocated a master plan approach to redevelopment. In the event, planning applications have been submitted and determined in a piecemeal way and the overall quality of the completed development remains to be seen.

A date for your dairy

Dorset Architectural Heritage Week: 9th to 17th September 2015. For information telephone 01202 888992; or email dahw@edht.org.uk or dahwoffice@gmail.com. The 2015 booklet will be available from all libraries and tourist information centres on **Monday 20th July** and the whole programme will also be available to view at <http://www.edht.org.uk/dahw.html> from the same date.

Changing of the guard!

My three-year term as your chairman ends in September and I am delighted to report that, with relatively little arm-twisting, Peter Mann has agreed to be nominated to succeed me.

Peter writes:

I feel greatly honoured that the Committee has decided to nominate me at the forthcoming AGM, to become the next Chairman of Dorchester Civic Society. As a member for many years, I am well aware that I lack the experience of Derek Beauchamp and our present Chairman Alan Rowley who have served the society so well. It is reassuring to know that Alan will remain active on the society's behalf and I shall do my utmost to ensure that, with the support of a strong committee and membership the society will continue in the next phase of the town's development, to be an influential independent voice.

As a history graduate of Merton College, Oxford, I worked professionally in education for 40 years, latterly as Chief Inspector of Dorset Schools. For the past 30 years, I have loved living in Dorchester with all its historic associations. For the past ten years I have been a Town Councillor and was privileged to serve as Mayor of Dorchester for 2014/15. I have also served on the Dorchester Joint Heritage Committee and the Council of the Thomas Hardy Society and am an active member of the Dorset County Museum and the National Trust.

Dorchester today is going through a time of rapid change. The town has grown by 30% over the last 15 years. The present population of just over 19,000 is expected to grow in the next seven years with the continuing development of Poundbury and Brewery Square to around 23,000. There are also the prospective developments in Charles Street and the old prison site and beyond these, a new local plan will create further pressures for the town to expand.

It is my conviction that to retain the individuality and sense of place of our historic Dorchester, we are in crucial need of a watchful and visionary Civic Society.

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

Yours sincerely

Alan Rowley, Chairman.

Peter Mann, (Chairman designate)