

Application Number:	P/FUL/2026/01516
Webpage:	https://planning.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/
Site address:	Julia's House 34 South Street Dorchester DT1 1DD
Proposal:	Siting of a statue depicting Susie the cat on a low plinth.
Applicant name:	James Honeychuck
Case Officer:	Jane Green
Ward Member(s):	Cllr Canning and Cllr Fry

1. Reason application is going to committee:

The application is to be heard at committee in line with the Council's adopted scheme of delegation as the application site is within Dorset Council ownership.

2. Summary of recommendation:

GRANT subject to conditions as set out at the end of this report

3. Key planning issues

Issue	Conclusion
Principle of development	The principle of public art is acceptable
Scale, design, impact on character and appearance	The statue is life-size and appropriate in term of scale and appearance
Impact on the living conditions of the occupants and neighbouring properties	No significant impact
Impact on heritage assets	No harm to the setting of heritage assets
Economic benefits	An indirect consequence may see visitors to the statue spend money in the town's shops, cafes and facilities
Highway impacts, safety and access	No unacceptable impact
Environmental Implications	No significant implications

4. Description of site

The site of the proposed statue is in South Street outside the retail shop 34 South Street occupied by Julia's House Charity. South Street is a pedestrian street located in Dorchester Town Centre within the Primary Shopping Frontage area. The site is also within the designated

Conservation Area and there are a number of listed buildings, the nearest being 28/29/30 South Street on the opposite side and also 25/26 South Street.

The location has been chosen so the statue is in line with the existing benches and planters.

5. Description of development

The proposal sees the erection of the life size cat statue of a height of 38cm mounted on a low plinth that would measure 40cm square to a height of 75cm. The total height would therefore measure 113cm. The statue will be cast in bronze, and the plinth would be fossil bearing Purbeck stone. The plinth will be anchored to the ground with stainless steel pins to a concrete sub-base. The flagstones will be replaced above the concrete base. The honorary bard of Dorchester 2025-2026 will compose a poem which will be inscribed in stone and attached to the plinth.

The statue is to be sculpted by a sculptor who lives and works in Weymouth.

6. Background and relevant planning history

P/PAP/2026/00042 - Decision: Response given - Decision Date: 12/02/2026

Siting of a statue depicting Susie the cat on a low plinth

It may also be worth explaining a little of the background to members not familiar with Susie. Susie the cat is a sociable local feline resident of Dorchester that frequents South Street shops and pubs and the town centre. Susie has a Facebook page "Susie's Travels in Dorchester" with over 12,000 followers. There is also a book titled *Not Lost: Susie the Dorchester Cat* written by a local charity, a forthcoming book, postcards, coffee mugs, a 2026 calendar and a community choir song. She has also appeared in feel good features on BBC and ITV.

The background to the statue is to celebrate Susie with a piece of accessible art with references to Dorchester's Roman heritage and Dorchester's literary connections.

The statue is donated by a private benefactor.

7. List of constraints

Grade: II Listed Building: 28-30, SOUTH STREET List Entry: 1291250; - Distance: 13.93

Application is within Dorchester Conservation Area

Public Right of Way: Footpath S2/9; - Distance: 23.81

Public Right of Way: Footpath S2/8; - Distance: 46.1

Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) impact risk zone

Scheduled Monument: Dorchester Roman walls (List Entry: 1002449); - Distance: 26.4

Scheduled Monument: Outer defences of Roman town, W of St Genevieve's Convent (List Entry: 1002380); - Distance: 201.81

Scheduled Monument: Part of Roman, Saxon, and medieval town in grounds of Wollaston House (List Entry: 1002384); - Distance: 221.73

Scheduled Monument: Henge, Romano-British amphitheatre and Civil War fieldworks known collectively as Maumbury Rings (List Entry: 1003204); - Distance: 430.4

8. Consultations

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

Consultees

1. **DC Highways** – No objection
2. **DC Conservation Officers** – No objection to the proposal on heritage grounds
3. **Dorchester Town Council** – As Dorchester Town Council will be taking ownership of the statue within 2 years of it being installed if permission is approved therefore, it doesn't feel appropriate for the Town Council to comment
4. **Dorchester West Ward Councillor**– No comments received

Representations received

Total - objections	Total - No objections	Total - comments
2	131	133

Summary of comments of objections:

- This is something the town doesn't need. It adds nothing to our attractions for visitors when the town's wonderful Roman heritage is largely underplayed. It would be far for useful and informative if the neglected brown tourist signs situated at both main entrances to Dorchester were refurbished. They just make the town look uninteresting and neglected. Promote it properly, not waste money on flippant displays.
- Adding a statue of it in town is a ridiculous idea for something that is just a passing trend. Dorchester isn't known for having a cat and wasting money on a statue is in no one's interest.

