

## Chapter 4

Assessment of designated assets with the potential for direct and indirect physical change

Land North of Dorchester  
January 2021

### Level of effect

**4.26** Taking into account the significance of the asset (high) and the risk of harm to its significance (medium), the overall level of effect of the indicative masterplan proposals on this asset is **medium-high**.

### Options for sustainable development

**4.27** Physical disturbance of a scheduled monument requires scheduled monument consent and, if not obtained, constitutes a criminal offence. Therefore, no ground works or vehicular movement should be allowed in the area of the scheduled monument, or its immediate vicinity, in order to avoid any possibility of physical harm.

**4.28** Options for rerouting the proposed Link Road should be considered in order to avoid/ minimise harm to the asset. Screening of the road is unlikely to be effective and would be inappropriate given that the open form and character of the water meadows means that screening would effectively be another impact to their significance.

**4.29** The final level of setting effect will depend on the design, height, and layout of the proposed Housing West and East areas. These will need to be considered carefully and of high-quality design. The potential for strategic landscape screening (in areas of agricultural land beyond the water meadows) may help reduce the visibility of the development in the landscape. However, this would not fundamentally alter the fact that development was present and should not be an excuse for inappropriate development or poor-quality design, and its effects of planting on other heritage assets will need to be assessed.<sup>32</sup>

**4.30** In the main areas of development, sightlines could be enabled through the development to help reduce the loss of the area for experiencing the asset in a manner that enables appreciation of its heritage significance. Another option might be to retain more open land around the monument by keeping more land to the south of the Stinsford to Charminster road undeveloped.

**4.31** Public benefits might be derived from offering interpretation of the site. It may be an option to extend the existing Dorchester heritage trail or Frome Valley trail to include access to and/ or information about the monument.

## Road bridges over the River from Backwater on Charminster Road [NHLE no. 1110616] and Road bridge southeast of Lower Burton Mill [NHLE no. 1324446]

### Summary (applicable to both assets)

Significance of asset	Contribution of the site to significance	Risk of harm to asset	Level of effect
High	High	High	High
Grade II listed	The site makes a high contribution to the significance of the asset and that contribution may be affected by development.	There is potential for physical damage to the assets due to increased usage as a result of the development.	There is potential for the development to result in physical deterioration / structural damage to assets of high significance.

### Description

**4.32** There are two grade II listed road bridges located along Westleaze Road, and these are assessed together due to their functional and historical connection to the same road and river. A third listed bridge [NHLE ref: 1110615] lies south of these two on the same road and may also be considered to form part of this functional group, however, it lies outside of the site boundary and so is assessed separately in Chapter 6.

**4.33** Westleaze Road was previously part of the Weymouth, Melcombe Regis and Dorchester turnpike (1760-1878). A road that was improved and maintained by a toll paid at a turnpike gate (the Tithe map depicts a Toll House<sup>33</sup> approximately 500m north of the northernmost bridge). It was through the localised development of turnpike roads that a comprehensive and well-maintained network of roads was developed in the UK and both bridges are historically associated with this development.

**4.34** The more northern of the two bridges [NHLE no.1324446], is located by Burton Mill. It dates to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and carries Westleaze Road over the River Frome. It is constructed of red brick in stretcher bond, with three elliptical stone arches. The central arch, which has two iron ties running through the bridge either side of it, is slightly wider than the two which flank it. All the arches have dressed-stone voussoirs, above which are plain parapet walls with stone copings. The southern end of the bridge's east face terminates in a brick pier; the west side is attached to a stone rubble wall that forms the boundary to Lower Burton Mill. This bridge

<sup>32</sup> Strategic landscape screening can in some contexts be as harmful as the effect that it seeks to ameliorate. In this instance some screening may be appropriate given the agricultural character of the area and existing tree cover.

<sup>33</sup> The tollhouse is located at 368673, 92069. It is not marked on the later OS maps, but the building now extant at that location appears to be historic with a thatched roof.

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appears to have replaced an earlier one as a '*pontem* [bridge] *de Burton*' is recorded in 1345.

**4.35** The more southerly road bridge [NHLE ref: 1110616] carries Westleaze Road over a backwater of the River Frome, approximately 180m north of the junction with the A37. The bridge is probably of early 19<sup>th</sup> century date and is constructed in Portland ashlar, with rusticated voussoirs over three elliptical arches. Above these, it features a brown brick parapet with ashlar coping. There is an iron scroll at the south end of east parapet, which adjoins otherwise plain railings.

**4.36** In terms of setting, the bridges may be experienced from the road, with some limited pedestrian access to the southern bridge via a single pavement that terminates at the bridge. They may both be experienced from a further pathway (and footbridges) to the east of the road, which runs through the water meadows that lie either side of the road. Visibility across these water meadows is variable due to their flat topography and the screening along the B3147 and heavily vegetated field boundaries. This setting remains much as it would have historically.

