

Dorchester Civic Society

An Independent Voice

Registered Charity No. 268636

Tess James (Chair)

70 Monmouth Road
Dorchester DT1 2DG

info@dorchestercivicsociety.org.uk
www.dorchestercivicsociety.org.uk

Position Statement

The impact on Poundbury Camp, including associated monuments and a section of Roman aqueduct, of proposed development north of Dorchester May 2020

Position Statement on the potential impact on the setting of Poundbury Camp (Scheduled Monument) of Dorset Council's North of Dorchester (DOR 15) proposals for a garden community of up to 4,000 dwellings, employment land and other facilities, and a link road between the A35(T) and B3147/A37 roads

Dorchester Civic Society considers it is impossible to develop the garden community scheme as currently proposed by Dorset Council in a way that will not have a highly adverse effect on the heritage setting of Poundbury Camp. As such, the development would be contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework (paragraphs 189 – 202), June 2019: in particular, paragraph 194 which states that ‘... harm to, or loss of significance of ... scheduled monuments ... should be wholly exceptional.’

Background to this position statement

1. Dorset Council is preparing a local plan comprising planning policies and proposals for the entire council area and looking ahead to at least 2038. The Council's published timetable for the work is: Options Consultation - September 2020; Publication – September 2021; Submission – March 2020; Examination – Summer 2022; and Adoption – Spring 2023
2. The new Council is drawing on earlier work by, in Dorchester's case, West Dorset and Weymouth & Portland councils reviewing the current local plan for the area adopted in 2015. That review included publication of an issues and options document in 2017 and a preferred options document in 2018. Dorchester Civic Society's critical assessment of the preferred options statement can be found at: <https://www.dorchestercivicsociety.org.uk/publications/>
3. Dorset Council is pressing ahead with a proposal to develop a garden community scheme on land north of the Frome water meadows despite local reservations and objections. This position statement is the first of a number that the Society anticipates it will need to prepare relating to facets of Council allocations and proposals leading up to a Local Plan Examination in Summer 2022.

Poundbury Camp and its significance

- Poundbury Camp is strategically located on an escarpment and affords panoramic views over a wide area (Figures 1 and 2) and a commanding view over the River Frome and associated water meadows (Figure 3). The Camp's prominent position means that it is also a significant feature in Dorchester's historic setting and skyline viewed from north of the Frome (Figure 4) and from further afield. Figure 5 shows Poundbury Camp's close relationship to other scheduled monuments in the centre of Dorchester (marked in red) notably the Roman Walls (that comprise a corresponding group of early C18 public walks which are a Registered Public Park and Garden); and the Dorchester Conservation Area (edged blue).

