

8.0 APPLICATION NUMBER:

WD/D/19/001378 LBC

SITE ADDRESS: THE ROMAN TOWN HOUSE, COUNTY HALL, COLLITON PARK, DORCHESTER, DT1 1XJ

PROPOSAL: Carry out improvement works to Roman Town House complex to include seating, access, parking, circulation, new timber steps and paths, laying of hard surfaces and other landscaping works and relocation of Roman sarcophagus

APPLICANT: Dorset Council

CASE OFFICER: Cass Worman

WARD MEMBERS: Cllr Andy Canning; Cllr Les Fry

2.0 Summary of Recommendation: Approve with conditions

3.0 Reason for the Recommendation:

Historic England is supportive of the proposals which in their view would enhance the conservation and heritage interest of the Roman Town House scheduled monument

The scheme will also have considerable public benefits, both through the improved conservation management of the site, and the improved public access and interpretation.

4.0 Table of key planning issues

Issue	Conclusion
Impact on heritage assets	Dorchester's Roman Town House is an exemplary and unique site of considerable importance. Maintenance works of the Roman Town House is required for its ongoing conservation. The new access in West Walks utilises an existing opening in the listed wall.

5.0 Description of Site:

5.1 Historically the Town House is located just inside the north western defences of the Roman town of Durnovaria. During the first half of the 18th century, Dorchester's Roman defences were converted into boulevards known as The Walks, with a path running along the top of the inner bank. The Town Walls/Walks border the site on the north and west sides. The Walks are still well used public spaces and routes today which link the town and form the historic context of the Town House. From the 17th century until the 1930s, its site was within the grounds of

Colliton House (which survives in the south-east corner of the present County Hall complex) – hence the name ‘Colliton Park’ which is still in use.

5.2 Parts of the remains of a high status Roman Town House (excavated in the 1930s when the construction of County Hall began) are contained within a modern building erected in the 1990s to protect the remains and facilitate public display. This is reputedly the only Roman domestic complex within a town that is fully on display in Britain. Individual elements within the Town House are of intrinsic interest for their quality, such as mosaics and two hypocausts; and in the case of an original window opening and evidence for an upper storey, for their rarity. Evidence of Roman buildings of a more industrial nature were found elsewhere within Colliton Park, indicating that the Roman Town House may have belonged to an industrialist operating in a remote corner of Roman Dorchester.

5.3 The Dorchester Roman Walls and Colliton Park Roman House are designated Scheduled Ancient Monuments. The Roman House is also Grade I Listed Building. The Dorchester Town Walks are a Grade II Registered Park & Garden. The Boundary Walls to the west and north sides of Colliton Park are Grade II listed. The site is also within the Dorchester Conservation Area.

5.4 The archaeological site is of considerable importance in its own right, as well as for making an outstanding contribution towards an understanding and appreciation of the Roman settlement and development of Dorchester as a Roman regional capital, the forerunner of the present county town.

5.5 The site lies behind County Hall and the current primary pedestrian access into the site is from the North Walks, however many visitors access the site via the County Hall car parks from the east and south of the site. The asphalt path from North Walks winds up to the main entrance into the site on the southeast corner where there is currently a series of interpretation boards. A garage, storage building and bike shelter lie in the southeast corner behind the main entrance into the site. A row of stone blocks to the side of the eastern path provides an informal seating wall, and a handful of benches are scattered throughout the site.

5.6 The Town House sits in the excavated dip within the southwest corner site, surrounded by raised grassy banks to the north, south and east, and a bank of coniferous trees to the west.

6.0 Description of Proposal:

6.1 New Access from West Walks

The key objective of the project is to improve access and circulation of pedestrian users to and around the site. This principally involves reinstating a former access west of the Colliton Park site from the West Walks. This new pedestrian access will pass through the Wall, through a former opening, up a new ramped access path. The path would then cross a small section of car park, and along the hedge on the western edge of the site into the northwest corner. A new pathway would then cross

along the top (north of the site) and connect to the existing pathways linking to the main entrance along the north walks and the existing ramped access from the south east corner.