**Figure 4.8:** Listed bridge NHLE ref: 1324446 looking west (towards the proposed Link Road)



**Figure 4.9:** The northerly listed bridge (NHLE ref: 1324446) looking northwest



**Figure 4.10:** View east from the northern road bridge into the site across water meadows (featuring pedestrian footbridge bridge to the fore)



**Figure 4.11:** View west (towards the existing B3147) from southern bridge into site across water meadows





## Significance

**4.37** The heritage significance of both bridges is **high**, as reflected by their listed status.

**4.38** In the later post-medieval period, the rapid increase of transport projects led to the standardisation of bridge design and typically less innovative and interesting designs occur post-1850.<sup>34</sup> These two examples both derive their high heritage significance from their architectural interest as earlier post-medieval bridges of good design quality and high historical (illustrative) interest as good representative examples of their type. The bridges also have some historical associative and illustrative value because of their association with the former Weymouth, Melcombe Regis and Dorchester turnpike, the route of which they help make legible.

**4.39** In terms of setting, the bridges functional relationships with the road and river are important to their illustrative value. The water meadows provide historic context, but do not contribute to the significance of the bridges or their understanding.

## Contribution of the site to significance

**4.40** The contribution of the site to the significance of these assets is **high**. These assets are physically part of the site and most of the bridges' heritage significance lies in their fabric, form, and design. The site also contributes to their historical illustrative value as it includes the features (e.g. the road and river) which are the very reason for the bridges' existence and are critical to understanding their siting.

## Sensitivity and potential harm

**4.41** The sensitivity of the significance of the assets to the development of the site is **high**. This is because there is the potential for increased traffic along the roads served by these bridges as they lead towards a large area of proposed housing on the indicative masterplan. There is also potential for changes to drainage within the site, both of which could lead to direct physical impacts on these heritage assets.

**4.42** The assets and the road, river and water meadows that form the principal components of the bridges' setting are identified on the indicative masterplan as being in open space. The proposed Link Road would run approximately 250m to the west of the northern bridge and 375m west of the southern bridge, where it would lie beyond the existing B3147, which is screened by vegetation. Visibility from both bridges would be limited due to intervening vegetation (see Figure 4.5, 4.6 and 4.7). The new road would affect the character and form of the water meadows and therefore the bridges' historic landscape setting. However, provided that the new road bridged the

existing water courses and did not seek to redirect them (which is unlikely), it should not affect the key aspects of setting that contribute to its setting (e.g. their relationship to the road and river).

## Level of effect

**4.43** The development of the site has the potential to result in a high level of harm to assets of high significance. Therefore, the overall level of effect on the historic environment is **high**.

## Options for sustainable development

**4.44** The structural integrity and capacity of the bridges needs to be considered in more detail as part of any proposals for the site, as well as what the potential increase in traffic will be. This will help establish how likely the bridges are to experience damage as an indirect result of the development.

**4.45** Any proposals for Open Space South should also ensure that any changes made to the elements of the bridges' setting (principally the road and river) conserve the contribution they make to the assets' significance.

## Sluice east of two bridges on the path from Hangman's Cottage to Whitfield House [NHLE no. 1119044]

## Summary

Significance of asset	Contribution of the site to significance	Risk of harm to asset	Level of effect
High	High	None	None
Grade II listed	The site makes a high contribution to the significance of the asset and that contribution may be affected by development.	The significance of the heritage asset will not be harmed.	Asset of high, medium, or low significance where the development of the site does not interact with the asset or its significance. The development may still be perceptible as a change to the asset's setting, but this change would not harm the significance of the asset.

<sup>34</sup> Historic England. 2011. *Infrastructure: Transport Listing Selection Guide*.

### Description

**4.46** A sluice is an artificial passage for water fitted with a gate for regulating its flow. This 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century example is located approximately 9m east of the two bridges along the path from Hangman's Cottage [NHLE ref: 1324034] to Frome Whitfield House and is of brick construction, with ashlar kerb stones.<sup>35</sup> It still features the remains of wooden sluice gates. The sluice controls water flow along the mill stream, which powered Friary Mills, located a short distance downstream. The sluice also formed a working part of the Frome water meadows,<sup>36</sup> enabling the control of water across them to increase grass growth and, in turn, grazing capacity.

**4.47** Being riverside water meadows, they were constructed as bedworks; the most sophisticated type of water meadow that enabled irrigation over relatively flat areas. Bedwork systems are most common in the chalkland areas of Dorset, Hampshire, and Wiltshire. They had a main weir or dam to divert water from the river and subsidiary weirs and sluices on smaller water courses to ensure an even distribution of water.<sup>37</sup> Early examples of these structures were of stone and timber but during the 18<sup>th</sup> century brick became commonplace and concrete structures appeared from Victorian times onwards. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century complex iron mechanisms were introduced to assist in the raising and lowering of hatches.

