

16 May 2019. Dorchester Civic Society

Dorchester and the boundary of the proposed Dorset and East Devon National Park: why Dorchester and its landscape setting should be included within the proposed National Park.

Executive Summary.

1. Should a National Park be designated, the Dorchester Civic Society wishes to see Dorchester and its surrounding landscape setting included within the proposed area. This note sets out the way in which Dorchester lies – historically, culturally and geographically – at the heart of the proposed National Park. The Society strongly believes that Dorchester is an integral and cohesive part of the surrounding landscape which, itself, forms the setting of the town. To include nearby landscape without including Dorchester would be an artificial separation which would deny centuries of cultural tradition.
2. Dorchester has a nationally important cultural and literary heritage. The renowned heritage of Thomas Hardy's literary landscape is centred on Dorchester – his 'Casterbridge'. Dorchester's landscape setting is Hardy's 'Wessex' and Egdon Heath. Dorchester's position at the heart of Hardy's landscape is vitally important due to the close and intimate relationship between the town and Hardy's landscape. Dorchester is quite rightly the centre of the important 'literary tourism' that is associated with Hardy. It is the heart of that literary environment and is indivisible from the surrounding landscape which forms its setting.
3. Dorchester is historically significant. It is a Roman Town which is not only significant in its own right but also in relation to its setting. Dorchester is the pre-eminent heritage town in Dorset and deservedly should be included within the boundary of the proposed National Park.
4. Dorchester occupies an important position within the local landscape. The intimate connection of town and countryside of Hardy's day still exists, with the water meadows of the Frome Valley immediately adjoining the town centre on its

northern side. Dorchester is the centre of local tourism and its necessary transport hub being the route focus for the surrounding area and further afield. The town is a railway, road, bus and cycle route focus and the centre of an excellent network of public footpaths. Dorchester is, therefore, the ideal location to act as the natural focus for the National Park.

5. Dorchester has much to offer to justify being included within the National Park. With its location as a route focus, it makes an excellent centre from which to enjoy the National Park. The town is integral to the surrounding landscape in physical siting, in cultural connections and in everyday life – the very functioning of the area. The proper conservation of all its natural and cultural treasures will allow Dorchester and its hinterland to prosper.

6. Given the need to manage visitor pressures for recreation and tourism across the whole of the proposed National Park, it makes sense to include Dorchester as an urban cultural alternative to the rural natural experience. All of the facilities – including museums and heritage centres - that Dorchester has to offer are important, not only in their own right, but in their association with, and aid to understanding, the surrounding landscape.

7. In its own right, Dorchester is an important Roman, Georgian, Market and County town. It is Hardy's Casterbridge and is at the heart of his Wessex. Its cultural heritage is central to the wider area and it is in an ideal position to promote the understanding and enjoyment of the area's special qualities. Inclusion within the National Park will create the essential synergy to foster the economic and social well-being of both Dorchester and the wider area. The attributes and attractions of Dorchester and its surroundings – its scenery, history, cultural heritage, architecture, civic and commercial functions, - create a living whole. But, it is Dorchester that is the nucleus, the core that radiates the energy that drives the local area. Dorchester deserves to be both in and at the heart of the National Park.

8. The Society believes that this submission represents a cogent argument for Dorchester's inclusion in the National Park based both on its integral relationship with its surrounding landscape, and its significance as a heritage town - an historic, cultural, and community centre suited to meeting greater recreation and tourism needs.

DCS. 16 May 2019.