Summary of comments of support:

- Great for tourism/will encourage visitors to Dorchester
- Boost economy through visitor spend
- Perfect tribute
- Will enhance the built environment
- A statue would preserve her [Susie's] story and charm for years to come
- The statue would be a real asset/adds interest to Dorchester
- Small, unobtrusive and respectful. Great addition to streetscene

- Height is ideal for children to enjoy
- Adds a good story and character to an already interesting town
- It will link Dorchester's roman heritage with the present
- Susie has inspired and bonded the local community. She has lots of followers and I think it would be nice to commemorate this. It's not always about the big achievements. Small things can also make a big difference and bring a community together.
- I've seen this Woman's work and it's really wonderful. Anywhere would be lucky to have one of her pieces on show. Experienced and talented sculptor (Ama Menec)
- A great teaching point for kids to understand animals and their worth
- Sculptures enhance urban environments by adding aesthetic value, fostering social interaction, serving as landmarks, and reflecting cultural identity, thereby enriching the urban landscape and promoting community engagement. The proposed cat sculpture has its own unique charm which will be a great addition to the surrounding built urban environment. This innovative initiative is fundamentally to be commended, not least because it is a valuable addition which will enhance its surroundings at no cost to the public purse.
- The proposed installation is a small but meaningful way to informatively and appropriately display Dorset's ancient heritage and honour modern history in the making! Thousands of tourists come to pay their respects to Greyfriars Bobby in Edinburgh and Hachiko in Tokyo. The Susie statue is a wise move for tourism and an investment in Dorset's future.
- Celebrating notable local figures, human and animal, is really important so that we can build our unique town and county identity. It will also add very positively to our shopping experience when in South Street.
- I particularly like that, in addition to providing accessible public art, the sculpture reference's Dorchester's historic Roman past, with the Roman glass bead collar and paw print on the Roman tile. Great that it is at head height to children, and sure it will delight locals and visitors alike
- Art is not a frivolous thing when it elevates the public mood, which many of us need in these troubling times. Having seen Ama's bronze sculptures of endangered wildlife, I know she will do a great job

Whilst most of the comments are from Dorchester and Dorset in general there are some from further afield and some from overseas.

9. Duties

s38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that the determination of planning applications must be in accordance with the development plan unless material circumstances indicate otherwise.

Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires that when considering whether to grant planning permission for a development which affects a listed building or its setting, there is a general duty to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires that special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas.

10. Relevant policies

Development plan

In this case the development plan comprises:

Local Plan Adopted West Dorset and Weymouth & Portland Local Plan:

The following policies are considered to be relevant to this proposal:

- INT1: Presumption in favour of sustainable development
- ENV1: Landscape, seascape & sites of other geological interest
- ENV2: Wildlife and habitats
- ENV4: Heritage assets
- ENV10: The landscape and townscape setting
- ENV12: The design and positioning of buildings
- ENV13: Achieving High Levels of Environmental Performance
- ENV14: Shopfronts & advertisements
- ENV16: Amenity
- SUS2: Distribution of development
- ECON4: Retail and town centre development
- ECON5: Tourism attractions and facilities
- COM7: Creating a safe & efficient transport network
- DOR3: Dorchester Roman town area

Material considerations

Emerging local plans:

Paragraph 49 of the NPPF provides that local planning authorities may give weight to relevant policies in emerging plans according to:

- the stage of preparation of the emerging plan (the more advanced its preparation, the greater the weight that may be given);
- the extent to which there are unresolved objections to relevant plan policies (the less significant the unresolved objections, the greater the weight that may be given); and

- the degree of consistency of the relevant policies in the emerging plan to the NPPF (the closer the policies in the emerging plan are to the policies of the NPPF, the greater the weight that may be given).

