



Dorchester Civic Society

An Independent Voice

Registered Charity No. 268636

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Dorchester at the Crossroads

As recently as the 1980s the population of Dorchester was no more than 15,000. Today it is 20,000 and growing. As a result of planning applications already approved, by 2025 it will be 23,000 and beyond that, who knows.

In 2015, West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland Local Plan was accepted by the independent planning inspector. However, he required a further review by 2020 to identify sites for an additional 4,500 houses (equivalent to Poundbury twice over!) The inspector also required the new Local Plan to address the issue of Dorchester's next phase of growth, a heavy hint that a significant element of this development should be within the Dorchester area.

In February of this year, the Councils published a consultation document, "West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland Local Plan Review: Issues and Options". This paper invited comments on seven possible development options adjoining the town.

In response, the Dorchester Civic Society accepts that some further development in the Dorchester area is necessary. We do need a better age balance with more varied employment opportunities and a more varied mix of housing. Many young people simply cannot afford to live here, so we need a really strong focus on smaller one or two bed units and, in particular, affordable and rentable properties.

At the same time, the Civic Society is very concerned that the growth must contribute to clearly defined objectives and cause the least possible harm to our wonderful physical, cultural and heritage assets. The Civic Society has responded to the Councils' consultation paper with the following key guiding principles:-

1. A clear vision and strategy for Dorchester and adjoining area is essential - not merely a list of development options.
2. The strategy should be based on housing needs - the needs of all the main towns in the Local Plan area - rather than be governed by land supply or developers or those who shout the loudest.
3. The overall strategy for the Dorchester area should consider all the possible options, including the local needs of the surrounding settlements, so reflecting the physical, historic, economic, social and cultural interdependence of Dorchester and its hinterland.
4. With Dorchester's distinct physical boundaries set by the river Frome flood plain and the A35/A37 bypass, it will be difficult to cross these boundaries without detriment to existing valued assets and without creating isolated housing estates with no real connection with Dorchester.
5. Dorchester's "green infrastructure" is of paramount importance and the river Frome water meadows must be retained in a "rural" condition for their enjoyment by townspeople.
6. New developments must not result in bland housing estates but must contribute very significantly to the infrastructure and housing needs of the town and area.
7. The needs and objectives must be met by:-
 - a broad strategy for town and adjoining area;
 - a masterplan for each allocation, detailing all infrastructure and community requirements;
 - development briefs setting out detailed approaches for design, layout, density and house types.

The opportunity to improve Dorchester, rather than simply expand it, must not be lost.

Peter Mann
Chairman, Dorchester Civic Society
April 2017