**4.48** This example is brick with ashlar kerb stones and an iron mechanism. The listed sluice survives well forming one of a pair (also listed alongside the bridge to which they are attached – NHLE ref: 1219107) either side of 'John's Pond' a historic irrigation well that likewise is integral to the operation of the water meadows.

**4.49** The pond, bridge and sluices both stand along the northern boundary of Dorchester Conservation Area, in an area known as The Walks (an area of tree-lined walks that were laid out in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century along the line of the Roman defences). The water meadows that they operated lie immediately north and can be seen through the tree-lined hedge that runs between them and the sluice channel (see Figure 4.14). The mill with which the channel was also associated is no longer extant.

Figure 4.12: The listed sluice (looking northeast)



Figure 4.13: Johns pond and both listed sluices (looking northwest)



<sup>35</sup> <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1119044>

<sup>36</sup> *IBID.*

<sup>37</sup> Historic England. 2018. Water Meadows: Introductions to Heritage Assets

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**Figure 4.14: View of Johns pond and the listed sluice with the water meadows visible behind (looking north)**



**Significance**

**4.50** The heritage significance of this sluice derives primarily from its historical illustrative value as a relatively well-preserved component of an important technological and agricultural development: the Frome water meadows. Such survivals are rare because for the meadows to function properly, the sluices and other operational infrastructure needed to be maintained and renewed. This means that those that survive today generally date from the end of a water meadow’s use and may be much later than that of its original construction.

**4.51** In terms of setting, the sluice would not be there were it not for the water meadows and vice versa. The surviving remains of these water meadows and their infrastructure – such as the other sluice, Johns Pond and the water course (mill stream) have an important functional and spatial relationship with the sluice that contribute to its historical illustrative value.

**4.52** Importantly, the asset and its setting also contribute to the special historic and architectural interest and character of the Dorchester Conservation Area and are also an integral component of the historic landscape character.

**Contribution of the site to significance**

**4.53** The contribution that the site makes to the heritage significance of the asset is **high**. This is because the site physically includes the sluice, which derives most of its significance from its physical form, fabric, and age. It also includes elements of the asset's setting that contribute to its significance, including part of Johns Pond and the mill stream, as well as the water meadows.

**Sensitivity and potential harm**

**4.54** The sluice stands on the very southern edge of the site, within the Dorchester Conservation Area, in Open Space South. The indicative masterplan has no proposals in this area meaning that **the risk of physical change is none**. There should also be no setting change as development within other areas of the site should not be experienced in combination with or from the asset.

**Level of effect**

**4.55** The significance of this asset is high but the risk to that significance from the development of the site is none. Therefore, the overall level of effect of the indicative masterplan proposals on these assets is judged to be **none**.

**Options for sustainable development**

**4.56** Any future proposals for Open Space South should seek to avoid change to this asset or its setting. Any changes proposed that are within the setting of this asset will require assessment in relation to the effects on its significance.

**Wall on the west side of Charminster Road north of the A37 junction [NHLE no. 1324446]**

**Summary**

Significance of asset	Contribution of the site to significance	Risk of harm to asset	Level of effect
High	High	Low	Low-medium
grade II listed building	The site makes a high contribution to the significance of the asset and that contribution may be affected by development.	The significance of the heritage asset may be harmed but that harm would be minor.	Asset is of high significance and the magnitude of change is likely to be of such a minor scale that the significance of the asset will only be marginally affected.

**Description**

**4.57** This 18<sup>th</sup> century wall stands on west side of Westleaze Road – which is embanked and crosses an area of water meadows – immediately south of (and potentially adjoining) a grade II listed road bridge (NHLE ref:1110616). The wall is of low height and constructed, to the south at least, of red brick with buttresses to the west side. To the north the construction material changes to Portland or Ridgeway rubble. The



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condition of the wall, especially that of the brick section, is very poor and in places the lowest section of wall appears to be completely missing. Its condition is such that it should be considered at risk.

**4.58** No further information is provided about the wall by the NHLE. However, it seems likely that the wall is of semi-retaining function (hence why it is buttressed) and was intended to hold up and protect the road (the former Weymouth, Melcombe Regis and Dorchester turnpike road) from being washed over or undermined by the water running across the water meadows; this theory is supported by the fact that there was no corresponding wall on the other side of the road, which would not have required the same level of protection as the river runs west to east. The wall may have further served to keep livestock within the water meadows and off the road.