The Dorset Council Local Plan

The Dorset Council Local Plan Options consultation took place between January and March 2021, with further consultation between 18 Aug – 31 October 2025. Being at a very early stage of preparation, the relevant policies in the draft plan should be accorded very limited weight in decision making.

National Planning Policy Framework 2024 (as amended 2025)

Paragraph 11 sets out the presumption in favour of sustainable development. Proposals that accord with the development plan should be approved without delay. Where the development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out-of-date then permission should be granted unless specific NPPF policies protecting areas or assets provide a strong reason for refusal and/or any adverse impacts of approval would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the NPPF as a whole, with particular regard to key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well designed places and providing affordable homes.

Other relevant NPPF sections include:

- Section 4 'Decision making': Para 39 - 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...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.
- Section 6 'Building a strong, competitive economy', paragraphs 88 and 89 'Supporting a prosperous rural economy' promotes the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business and enterprise in rural areas, through conversion of existing buildings, the erection of well-designed new buildings, and supports sustainable tourism and leisure developments where identified needs are not met by existing rural service centres.
- Section 11 'Making effective use of land'
- Section 12 'Achieving well designed places' This indicates that all development to be of a high quality in design, and the relationship and visual impact of it to be compatible with the surroundings. In particular, and amongst other things, Paragraphs 131 – 141 advise that:

The creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development.

Development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design.

- Section 14 'Meeting the challenges of climate change, flooding and coastal change'

- Section 15 ‘Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment’- Paragraphs 192-195 set out how biodiversity is to be protected and encourage net gains for biodiversity.
- Section 16 ‘Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment’- Paragraph 212 says that when considering designated heritage assets, great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation, irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance. The effect of an application on the significance of non-designated heritage assets should also be taken into account (para 216).

Other material considerations

National Planning Practice Guidance:

Design: process and tools 01 October 2019 Guidance

Historic environment: 23 July 2019 Guidance

Town centre and retail: 18 September 2020 Guidance

Supplementary Planning Guidance:

West Dorset District Council Design and Sustainable Development Planning Guidelines
Adopted February 2009

Dorchester Conservation Area Appraisal Adopted July 2003

Dorchester Town Council policy statements:

Dorchester Heritage Tourism Strategy (2020)

Dorchester Town Council Community Implementation Plan (2023-28)

Dorchester Town Council Corporate Plan (2025-29)

All of Dorset:

Dorset Council Interim Guidance and Position Statement Appendix B: Adopted Local Plan policies and objectives relating to climate change, renewable energy, and sustainable design and construction. December 2023.

11. Human rights

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 Public Sector Equalities Duty.

It is acknowledged that the statue is another potential obstruction to those pedestrians who are blind or partially sighted. The proposal would not be unduly hard to detect with a mobility cane due to the solid base attached to the ground. It could also impact on disabled persons or those who are pushing a buggy.

As the position of the statue is in line with other street furniture, it would not be positioned in a desire line or pedestrian route, and it would not therefore negatively impinge on accessibility, and a clear pedestrian route would remain. It is therefore considered that the proposal will not disadvantage any persons with certain protected characteristics and any persons with disabilities or mobility impairments or pushing buggies are accommodated and access for all remains.

13. Planning Assessment

Principle of development

The principle of public art is acceptable. Paragraph 135 of the NPPF encourages development that is sympathetic to local character and history, establishes a strong sense of place and create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and wellbeing. Policy ENV10 of the Local Plan states new development should make a positive contribution to local distinctiveness and incorporates features that would enhance local character, including public art.

Scale, design, impact on character and appearance

The statue is to be life-sized and a true representation of the subject. It will be of a bronze composition on a Purbeck stone plinth.

Whilst art is subjective it is considered the sculpture will have a social and historical relationship to the area and would contribute positively to local identity and distinctiveness.

The height and nature of the piece would mean it can be interacted with by children, users of wheelchairs and blind and partially sighted people which is positive.

As such the proposal would enhance local character and would be a positive focal point and would be an active addition to the sense of place.