Some visitors entering the site from this new access at the northwest of the site will be drawn directly to the Town House down the grassy slope. To prevent erosion of the bank, a set of timber steps would be created leading from the new path directly to the Town House.

6.2 Improvement at the southeast corner

At the southeast corner, the storage building and bike shelter are to be removed. This would facilitate the creation of 7 new parking spaces at the south east entrance. The screen fencing around the bin store is to be replaced. A new hedgerow to separate the parking from the entrance into the site is to be planted. The double garage is to remain.

The southeast entrance into the site is to be reconfigured with new interpretation. This redesigned entrance would result in an overall improved visitor experience by the removal of unsightly structures and a more logical visitor flow down into the site.

6.3 Improved interpretation

There are currently timber posts demarking the footprint of the building sited outside the modern shelter. There are also remains of a Roman path/road below ground level. It is proposed to improve the interpretation of this area of the Town House outside the shelter by replacing the timber marker posts with concrete posts and a new hard hoggin surface. New interpretation boards etc would be installed, details to be agreed via a landscape management plan

6.4 New Seating

It is anticipated that the new interpretation area will function as a multi-functional public space for events. To facilitate this, a new amphitheatre style seating area on the grassy bank is proposed. Details of how this will look/be constructed is to be determined at a later date.

6.5 Landscaping

It is proposed to remove the belt of coniferous trees on the western bank, this would result in multiple benefits:

- It will open the views into the site and help reinstate the original context of the Town House inside the setting of the north west corner of the Roman town's walls;
- The removal of the trees will help address issues caused with shade and damp suffered by the western side of the monument
- Removal of the tree belt will also help deter the occasional antisocial behaviour related to the west part of the site by opening up the area.

The established ash tree on the southwest corner of the bank it to be retained. The newly open west slope would be seeded with a low maintenance grass mix and this treatment will follow around along the south slope.

6.6 Repairs to Roman Town House

A small section of the pathway will be extended around the south west corner of the Town House west range, to allow a safe route past the low hanging roof eaves.

The application provides some details in S&L Kelland's report, as to the proposed maintenance and restoration of the Roman Town House's historic features, including repairs to the floor and stonework inside the shelter. This document also details the approach to relocating the Roman sarcophagus.

6.7 Relocation of Roman sarcophagus

The Roman coffin currently adjacent to the path on the eastern side of the site is to be relocated. Its current position among the domestic complex of the Roman Town House is incongruous (Roman law forbade human burials within towns). It is proposed to move the coffin to a position next to the new access path as a feature of interest along the path. It will also enable it to be interpreted separately from the former living area of the Roman Town House itself.

7.0 RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY:

Application No.	Application Description	Decision	Date of decision
1/E/06/000732	Addition of timber gable infills to the cover building over the West range of the Roman Town House and some building up of the flint walls, a new ramped access footpath down to the Roman Town House, a new ramped footpath from the County Hall site to North Walks and associated work and landscaping	Approve	05 June 2006
1/E/96/000473	Erect building over west range of Roman Town House and erect new interpretation centre with associated landscaping works. Construct new pedestrian access	Approve	08 October 1996

8.0 Constraints

The Dorchester Roman Walls and Colliton Park Roman House are designated Scheduled Ancient Monuments

As the development site lies within a scheduled monument, any works affecting or altering the scheduled monument requires Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC) in addition to planning permission and / or Listed Building Consent. Historic England administers SMC on behalf of the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. For the purposes of SMC, 'works' include any groundworks (e.g. for removing structures, digging new foundations, drainage trenches, levelling or lowering the ground, laying hard surfaces etc.). In this case, SMC has been applied for and granted, for the works to the monument. The SMC is conditional on the submission and approval of an archaeological programme in the event that groundworks are undertaken which might impact on archaeological remains.