Figure 4.15: Southern end of the wall in red brick



Figure 4.16: Northern end of the wall in Portland stone



#### Significance

**4.59** The significance of the wall is **high**, reflected by its listing. This significance is derived primarily from its historical

illustrative value as an 18<sup>th</sup> century wall demonstrating the way in which the historical landscape was worked and managed. It also has some limited architectural and archaeological interest as a result of the handmade bricks and rubbed brick copings, which were principally functional but also add some visual interest.

**4.60** In terms of setting, the asset only exists because of the road and water meadows; therefore, its relationship with these features contributes greatly to its historical illustrative value.

#### Contribution of the site to significance

**4.61** The contribution of the site to the significance of this asset is **high**. This is because the site physically includes the wall, which derives most of its significance from its physical form, fabric, and age. The site also includes important elements of the asset's setting that contribute to its significance.

#### Sensitivity and risk of harm

**4.62** There is a **low** potential for harm to the asset. The asset is in Open Space South and so should not experience any physical change, however, the proposed Link Road would lie 395m to the west of the wall and would be visible from and in conjunction with the asset. It would physically change the character of the water meadows and diminish the way in which they currently contribute to the understanding of the assets function and history. That said, this relationship would not be lost or fundamentally changed given that an area of water meadows would remain intact between the two. There would be no change to the wall's relationship to Westleaze Road.

**4.63** There is a small risk of indirect effects to the wall if the construction of the Link Road affects the water table within the meadows and places additional pressure on the asset. In its current state of disrepair any additional pressure could be highly damaging. Any future assessment will need to assess the potential for such effects.

#### Level of effect

**4.64** Taking into account the significance of this asset (high) and the risk of harm to their significance (low), the overall level of effect of the indicative masterplan proposals on this listed wall is judged to be **low-medium**.

#### Options for sustainable development

**4.65** Any future proposals for Open Space South should seek to avoid change to this asset or its setting. Any changes proposed that are within the setting of this asset will require assessment in relation to the effects on its significance.

**4.66** The requirements of construction of the Link Road and associated drainage and its potential to physically affect the asset needs further consideration; designs for the road need to ensure that the wall is not subject to any additional pressure that would result in further loss or deterioration. A programme of repair work to restore the wall's structural integrity would help it better withstand any changes and prevent further deterioration of the asset.

**Dorchester Conservation Area**

**Summary**

Significance of asset	Contribution of the site to significance	Risk of harm to asset	Level of effect
High	High	Medium	Medium-high
Conservation area containing numerous other designated assets – listed buildings, scheduled monuments, registered park and gardens.	The site forms a considerably important part of the heritage significance of the asset and this contribution may be affected by the development of the site.	The significance of the heritage asset would be harmed but not substantially.	Asset is of high or medium significance and the magnitude of the change is likely to be of such a scale that the significance of the asset would be harmed, but not substantially

**Description**

**4.67** Designated in 1977, Dorchester Conservation Area covers the historical settlements of Dorchester and Fordington. It is located on a spur of higher ground above the River Frome, with a steep escarpment north towards the river and a pronounced fall from west to east. Dorchester developed from a Roman town – which itself grew around a legionary garrison – to become an important cloth trade centre in the medieval period and, as such, has a rich historic environment, also reflected in the high number of individual asset designations (267 listed buildings, 5 scheduled monuments and 2 registered park and gardens). The conservation area designation celebrates and protects the collective architectural and historical interest of these assets as well as numerous non-designated assets and the spaces between them, and how together they create the character and appearance of Dorchester.

**4.68** Evidence of the town's Roman origins may be proportionately scant within the conservation area, but what has survived had a defining influence on the development of the town we see today: of the five scheduled monuments within the conservation area, all are of Roman date save for the Neolithic Maumbury Rings (although this was altered in the Romano-British period to serve as an amphitheatre)<sup>38</sup>. Although the medieval and later street plan appears not to have been substantively influenced by the Roman plan beyond their key axes, the extent of its development was contained for centuries by the walls and their entrances as set down by the Romans.<sup>39</sup>

**4.69** Throughout the medieval and post-medieval period, Dorchester continued as an important market town and textile centre, and in the late-18<sup>th</sup> century underwent many civic (and private) improvements, consolidating its position as the county town. The 1771 town map is a wonderful depiction of the marriage of this history, showing the broad medieval streets, narrow burgage plots and geometric patchwork of gardens, orchards and fields, packed between the River Frome to the north and the clearly delineated town limits of the Roman walls – by this time fashioned into the tree-lined promenades of the Town Walks – to the west, south and east.<sup>40</sup> This was to remain the case into the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the expanding population – fuelled to no small extent by the arrival of the railway to the south of the town walls – could no longer be contained, and the settlement spread into the countryside to the west and south, and into Fordington to the east.

