



## **Dorchester Civic Society**

**An Independent Voice**

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### **Position Statement by Dorchester Civic Society on:**

**37-38 High West Street, Dorchester DT1 1UP**

**WD/D/19/002470:**

**Demolition of existing buildings and erect 1.no A1 retail unit and 9.no dwellings**

**Dorchester Civic Society objects to the grant of planning permission.**

**The application should be refused for the following reasons:**

1. The proposed development would be harmful to the character and appearance of the Dorchester Conservation Area by reason of:
  - a) The detailing of the High West Street facade does not complement the form of the predominantly Georgian architecture of High West Street nor recognise the gradient on the street.
  - b) The scale massing and design of the main block at the rear of the site would be over dominant and out of character particularly when viewed from Borough Gardens/Princes Street.
  - c) The proposal would detrimentally affect the setting of the only remaining evidence of the town's Roman Wall and the Walks created on the line of the Roman Wall.
2. The proposed development would be contrary to policy ENV4. *Heritage Assets* of the approved local plan as it neither conserves or enhances the Dorchester Conservation Area.
3. The proposed development would be contrary to policy ENV10. *The Landscape and Town Setting* of the approved local plan as it does not positively maintain or enhance the local identity or distinctiveness of this part of the Dorchester Conservation Area.
4. The proposed development would be contrary to policy ENV12. *The Design and Positioning of Buildings* of the approved local plan as its design, scale, massing and materials do not complement or respect the character of the surrounding area.

## 1 Application site

A prominent elongated site (including part of the site of 36 High West Street a fact not noted in the address of the application) in the Dorchester Conservation Area fronting the south side of High West Street and extending back almost to Princes Street, separated only by the single storey Sterling House: it is disappointing that the site of this building has not been incorporated into the application site. The existing two storey building facing High West Street is believed to date the mid-twentieth Century; the two storey building occupying much of the rear part of the site is understood to date from the 1920s and was originally a community hall.

High Street is Dorchester's finest street and contains over 60 listed buildings. The frontage to High West Street (Figure 1) adjoins Nos 39/40 (Grade II listed) and faces 41-45 High West Street (Grade II listed).

The rear part of the site (Figure 2) is visible from, and seen in relation to, the Roman Wall (Grade II listed), West Walks (a Scheduled Monument), and Borough Gardens (also a Scheduled Monument and a Registered Park and Garden (Grade 2). The rear part of the site will also be visible from Princes Street (possibly including views from the east of this street) which itself contains a number of listed buildings including the adjacent 13-14 Princes Street (Grade II) (Figure 3).

**Figure 1** (High West Street frontage)



**Figure 2** (Montage view from the Princes Street entrance to Borough Gardens)



**Figure 3** Rear of site seen over Sterling House, 1 & 2 Princes Street



## **2 Urban design assessment**

Few sites, as visually prominent as this within the Dorchester Conservation Area, have been the subject of redevelopment proposals in recent years.

Dorchester Civic Society has no objection in principle to the redevelopment of the site but considers that any change or new addition to the townscape must make a significantly greater contribution to the visual quality and character of the Conservation Area than the building(s) it replaces.

The Society considers that the key factors in assessing the acceptability or otherwise of this application's design include:

- The amount of development proposed in relation to the position and size of the site and its surroundings
- The layout of the development including service access and car parking
- The design of the High West Street and other elevations, in particular the west elevation



The Society understands that the height of the vehicular access from High West Street into the development (also 4 metres) stems from the design approach adopted to comply with Building Regulation requirements for fire service access and facilities. The scheme presumes that fire tenders will need to go onto the site itself which necessitates the construction of the high, visually intrusive entranceway; this compares unfavourably with the vehicular access (of comparable width but less than 3 metres high) to the award-winning Eastgate development, near Swan Bridge, at 53 High East Street. The Society believes that there are other ways of satisfying fire access requirements such as the installation of fire risers within the building.

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characterises the proposed elevation, particularly at first and second floor level is too closely related to the design of the adjacent listed building, reinforced, for example, by the continuation of stone string courses between the ground and upper storeys in both building. At the same time, the scale and height of the ground storey of the proposed building, a key element in the street scene, is also unacceptable: it fails to take account in the fall of the street away from Top O'Town: it comprises an overbearing, out of proportion and visually disruptive vehicular entrance, and a shop front adjacent, but visually ill-related, to the two shop fronts at 36 High West Street. Any shop front should be designed as an integral part of the street frontage rather than, as the application proposes, with contrasting painted brickwork. Both the shop front and the detail of the access way should reflect that they are supporting the upper floors of the building rather than allowing these floors to appear to float above.

The Society considers that the design of the scheme's prominent west elevation, visible from and seen in relation to Borough Gardens, West Walks, the Roman Wall and parts of Princes Street fails to take account of the character and visual sensitivity of this part of the Conservation Area: whilst such a facade might be appropriate in Brewery Square it is unacceptable here failing to reflect local distinctiveness including the scale, architectural character and materials of nearby buildings within the Conservation Area.

### **3. Conclusion**

Dorset Council has a statutory duty in considering any new development that it protects and enhances the character and appearance of the Dorchester Conservation Area. The Society contends that this application fails to meet this statutory requirement by virtue of its failure to reflect the character of the Conservation Area and nearby listed buildings, due particularly, but not solely, to the design and height of the rear section and its impact on the Roman Wall and Borough Gardens.

In addition, the proposal is contrary to the policies of the approved local plan relating to conserving the Conservation Area, maintaining local identity and distinctiveness, and the design, scale and massing of the proposal.

The opportunity to create a new building on such an important site within the Conservation Area is rare. This site is, therefore, presents an opportunity to create a building of high urban design quality. The Society contends that the application not only fails this test but is harmful and detrimental to the Conservation Area.

**In the absence of any other overriding material considerations the application should be refused for the reasons stated at the beginning of this Position Statement.**