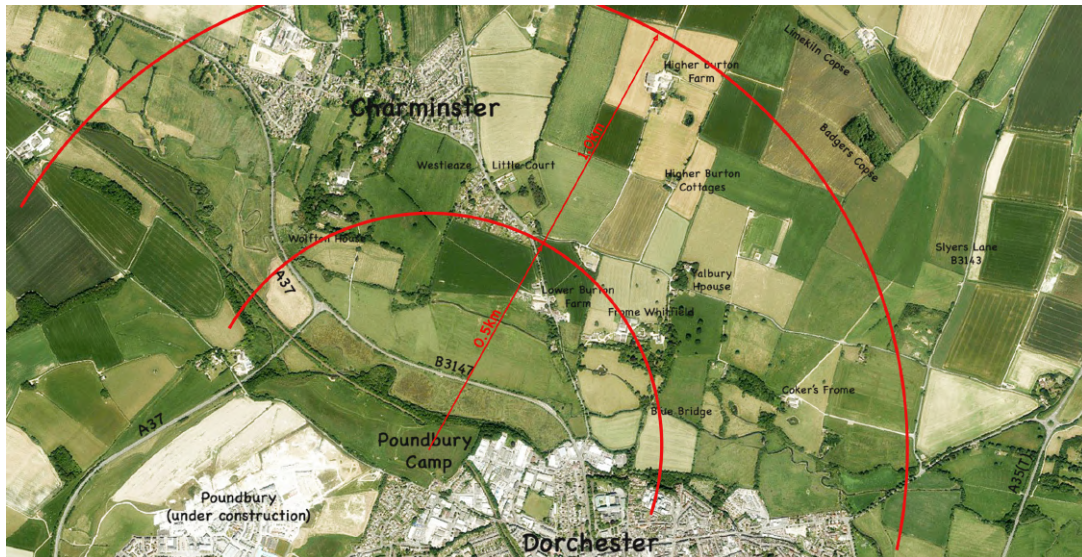


Figure 1: Aerial of Poundbury Camp and its environs



Figure 2: Montage of view from Poundbury Camp, north-west to north-east

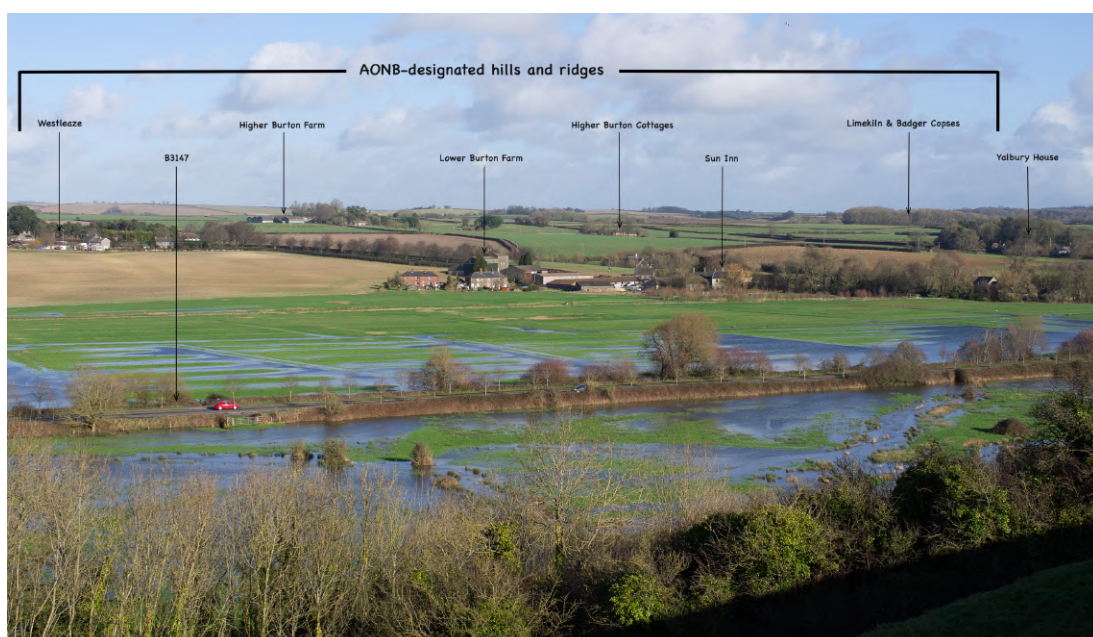


Figure 3: View north-east from Poundbury Camp over the Frome water meadows towards the AONB



Figure 4: View of Poundbury Camp and Poundbury (from Footpath S14/9) south of Higher Burton Farm