**4.70** Dorchester Conservation Area includes aspects from all episodes of this history, encompassing the historic core of the town, some of the later Victorian expansion, and the former village of Fordington. Fordington is a settlement of Saxon origin that grew up around a fording point on the River Frome. For many years its medieval fields – which not only surrounded the village but also completely encircled Dorchester – provided residents of both settlements with food and agricultural work, as well as constraining the growth of Dorchester.<sup>41</sup> However, this changed in the late-19<sup>th</sup> century when the Duchy of Cornwall regained control of Fordington's fields and began to sell off or develop the land. Not only did this result in the coalescence of the two the settlements, but the enclosure of land and introduction of new boundaries fundamentally changed the management and character of the surrounding landscape and divorced the town and its citizens from it. The relationship between the historic core of the conservation area within the walls and the rural setting without – a relationship of both function and recreation that had been in existence for centuries – was, within the space of a century,

<sup>38</sup> Further altered during the Civil War to serve as temporary fortifications.

<sup>39</sup> WDDC. 2003. Dorchester Conservation Area Appraisal, pp. 6-8

<sup>40</sup> Available at <http://www.opcdorset.org/fordingtondorset/Files2/MapDorchester1771.html> [accessed 02nd November 2020].

<sup>41</sup> WDDC. 2003. Dorchester Conservation Area Appraisal, pp. 6

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almost completely lost, and was further eroded in the late-20<sup>th</sup> century by the construction of Poundbury to the west of the town.

**4.71** Despite the considerable changes that have taken place since the early-19<sup>th</sup> century, Dorchester remains a relatively compact, high-density settlement at its core and it is this that is the focus of the conservation area designation. The extended conurbation of the town is contained to the west, south and east not by the town walls now but by the A35 and A37, beyond which is the rural setting which was for so long the source of the town's prosperity. The River Frome remains, as it has always been, its northern boundary, beyond which the open landscape setting survives, and in which the proposed site is located.

**4.72** The conservation area appraisal divides the designated area into eight subareas. That adjacent to the site (to the west end of the conservation area's northern boundary) is sub-area A – Colliton Park, the Grove and Friary, while the area directly encroached upon by the site (to the east of sub-area A) is sub-area D – The Walks.

**4.73** Sub-area A was originally the north-western part of the Roman town. After lying in pasture for some time, it was subsequently developed to include: a medieval hospital (no longer extant); Colliton House (17<sup>th</sup> century core and major early-18<sup>th</sup> century additions); the prison with its 1790-92 gateway; The Keep (grade II listed and assessed separately as Dorset Military museum) and associated former military buildings, ranging in date from the 1790s to 1879; and the Art Deco county hall.<sup>42</sup> A large number of other listed buildings, primarily domestic buildings of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century date, also stand in the area. The conservation area appraisal highlights that there are important views to and from this sub-area from the water meadows to open countryside to the north.<sup>43</sup>

**4.74** In sub-area D, the tree-lined walks were laid out in the early-18<sup>th</sup> century along the line of the Roman defences. They are an attractive feature of Dorchester, defining the historical core and forming the basis of a well-used network of pedestrian routes within the town.<sup>44</sup> From North Walk and Colliton Walk there are views over The Grove to the water meadows within the site. Similarly, the riverside walk features good views of the open countryside to the north towards the site.

<sup>42</sup> WDDC. 2003. Dorchester Conservation Area Appraisal, pp. 17

<sup>43</sup> WDDC. 2003. Dorchester Conservation Area Appraisal, pp. 17

<sup>44</sup> WDDC. 2003. Dorchester Conservation Area Appraisal, pp. 17



Figure 4.17: Views within Dorchester Conservation Area



Dorchester High West Street, with the rural landscape surrounding the settlement just visible in the far distance.



Fordington High Street, again with the rural landscape surrounding the settlement just visible in the far distance.





View south up Friary Hill south towards the historic core of the conservation area from the northern extent of the CA.



View south up Glyde Path Hill south towards the historic core of the conservation area from the northern extent of the CA.



View north down Friary Hill toward the northern boundary.



View north down Glyde Path Hill toward the northern boundary.





View north along the old Roman defences, now the Town Walks, towards the site.



Hangman's Cottage on the northern boundary, where the closer urban form and bustle of the town gives way to its rural surroundings.

## Significance

**4.75** The importance of conservation areas is derived from their architectural and historic interest and how this has shaped a distinct character and appearance. This identity may be illustrative of a particular moment in time relating to specific events, industries or communities or, as with Dorchester, one that has evolved over centuries and imparts an enduring sense of time-depth. The most obvious source of this character are features such as the materiality, detailing and scale of buildings, streetscapes and open spaces, but our experience of a conservation area is also shaped by the way these elements are configured and the sounds, views, colours and activity of the area. It is the interplay between all these elements that makes conservation areas such interesting and distinctive places, worthy of preservation.