The Roman House is also Grade I Listed Building

(statutory duty to preserve or enhance the significance of heritage assets under the Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990)

The Dorchester Town Walks are a Grade II Registered Park & Garden

(statutory duty to preserve or enhance the significance of heritage assets under the Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990)

The Boundary Walls to the west and north sides of Colliton Park are Grade II listed

(statutory duty to preserve or enhance the significance of heritage assets under the Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990)

The site is within the Dorchester Conservation Area

(statutory duty to preserve or enhance the significance of heritage assets under the Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990)

9.0 Consultations

All consultee responses can be viewed in full on the website.

Historic England - support

- Have been actively engaged advising on the preparation of the current proposals for enhancing the site and visitor
- Re setting, consider that the development will have either a neutral or a positive impact on the settings of the scheduled monuments and nearby listed walls
- Scheme has potential archaeological implications, however these will be minor and any impacts would be far outweighed by the public benefits of the

scheme. Condition recommended in line with SAM Consent.

Dorset Council Senior Archaeologist - Support

- Has provided archaeological advice during this project
- No concerns about the archaeological impact of the proposed works and how they are to be mitigated.
- Condition supported as per SAM Consent.

Dorset Council Highways - No objection

Dorset Council Conservation Officer - Support

Dorset Council Environmental Health - No comment

Dorchester Town Council – Support

Representations

No representations were received at the time of report preparation

10. Relevant Planning Policies

Adopted West Dorset and Weymouth & Portland Local Plan (2015)

ENV4 - Heritage assets

National Planning Policy Framework (2019)

15. Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

Para 38 - Local planning authorities should approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way. They should use the full range of planning tools available, including brownfield registers and permission in principle, and work proactively with applicants to secure developments that will improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area. Decision-makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible.

Other material considerations

Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 (as amended).

Dorchester Conservation Area Appraisal (2003)

WDDC Design & Sustainable Development Planning Guidelines (2009)

11. Human Rights

6.1 Article 6 - Right to a fair trial.

Article 8 - Right to respect for private and family life and home.

The first protocol of Article 1 Protection of property

This Recommendation is based on adopted Development Plan policies, the application of which does not prejudice the Human Rights of the applicant or any third party.

12. Public Sector Equalities Duty

As set out in the Equalities Act 2010, all public bodies, in discharging their functions must have “due regard” to this duty. There are 3 main aims:-

- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people with certain protected characteristics where these are different from the needs of other people
- Encouraging people with certain protected characteristics to participate in public life or in other activities where participation is disproportionately low.

Whilst there is no absolute requirement to fully remove any disadvantage the Duty is to have “regard to” and remove OR minimise disadvantage and in considering the merits of this planning application the planning authority has taken into consideration the requirements of the PSED

The proposed improvements have been developed with improved accessibility at the forefront of the design:

- The new access from West Walks will be via a DDA compliant ramp. The new pathway from the northwest corner will be a user-friendly gradient of 1:12, and the camber of the new paths will be designed and built to recommended gradients. The path surfaces will use a reasonable firm wearing course suitable for all users.
- The overall strategy for circulation is to enable everyone of all abilities to access and appreciate most of the site so its setting and context is understood and enjoyed. This circulation and access strategy will be made clear via the signposting and waymarking plans for the site which will be developed as part of the overall interpretation strategy.
- Disabled car parking spaces and drop off points will be available immediately adjacent to the site in new and remarked spaces.

13. Financial Benefits

Increased revenue from improved visitor numbers via guided tours, school & educational groups etc

Enhanced visitor attraction for the town

14.0 Planning Assessment

Impact on Designated Heritage Assets - Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Listed Buildings, Listed Parks & Gardens, Conservation Area

The application concerns a scheme encompassing proposals for landscape enhancement, repair work to the Town House and surrounds, improving visitor access, site interpretation and displays and provision of seating. Historic England is supportive of the proposals which in their view would enhance the conservation and heritage interest of the Roman Town House scheduled monument, and benefit both the Town House and the Roman Walls monument and Dorchester as a whole. The majority of the works to the listed building are covered by the previously issued SAM.