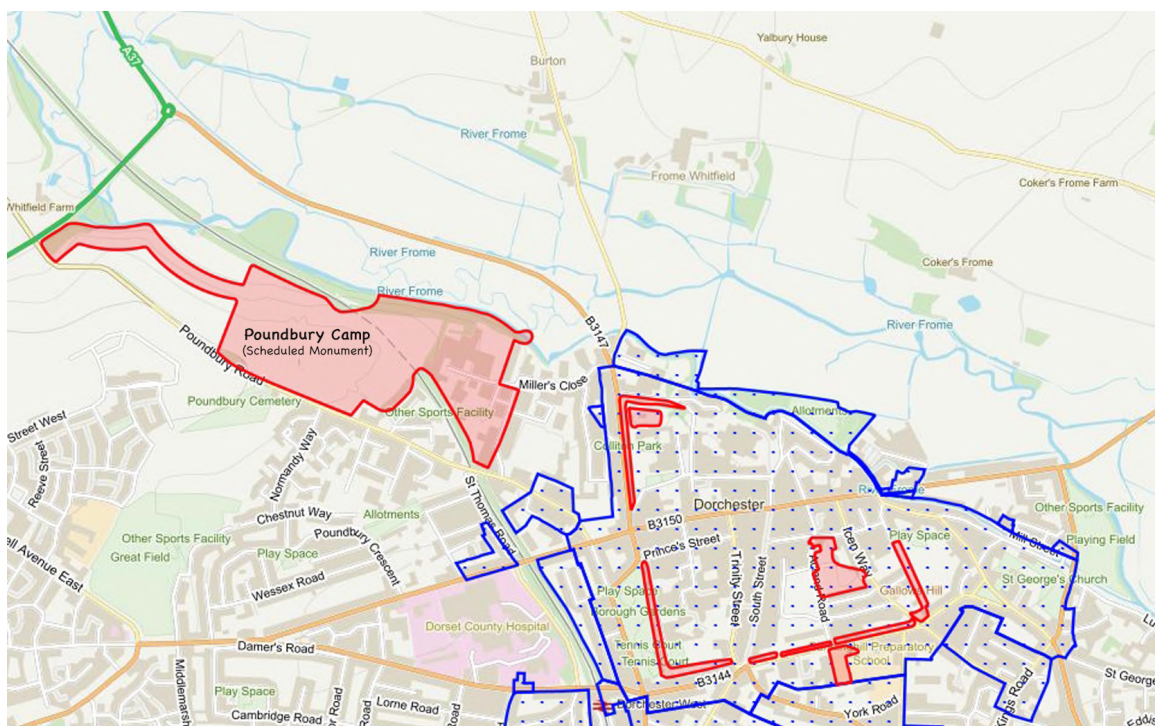


Figure 5: Poundbury Camp in relation to the Conservation Area and other Scheduled Monuments

5. Historic England's listing for the Camp, which is a Scheduled Monument, is as follows:

Reasons for designation

Poundbury consists of a major settlement complex which spans four millennia from at least the late Neolithic period onwards. Its central focus is an Iron Age hillfort with multiple defences which together with Maiden Castle, Hod Hill and others formed an important network of hillforts within the Durotrigian tribal area. Its significance is indicated by the fact that the Romans founded the civitas capital of Durnovaria alongside the hillfort soon after the invasion. The cemetery associated with the town is one of the largest Late Roman examples so far identified and archaeologically excavated in Britain if not Europe, and its Christian connections give it exceptional added value.

Details (Figure 5)

This major chalk bluff overlooking the river Frome has provided a focus of human settlement for over 4,000 years. It includes evidence of a Neolithic settlement of the 3rd millennium BC; a substantial Bronze Age occupation with hut plans, pits and field systems; an extensive Iron Age hillfort and associated earthworks, plus other structures, enclosures and related burials of the late Iron Age. There is also a section of Roman aqueduct incorporated in the western and northern parts of the monument. On the eastern half of the bluff is situated an earlier Romano-British farmstead; and an extensive later cemetery, possibly Christian, belonging to the Roman town Durnovaria and consisting of some c1450 burials. Further buildings and enclosures of the 5th-8th centuries overlie the Roman cemetery and indicate the continuity of settlement in the area. The following are all excluded from the scheduling; 1. all the above ground buildings/structures (though the ground beneath these is scheduled); 2. the areas of the 1964-80 and 1986 excavations; 3. maintained and metalled roads within the Trading Estate.

6. Poundbury Camp was valued and relatively well-treated in the nineteenth century: for example, protestors persuaded Brunel to construct a railway tunnel under the monument instead of putting the tracks in a cutting. The twentieth century was far less kind: a WW1 prisoner of war camp was constructed on the eastern part of the site followed by an industrial estate that was expanded in the 1970s; further industrial and residential development progressively extended right up to the Camp's southern boundary with the Bradford Peverell Road (a Roman road); and the new community of Poundbury is an increasingly prominent background feature on the skyline.
7. How will Poundbury Camp fare in the twenty-first century? Dorset Council's proposal for the North of Dorchester Garden Community and associated A35 – A37 link road threaten to complete the urbanisation of the Camp's heritage setting.

Dorset Council's proposal for a North of Dorchester Garden Community

8. A consortium of landowners and developers has been promoting urban development north of Dorchester for many years. As part of the process of reviewing the adopted local plan for the area, West Dorset and Weymouth & Portland Councils' Preferred Options Consultation document (August 2018) allocated the site for a mixed-use development including up to 3,500 dwellings (DOR 15).
9. Dorset Council's successful bid (November 2018) to the Government's Garden Community Programme described the scheme in the following terms:

The North Dorchester development sits on the northern side of the Frome Valley water meadows with the centre of Dorchester being approximately one kilometre from the southern portions of the site. The development will be designed as a stand-alone community enabling its day-to-day needs to be met within the site's limits. This will include the provision of a new school's campus across all levels – first, middle and high, relieving pressure on the area's already over-subscribed schools; local centres to provide convenience retail, leisure and other town centre uses to complement that already provided within Dorchester's town centre; 10 hectares of employment land to provide job opportunities within the new community; healthcare facilities including care homes and a doctors' surgery and new community meeting places.