**4.76** The significance of Dorchester Conservation Area is **high**. This special interest derives principally from:

- The preservation of the town's Roman walls and town boundary, medieval streets and the abundance of nationally important listed buildings within it. The organic evolution of the buildings has furnished the town with an array of building types and styles that together document the development of the town and define its appearance.
- The harmonious, but not homogenous, appearance of streetscapes. Their piecemeal development means that buildings largely conform to the established scale, proportions, orientation, back of pavement building line and materiality of their neighbours, and so whilst there is eclecticism in styles there is an overarching coherence that ties the street scenes together. Taller buildings tend to be merely accents that punctuate the skyline and are almost exclusively religious, civic or commercial in function. This arrangement – along with the topography of the town – means that glimpsed views of assets and the dynamic but contained views of streetscapes are



particularly important in conveying the character of the town.

- The presence and legibility of a number of above ground scheduled monuments of monumental character is of considerable archaeological value and exerts a great influence over the town's character – visually as individual features within the townscape, but also spatially by constraining and delineating the town's later development. In addition, these assets reinforce the sense of time-depth within the settlement.
- Pockets of public and private green spaces, planting and street trees within the conservation area give respite from the bustle of activity and harder urban townscape of the main streets. The riverside walks especially are a defining characteristic of the town and bring the rural surrounds to the north of the town right up to its boundary. Similarly, secondary streets, alleyways and yards provide an experience of the town that is much quieter and more intimate.
- The town and surrounding landscape – indeed, surrounding county – has artistic interest and historical association with important literary figures such as Thomas Hardy and William Barnes, whose works take inspiration from historical features, townscapes and landscape character – and include references to specific historic features in and around Dorchester.
- The setting of the conservation area contributes greatly to the character and appearance of the town in a number of ways:
  - For centuries, the rural hinterland was the source of economic prosperity for the town and so it has an important role to play in understanding the historical development of the area; however, the town is no longer reliant on an agricultural economy and so the importance of this historic, contextual relationship is easy overlooked on the ground – especially as the high-density streetscapes create an insular character that contains views within the core of the conservation area, making its surroundings imperceptible for the most part except in glimpsed views.
  - For most people the importance of the area's setting is how it influences their experience of the town today rather than in how it helps reveals the town's past – its scenic qualities and its value as green, open space right on the doorstep of the town. The town's continuing intimate relationship with the river and the water meadows especially is a defining feature of Dorchester. Despite the proximity of town and countryside to the north, the change in

character as one moves away from the main streets down toward this area is pronounced. The relentless traffic, busy activity of the streets and hard urban environment gives way quickly into quieter, greener, softer environs, providing some welcome visual, spatial and aural contrast.

- The town's setting also has an important role to play in the experience of the conservation area when viewed from outside its boundary. The town is surrounded by rising landforms that elevate the enveloping countryside above its roofscape, crowning it with a green horizon that underlines the rurality of the location and the town's links to its agricultural hinterland. It allows the town to be read as a single entity and for the relationship between assets to be better understood – the town's commercial centre identifiable by the cluster of spires, towers and chimneys of important religious, civic and commercial buildings, the conspicuous gap and outlying spire of St George's identifying the historically separate settlement of Fordington, and the size of the settlement and contrast with its surrounding portraying the importance of the town now and historically as the principal urban centre in the area.

#### Contribution of the site to significance

**4.77** The contribution the site makes to the significance of the asset is **high**; this includes both the part of the site that is directly within the boundary of the conservation area but also that which forms part of the asset's setting. The asset has an important historical connection with the land contained within the site, a large part of which formed part of the historic parish of Holy Trinity but all of which fed into the prosperity of the town from the medieval period onwards as the centre for trade in the area.

**4.78** The importance of this relationship is experienced on the ground through the visual connections between the two from the riverside, in views out towards the site from The Grove and in views back towards the town from the site. The latter also provides further historical context for the town as it is from here that it is possible to appreciate the spatial relationship between the town, the floodplain of the River Frome, the downland to the south of the town behind its skyline (along with the top of Maiden Castle) and Fordington Down rising to the southwest. These relationships are important in terms of understanding the strategic location of the Roman fort and town, and the functional relationships between the town and the route of the aqueduct from Fordington Down.

