

Full Council - 10 December 2020
Public Participation

Question 1

Submitted by: Dr Anthony Fincham, Hon. Chairman of the Thomas Hardy Society.

I place this question on behalf of Thomas Hardy Society, which is an international literary society with over one thousand members, dedicated to the promotion of the works of Thomas Hardy, and the preservation of the countryside, which features so prominently in Hardy's novels and poems.

Hardy's Casterbridge (Dorchester) is the central focus of his Wessex – described so clearly in much of his poetry and fiction, most particularly in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, where he describes Dorchester as being 'as compact as a box of dominoes', having 'no suburbs in the ordinary sense. Country and town met in a mathematical line'. Although much has changed in the 140 years since this novel was published, this strict division between town and country persists unaltered along the Roman northern boundaries of the town.

Five years ago, plans to allow a similar large-scale development on Came Down were rejected primarily on grounds of their deleterious impact on a sensitive landscape of literary, ecological and historical importance. The North Dorchester proposal would have a far worse impact on the local environment in all these same categories. It is also nonsensical to build a detached extension to a town, ruining the intervening water meadows and in effect linking Charminster and Stinsford in one hideous conurbation.

The population of Stinsford Parish today stands at 334 which is less than it was in 1840, when Hardy was born there. This proposed development would ruin Hardy's Mellstock – so vividly described in his poetry and early fiction – especially in *Under the Greenwood Tree* and *Desperate Remedies*. The Hardys' Cottage, Stinsford Church and the Kingston Maurward Estate and the countryside of the whole of Stinsford Parish are sites of literary pilgrimage to which people travel from all over the world. The construction of 'North Dorchester' would therefore constitute an act of the most severe literary, historic and environmental vandalism

I understand that you recently replied to a public question that the local plan '...provides for environmental protection and enhancement alongside development.'

My question on behalf of the Thomas Hardy Society is what enhancements will accrue for Dorchester and Hardy's own Parish of Stinsford with the building of a 4,000-house mixed development? How can you make such a statement when the planned development would destroy all that is most valuable about this unique County Town and its environs?

Question 2

Submitted by: Cllr Alistair Chisholm, Independent Councillor Dorchester Town Council

Given the land NE of Dorchester is marked as unsuitable for development in Dorset Council's SHLAA, why is the Council proposing major housing development in this area, and why is the SHLAA not part of the suite of documents being made publicly available given its important role in guiding development recommendations.

Question 3

Submitted by: Linda Poulson

When WDDC included DOR15 in its proposals for a new local plan prior to local government reorganisation, Dorchester Town Council expressed strong opposition on behalf of the town, & something like **1,400 objections** were received raising legitimate reasons why the site should not go ahead - yet despite this opposition it has reappeared as DOR13 in Dorset Council's latest draft Local Plan.

Cllr Walsh insists that this is a democratic process, that people's voices will be heard – what level of public opposition would persuade him that it is 'undemocratic' to pursue this site? Please will he explain what tips the balance between 'democratic' & 'undemocratic' with regard to DOR13?

Question 4

Submitted by: Linda Poulson

I know how DOR13 will benefit landowners & developers – they will make huge profits at the expense of the local community.

I know how DOR13 will benefit Dorset Council – it will assist them in delivering over- inflated Gov housing targets instead of challenging them.

I know how DOR13 will benefit the planners – they will take part in an ambitious vanity project which enables them to stamp their mark on a Greenfield site rather than identifying the numerous brown field sites which are already available.

What I don't know is how Dorchester will benefit from such large scale destruction of the environment & pressure on its already struggling infrastructure. The draft plan makes all sorts of unsubstantiated claims but the huge costs of implementing them cast serious doubts on the site's viability. In the real world, how will Dorchester benefit from DOR13?

Question 5

Submitted by: Peter Bowyer Chair of Dorset CPRE

Will the portfolio holder for planning confirm that the draft Dorset Local Plan will be based on central government targets which are 47% above the housing levels in existing Local Plans in Dorset?

Question 6

Submitted by: Peter Bowyer Chair of Dorset CPRE

Will the portfolio holder for planning confirm that the government housing target for Dorset is "in excess of sensible forecasts of local housing need". These words in quotations relate to the conclusions of an important independent report for Dorset CPRE which has been made available to every member of the Dorset Council as well as leading officers.