To facilitate the ease of movement between the existing town and the new community, at least three convenient pedestrian and cycle routes will be provided along with enhanced public transport linking the two communities.

10. The bid states that the development is expected to provide up to 4,000 dwellings; create 1,340 jobs; and deliver a link road between the A35(T) and the A37 ‘... to relieve some pressure on the A35 ... junctions.’
11. Figure 6 delineates the proposed site area (433 hectares) that extends to the foot and across the entire north edge of Poundbury Camp: Figure 7 is the Strategic Framework Plan that accompanied the bid.

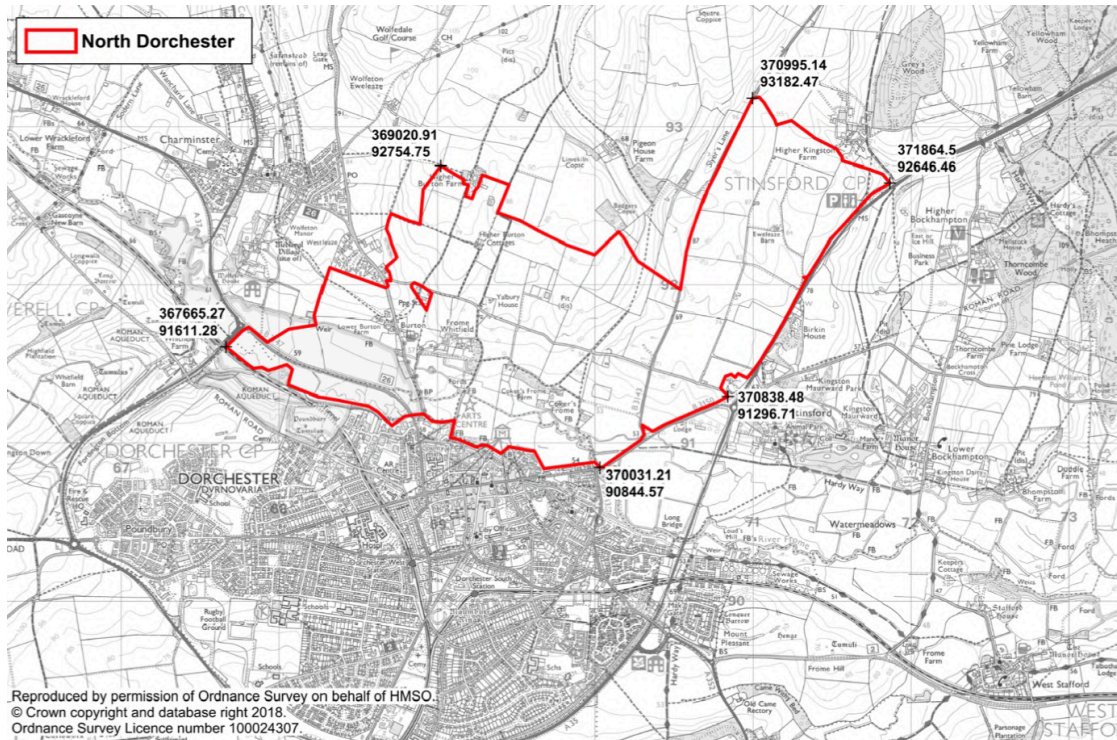


Figure 6: North of Dorchester Garden Community (DOR 15) Location Plan (source Dorset Council)