**4.79** This contribution to significance is greatest in medium-range views from the water meadows and on the approach to

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### Assessment of designated assets with the potential for direct and indirect physical change

Land North of Dorchester

January 2021

Dorchester from the north. Although the town is visible from Waterston Ridge, all that is perceptible at this point is that there is a large town to the south – an important feature of landscape character but any understanding of the conservation area itself is extremely limited. It is not until one is within the site on the descent southwards toward the water meadows that the town starts to become distinguishable as a historic settlement and that individual buildings, a clear skyline and a semblance of form become apparent. It is this ability to appreciate multiple aspects of the conservation area's character that starts to increase the importance of the contribution the site makes to its significance. Furthermore, the immediacy and intimacy of this relationship between town and rural surrounds has been considerably diminished due to later development on all sides of the town and so it is only to the north of Dorchester – including land that lies within the site – that its landscape setting still connects directly to the historical core of the settlement.

**4.80** As well as providing a context that aids understanding of the history of the town, the experience of the conservation area from the site also contributes greatly to its aesthetic qualities. These views are dynamic – they evolve in line with movement around the site, with different features passing in and out of view. In some views, the urban form and presence of the town dominates, but in others it is subservient to the

rural context. It is precisely this swift and intimate transition from one to the other and back again that contributes so much to the character and appearance of the area and, to some, helps to place Dorchester within its quintessentially 'Wessex' setting.

**4.81** In fact, paradoxically, the closer you get to the town in approaches from across the water meadows, the less aware you are of its urban core as it becomes less visible in views due to changes in topography; once you reach the riverside walks you are within the boundary of the conservation area and yet completely removed from the bustle of town life. In this regard, the site contributes much to the character of this part of conservation area, not so much because the urban core can be seen (as views around the riverside are largely contained by the heavily vegetated banks) but because the lack of urban activity and noise creates a more secluded, relaxed and tranquil environment. When views of the site are glimpsed, they are long-reaching across the water meadows but contained by the rising landform beyond them. Such is the strength of the relationship between the site and the conservation area at this point that the boundary is virtually imperceptible on the ground, as they are so similar in character and the transition from one to the other happens almost seamlessly.

**Figure 4.18: Views from and towards the site**



The view from Waterston Ridge. A settlement is discernible in the distance, but what form, features, character or appearance it takes is not clear at this distance, only the rurality of its location.



View towards the town from the Charminster to Stinsford road that runs east to west across the site. In these medium-range views the form of the town starts to become more legible and individual features can start to be picked out.





View across site towards CA just north of Coker's Farm.



View from the east across the site and water meadows towards the town.



View towards Dorchester CA from the footpath between Wolfeton House and Lower Burton Farm. The fields and water meadows in the foreground form part of the site, proposed on the indicative masterplan to remain as open space, although the Link Road is proposed to run through the field around the farm.



Views towards the site from the northern boundary of the conservation area.







View down The Grove. Part of the site can be seen in the distance – an area of open space on the indicative masterplan.



View north northwest from the corner of North Walk and Colliton Walk towards the site.



View east along North Walk. Northernhay and Caters Place can be seen set down from the walks to the left-hand side of the photo, and the site lies beyond that (not visible in this view),



Urban meets rural – the end of Friary Hill where it meets the riverside walks. The site is beyond the trees.



View towards the site from the churchyard of St George's.



View across the site back towards the CA and wooded northern boundary.



### Sensitivity and potential harm

**4.82** The risk of harm to the heritage significance of this asset is **medium**. The water meadows that contribute so much to the experience of the conservation area and provide an important historical context for the settlement will remain as open green space according to the indicative masterplan, and therefore their contribution will not change. The parts of the site that are to be developed will also only alter the outlook from a few limited viewpoints from within the conservation area, potentially appearing in some views along The Grove, in views out from the churchyard of St George in Fordington, and potentially from the northern boundary. The first two views are fortuitous but not fundamental to the character and appearance of the conservation area and so any impact on the asset's significance is likely to be low; those from the northern boundary have the potential to have a slightly greater impact on the area's significance and are discussed in more detail below.

**4.83** Where the asset's significance is more likely to be affected is in views towards it from the site – those medium range views from around the water meadows up to Frome Whitfield and the approach to the conservation area from the north. There is potential for some views from around the southern end of Slyer's Lane and along the Charminster to Stinsford road to be lost as a result of the sections of 'housing east' and 'housing west' that extend south of the road, and through the associated 'strategic landscaping' (see Figure 1.2). This would affect the aesthetic values of the conservation area and the ability to appreciate the whole settlement – as well as the individual features that define its form and skyline – within its wider, historical landscape context.

**4.84** However, perhaps the greatest change in the experience of the conservation area will come through the increase in activity, noise and light that will result from the development and has the potential to diminish the strong contrast and transition from urban to rural that is a fundamental part of the asset's significance. Whilst the water meadows will not change, there is also potential for development to be visible across the water meadows in glimpsed views from the riverside, changing the outlook from this area from dispersed farms in a rural context to dense urban form. These changes will detract from our experience of the conservation area and affect its character and appearance.