The scheme will have considerable public benefits, both through the improved conservation management of the site, and the improved public access and interpretation.

As the development site lies within a scheduled monument, any works affecting or altering the scheduled monument requires Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC) in addition to planning permission and / or Listed Building Consent. In this case, SMC has already been applied for and granted, for the works to the monument. The SMC is conditional on the submission and approval of an archaeological programme in the event that groundworks are undertaken which might impact on archaeological remains.

Impact on Designated Heritage Assets

The new entrance proposed in the West Walks appears to be an original feature of the Colliton Park wall and retains a stone pier on either side. Its purpose was perhaps to allow the movement of livestock that were used to graze the Park to and from a former farm and open countryside in the adjacent Frome valley. A likely date for the blocking of this entrance with stonework was in the 1930s when construction of County Hall began. The archaeological evaluation already undertaken has shown there was an associated trackway on the inside of the entrance, which was infilled in the 20th century.

The proposal would involve the removal of the infill of the entrance only (i.e. the piers will be retained). These works will be supervised and recorded by the archaeological contractor undertaking the programme of archaeological works. A detailed method statement of these works will be secured via condition.

The Roman coffin is to be relocated. Its current position among the domestic complex of the Roman Town House is incongruous (Roman law forbade human

burials within towns!). Moving it to a position next to the new access path will make it a feature of interest along the path and will enable it to be interpreted separately from the former living area of the Roman Town House itself.

Inside the shelter, maintenance works to the floor are proposed, The application provides details of this in S&L Kelland's report. This document also details the approach to relocating the Roman sarcophagus.

Regarding setting, it is considered that the proposed development will have either a neutral or a positive impact on the settings of the scheduled monuments and nearby listed walls. The proposed improvements and maintenance of the Town House and surrounds will have a positive impact on the designated heritage asset

It is considered that the proposal will not adversely affect the building, setting, nor any features of special interest of the listed buildings. This conclusion has been reached having regard to: (1) section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 that requires special regard to be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the setting of Listed Buildings; and (2) Policy ENV4 of the Local Plan.

15.0 Conclusion

The proposals would enhance the conservation and heritage interest of the Roman Town House scheduled monument, and benefit both the Town House and the Roman Walls monument and Dorchester as a whole.

The scheme will have considerable public benefits, both through the improved conservation management of the site, and the improved public access and interpretation

16.0 Recommendation

GRANT subject to conditions

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- 1 PLAN The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans:

Location Plan - Drawing Number L107 Rev P1 received on 23/05/2019
Site Plan - Existing Arrangement - Drawing Number L100 P1 received on 06/05/2019
Site Plan - Proposed Arrangement - Drawing Number L101 P2 received on 14/06/2019
S & L Kelland 2018 report : "Input to Roman Town House Lottery Bid" received on 14/06/2019

REASON: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.

- 2 K40A The work to which it relates must be begun no later than the expiration of three years beginning with the date on which the consent is granted.
- REASON: This condition is required to be imposed by reason of Section 18 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (as amended).
- 3 NS The repairs and maintenance to the Roman Town House, and the moving of the Roman Coffin, shall accord with the methodology described in the S&L Kelland report "Input to Roman Town House Lottery Bid".
- REASON: To protect and safeguard the fabric and features of the heritage asset
- 4 NS Prior to the opening up of the new access in the West Walks hereby approved, a detailed method statement shall be submitted to, and approved by, the Local Planning Authority. The works shall thereafter accord with the agreed details.
- REASON: In the interest of the architectural and historic interest of the listed wall

NOTES TO APPLICANT

1. National Planning Policy Framework Statement

In accordance with paragraph 38 of the NPPF the council, as local planning authority, takes a positive approach to development proposals and is focused on providing sustainable development. The council works with applicants/agents in a positive and proactive manner by:

- offering a pre-application advice service, and
- as appropriate updating applications/agents of any issues that may arise in the processing of their application and where possible suggesting solutions.

In this case:

- The application was acceptable as submitted and no further assistance was required.