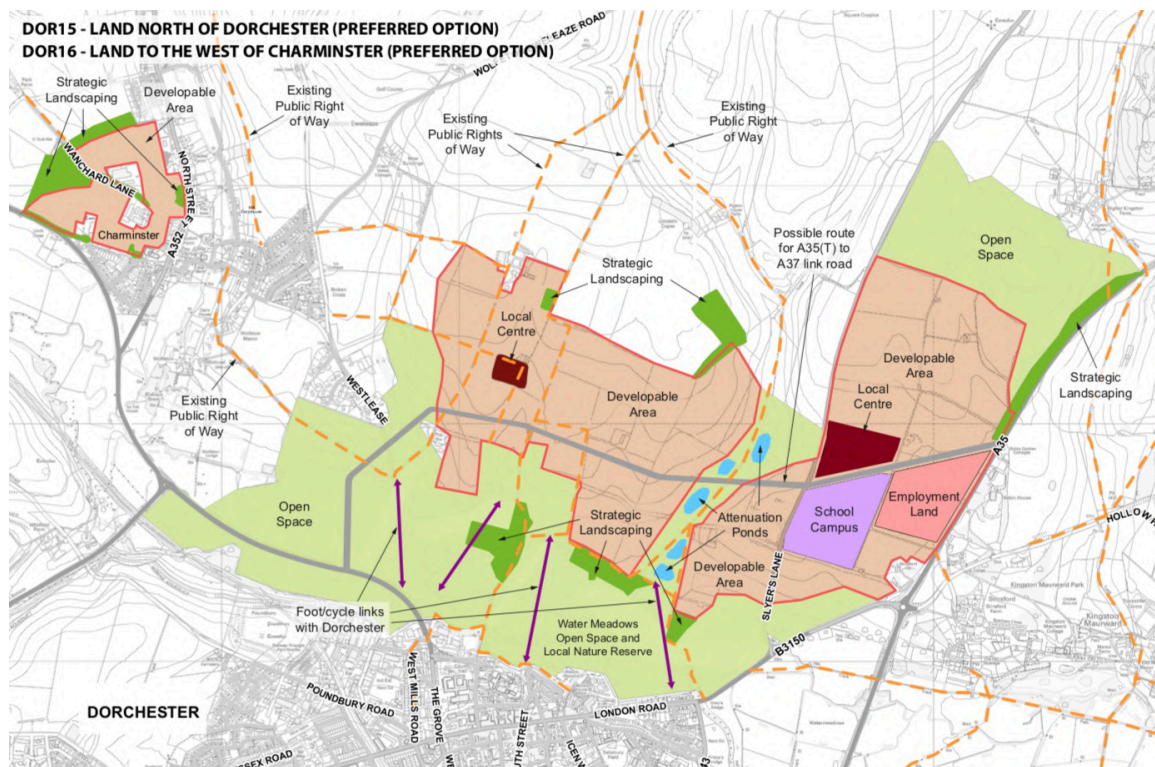


Figure 7: North of Dorchester Garden Community – Strategic Framework Plan (source Dorset Council)

Assessment of the impact of the proposed garden community on the setting of Poundbury Camp

Background

12. In February 2017 West Dorset and Weymouth & Portland Councils consulted on an 'issues and options' document before publishing a 'preferred options' document in August 2018.

13. Historic England's response (3 April 2017) to the issues and options document notes:

Housing development in Dorchester over the last 20 years has, in the main, been accommodated by the Poundbury development. Although this has caused some adverse impact on the setting of Maiden Castle, Poundbury is generally a successful example of significant urban extension. It has meant that unlike many towns of a similar size, Dorchester has not sprawled with incremental development. It is contained by the bypass to the South and the Frome Valley to the North. The immediate transition from town to water meadows at the North is a defining and attractive characteristic of Dorchester, which adds considerably to passive interpretation of the extent of the original Roman settlement. In accordance with national policy, great weight needs to be applied to protect, and where appropriate enhance, the significance of affected designated heritage assets, in this case the setting of the Dorchester Conservation Area.

Land North of the Frome Valley is identified as a possible development site ... in the Dorchester background paper. Historic England is likely to express a strong reservation to the principle of development in this area due to the potential for an urbanising effect on the Frome Valley and consequent impact on the strongly-defined northern edge of Dorchester as described above. The immediate transition from town to country remains as described in Thomas Hardy's literature, which is a significant tourist draw. Careful thought must be given to the integrity of the historic town within its landscape setting. How would development affect an appreciation of Hardy's Dorchester?

14. Historic England's response (8 October 2018) to the preferred options document states, in respect of the DOR 15 proposal:

The Plan and its evidence base emphasise the significance of this very large site and its surroundings. The historic landscape contains many heritage assets and provides the setting for various others. The numerous heritage values of these assets, the adjacent townscape and surrounding landscape further accentuate the importance and sensitivity of the proposed allocation. The immediate transition from the town to the water meadows to the north is a defining and attractive characteristic of Dorchester.