Impact on heritage assets

The proposal site is located towards the south end of the sub-area c within the Dorchester Conservation Area. This street is predominantly used for retail at ground floor with some offices and flats at upper levels.

There are several nearby designated heritage assets including the Grade II Listed buildings South Terrace, United Reformed Church and gateway, 25 and 26 South Street, 28-30 South Street, Dorchester War Memorial and the pillar box at junction with South Street. The Town Walks constitute a Grade II Registered Park and Garden, beneath which lies the Scheduled Monument of the Dorchester Roman Walls

The immediate surroundings contain various street furniture, including large timber planters with integrated bench seating. There are nearby metal bollards, bike racks and a local information board.

Many of the surrounding shopfronts are modern alterations which do not contribute positively to the special character and appearance of the conservation area. The former Eldridge Pope New Inn opposite retains historic tiles and contributes to local heritage interest.

The proposal takes up a relatively small amount of space within the street. Consideration is given to the density of similar features. As there are few other statues or monuments in the vicinity it will not therefore compete with or detract from other such structures. The statue will contribute to the overall street scene and enhance the special character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

The proposal will not directly affect any of the nearby listed buildings. Increased street furniture can have a harmful effect on the setting of a listed building. However, in this instance the proposals will cause no harm.

There will be no harm to the Scheduled Monument or Registered Park and Garden.

In conclusion the statue is not considered to detract from the setting of the heritage assets; the proposal is justified and there are public benefits to be gained. Conservation officers have no objection on heritage grounds. As such it is considered that policy ENV4 of the local plan is adhered to.

Highways impacts, safety and access

The proposed statue is to be located outside of 34 South Street between the existing benches and planters. Concern was raised at the pre-application stage that if the benches and planters were removed in the future the statue would be located in a isolated position which may present an obstruction/trip hazard in the pedestrian street. It was confirmed at that time that the benches and planters were controlled by the Town Council who would also take over the ownership of the statue and therefore it is in their own interests to maintain this protection.

That said South Street is generally kept clear of obstruction through the main street for the purposes of delivery and emergency vehicles and, in the main, clear on the footpaths immediately abutting the shops/premises for pedestrian access. There is a line of planters, benches, Sheffield bike stands, bollards, bins etc. in between these areas and quite a few A-frame advertisements. The proposed statue will be within this line of street furniture. The area is also well lit with streetlights and lights projecting from the retail shops at night which helps with visibility during darker days and at night. It is therefore considered that the statue will not present a significant trip hazard, although it is acknowledged it is another potential obstruction to those pedestrians who are blind or partially sighted as with all the other street furniture.

The Highways Authority considers that the proposal does not present a material harm to the transport networks or to highway safety and have no objection.

Noting the subject is lower to the ground than many statues it is considered this will provide further inclusivity as wheelchair users, people with mobility impairments and children may well find the statue more accessible.

Impact on the living conditions of the occupants and neighbouring properties

It is considered the proposal will not have an unacceptable impact on amenity of neighbouring properties.

14. Benefits

The proposal may provide a number of financial and non-financial benefits, including public benefits.

Material considerations

The applicant has specifically requested that it is made clear to the committee that the intention behind the statue is not as a tourism attraction but rather to honour a well-loved feline resident, a nod to Dorchester's Roman origin, an accessible piece of art and a quality poem inscribed on the plinth as a continuation of Dorchester's literary heritage.

It may be however an indirect consequence that visitors of the statue may spend money in the town's shops, cafes and facilities.

Non-material considerations

Public art can contribute to the sense of place and local identity and can educate and inspire audiences and can create historic and social awareness and improve well-being.

15. Environmental implications

No significant implications

16. Summary of issues and the planning balance

Noting the significant public support for the statue and for the reasons as set out above, the proposal is considered to accord with all relevant policies of the West Dorset, Weymouth & Portland Local Plan, in particular policy ENV10 and paragraph 135 of the National Planning Policy Framework and is recommended for approval with conditions. The proposal would comply with the Development Plan, taken as a whole, and there are no material considerations that indicate otherwise.

17. Recommendation

GRANT of planning permission subject to the following conditions:

1. The development to which this permission relates must be begun not later than the expiration of three years beginning with the date of this permission.

Reason: This condition is required to be imposed by Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended).

2. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans:
PP-14787438v4 Location Plan
Susie statue plinth installation
Susie statue site illustrations
Susie statue location outside Julias House shop

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

Informative Notes:

1. Biodiversity Net Gain

The effect of paragraph 13 of Schedule 7A to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 is that planning permission granted for development of land in England is deemed to have been granted subject to the condition (biodiversity gain condition) that development may not begin unless:

- (a) a Biodiversity Gain Plan has been submitted to the planning authority, and
- (b) the planning authority has approved the plan.

The planning authority, for the purposes of determining whether to approve a Biodiversity Gain Plan, if one is required in respect of this permission would be Dorset Council.

There are statutory exemptions and transitional arrangements which mean that the biodiversity gain condition does not always apply. These are listed in full in a subsequent informative below.

Based on the information available this permission is considered to be one which will not require the approval of a biodiversity gain plan before development is begun because one or more of the statutory exemptions or transitional arrangements are considered to apply.

- Development below the de minimis threshold, meaning development which:

- i) does not impact an onsite priority habitat (a habitat specified in a list published under section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006); and
- ii) impacts less than 25 square metres of onsite habitat that has biodiversity value greater than zero and less than 5 metres in length of onsite linear habitat (as defined in the statutory metric).

Read more about Biodiversity Net Gain at <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/w/biodiversity-net-gain>

2. Statutory Exemptions and Transitional Arrangements in respect of the Biodiversity Gain Plan

1. The application for planning permission was made before 12 February 2024.
2. The planning permission relates to development to which section 73A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (planning permission for development already carried out) applies.

3. The planning permission was granted on an application made under section 73 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and

(i) the original planning permission to which the section 73 planning permission relates* was granted before 12 February 2024; or

(ii) the application for the original planning permission* to which the section 73 planning permission relates was made before 12 February 2024.

4. The permission which has been granted is for development which is exempt being:

4.1 Development which is not 'major development' (within the meaning of article 2(1) of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015) where:

i) the application for planning permission was made before 2 April 2024;

ii) planning permission is granted which has effect before 2 April 2024; or

iii) planning permission is granted on an application made under section 73 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 where the original permission to which the section 73 permission relates* was exempt by virtue of (i) or (ii).

4.2 Development below the de minimis threshold, meaning development which:

i) does not impact an onsite priority habitat (a habitat specified in a list published under section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006); and

ii) impacts less than 25 square metres of onsite habitat that has biodiversity value greater than zero and less than 5 metres in length of onsite linear habitat (as defined in the statutory metric).

4.3 Development which is subject of a householder application within the meaning of article 2(1) of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015. A "householder application" means an application for planning permission for development for an existing dwellinghouse, or development within the curtilage of such a dwellinghouse for any purpose incidental to the enjoyment of the dwellinghouse which is not an application for change of use or an application to change the number of dwellings in a building.

4.4 Development of a biodiversity gain site, meaning development which is undertaken solely or mainly for the purpose of fulfilling, in whole or in part, the Biodiversity Gain Planning condition which applies in relation to another development, (no account is to be taken of any facility for the public to access or to use the site for educational or recreational purposes, if that access or use is permitted without the payment of a fee).

4.5 Self and Custom Build Development, meaning development which:

i) consists of no more than 9 dwellings;

ii) is carried out on a site which has an area no larger than 0.5 hectares; and

iii) consists exclusively of dwellings which are self-build or custom housebuilding (as defined in section 1(A1) of the Self-build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015).

4.6 Development forming part of, or ancillary to, the high speed railway transport network (High Speed 2) comprising connections between all or any of the places or parts of the transport network specified in section 1(2) of the High Speed Rail (Preparation) Act 2013.

* "original planning permission means the permission to which the section 73 planning permission relates" means a planning permission which is the first in a sequence of two or more planning permissions, where the second and any subsequent planning permissions are section 73 planning permissions.

3. Informative: National Planning Policy Framework Statement

In accordance with paragraph 39 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 applicants/agents of any issues that may arise in the processing of their application and where possible suggesting solutions.

In this case:

- The applicant was provided with pre-application advice.