15. Highlighting the sensitivity of the site, Historic England's response quotes from a council-commissioned landscape and heritage assessment for Dorchester (LUC, June 2018):

Views of the historic core of Dorchester from the rising ground within the assessment area (the site) provide an important opportunity to appreciate the settlement in its landscape setting. ... These relationships are important in terms of understanding the strategic location of the Roman fort and town and the functional relationships between the town and the route of the aqueduct from Fordington Down. The panoramic view of the town across the foreground of the water meadows lining the floodplain of the River Frome, with Maiden Castle, the downs and Hardy Monument in the background, help place Dorchester within its quintessentially 'Wessex' setting.

16. Dorchester Civic Society's response to the preferred options document (7 October 2018) states, inter alia:

The North of Dorchester [DOR 15] proposal will cause harm to the physical, cultural and historic assets of Dorchester.

- *The proposal for development North of Dorchester will have a harmful impact on sensitive landscape and the relationship between Dorchester and open countryside to the north.*
- *The Council's own Landscape and Heritage Study states, in reference to this area, that 'development could potentially degrade or eliminate this functional and historical relationship'.*
- *The setting of the Conservation Area - including the much loved 'Ratty's Trail' - will be marred with the loss of the 'clean cut and distinct edge' of Hardy's Casterbridge.*
- *The allocation will not result in an enhancement of the Dorchester area – a lost opportunity to overcome problems in and around the town.*

Specific issues

17. Figure 8 is the view north east from Poundbury Camp over the Frome and associated water meadows: the western part of the proposed housing development is delineated in red; the potential alignment of north Dorchester link road and its junction with the B3147 are highlighted in white. The photograph illustrates the severe and adverse impact of the proposal on the heritage setting of Poundbury Camp.



Figure 8: View north-east from Poundbury Camp over the Frome water meadows (as Figure 3) with proposed development boundary and north Dorchester link road with a junction to B3147 superimposed

18. The proximity and high degree of inter-visibility between the scheduled monument and the south-facing slopes in the western part of the proposed site (broadly, all the land between Lower and Higher Burton Farms and Westleaze, Yalbury House and Frome Whitfield) mean that development here will inevitably have a very harmful effect on the Camp's setting. The essentially open and exposed character of the site situated on rising ground mean that there is little possibility of mitigating to any great degree the development's impact on the landscape setting of Poundbury Camp.

19. Dorset Council's own landscape and heritage study assessment concludes, in respect of this part of the proposed development site, that:
- Development within the area is likely to give rise to harm to the setting of Poundbury Camp through loss of / intrusion into the rural agricultural setting that contributes to the understanding of the fort's location with regard to topographic features, and an appreciation of the rural hinterland that the asset is likely to have controlled. (LUC, July 2018)*
20. Even more concerning is the inevitable impact of constructing a link road between the A35(T) and A37 across the water meadows with, in all probability, a roundabout junction with the B3147 at the foot of Poundbury Camp. In 2018, the shadow Dorset Council proposed that this road should form part of England's Major Road Network. Such a road would have to be constructed on a causeway over the water meadows; all or part of the route would require the usual traffic signage and lighting; the expected levels of traffic would significantly reduce any sense of quietude it is still possible to experience within the Camp; and the Camp's heritage setting would be irreparably lost.

Conclusions

21. Poundbury Camp was valued and relatively well-treated in the nineteenth century but the twentieth century was far less kind: industrial and residential development now extends right up to the Camp's southern boundary with the Bradford Peverell Road and the new community of Poundbury is an increasingly prominent background feature on the skyline.
22. How will Poundbury Camp fare in the twenty-first century? Dorset Council's proposals for the North of Dorchester Garden Community and the associated A35 – A37 link road will complete the urbanisation of the Camp's heritage setting.

Dorchester Civic Society considers it is impossible to develop the garden community scheme as currently proposed by Dorset Council in a way that will not have a highly adverse effect on the heritage setting of Poundbury Camp. As such, the development would be contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework (paragraphs 189 – 202), June 2019: in particular, paragraph 194 which states that '*... harm to, or loss of significance of ... scheduled monuments ... should be wholly exceptional.*'

12th May 2020