**4.85** Furthermore, there is some uncertainty with regard to the location, route and form of the Link Road required to connect the west side of the site to the B3147. This has the potential to further detract from the experience of the conservation area in its rural setting by introducing a physical and visual barrier between the town and its historic landscape context. It will also introduce more movement, activity, noise and light into the area that has the potential to detract from the aesthetic

qualities of the asset when viewed from its setting, in particular around the western end of the site near Lower Burton Farm and as it passes through the open space of the dry valley between 'housing west' and 'housing east'.

### Level of effect

**4.86** The development of the site would result in a medium level of harm to an asset of high significance. Therefore, the overall level of effect of the indicative masterplan proposals on the historic environment is **medium-high**.

### Options for sustainable development

**4.87** In this instance there is little that can be done to avoid all harm if the site is developed – and the Link Road directed through open countryside – because the change of use of the land from agricultural to developed will fundamentally alter the significance the asset derives from its historical context, and this cannot be overcome with design. However, the retention of the water meadows and some open space throughout the development does help to minimise the harm by retaining important features that help illustrate the area's rural past.

**4.88** Harm to the asset could be further minimised by pulling the boundary of the housing back to the north of the unnamed Charminster to Stinsford minor road, which will help maintain more of the medium-range views and draw the activity, noise and light of the development further away from the northern boundary of the conservation area, and may also help reduce its prominence in views. To that end, it is recommended that any applications for development include verified views from the asset towards the site as well as views back towards the asset from the site. This should include those areas affected by the Link Road as well as built development. This will help establish the extent of the visual impact of the development on the significance of the asset and how amendments to the boundary, development layout and / or restricted building heights might help avoid the harm identified.

**4.89** The appropriateness of screening the development with strategic landscaping also requires greater consideration, as there is the potential for planting to restrict views to and from the town even further. Screening cannot effectively mitigate the effect of poor design and the transition from urban to rural surroundings needs to be carefully designed from the outset.

**Chapter 4**

Assessment of designated assets with the potential for direct and indirect physical change

Land North of Dorchester  
January 2021

**Road Bridges over River Frome on A37 [NHLE ref: 1324445] and on Westleaze Road [NHLE ref: 1110615]**

**Summary**

Significance of asset	Contribution of the site to significance	Risk of harm to asset	Level of effect
High	High	High	High
Grade II listed	The site forms a considerably important part of the heritage significance of the asset and this contribution may be affected by the development of the site.	There is potential for physical damage to the assets due to increased usage as a result of the development.	There is potential for the development to result in physical deterioration / structural damage to assets of high significance.

**Description**

**4.90** These two grade II listed bridges stand 70m apart from one another at the northern edge of Dorchester, immediately adjacent to the southern boundary of the site. One bridge [NHLE ref: 1110615] carries Westleaze Road over the River Frome and the other [NHLE ref: 132444] carries the B3147 over the Frome. Westleaze Road was previously part of the Weymouth, Melcombe Regis and Dorchester turnpike (1760-1878), a road that was improved and maintained by a toll paid at a turnpike gate. It was through the localised development of turnpike roads that a comprehensive and well-maintained network of roads was developed in the UK and both bridges are historically associated with this development. The B3147 is a later 19<sup>th</sup> century road.

**4.91** The Westleaze Bridge is of 18<sup>th</sup> century or earlier date. It is constructed of Portland or Ridgeway ashlar and has three arches (a central segmental one and two two-centred ones), two cutwaters, and a red brick parapet with ashlar coping. The parapet is continued at either end by rubble walls that extend around 2.7m.

**4.92** The B3147 bridge is of later date. Neither it, nor the road it carries, is shown on the draft OS map of 1805, so it is probably mid- 19<sup>th</sup> century. Constructed of brown brick it has two segmental arches including Portland ashlar voussoirs and a keystone, between which there is a circular cutwater. Above

the arches, there is an ashlar band and parapet with ashlar coping.

**4.93** In terms of setting both bridges stand at the edge of Dorchester in an area where commercial/ industrial development gives way to the open countryside, specifically the water meadows along the Frome river valley.

**Figure 4.19: Bridge over River Frome on A37**



Parapets and rubble wall of listed bridge NHLE ref: 1324445 looking southwest

**Figure 4.20: Eastern face of Bridge over River Frome on A37**



**Significance**

**4.94** The heritage significance of both bridges is **high**, as reflected by their listed status. In the later post-medieval period, the rapid increase of transport projects led to the construction of more standardised and less spectacular bridges than are typically found pre-1850.<sup>45</sup> These two examples both derive their high heritage significance from their architectural interest as bridges of good design quality

<sup>45</sup> Historic England. 2011. *Infrastructure: Transport Listing Selection Guide*.



(architectural value) and high historical (illustrative) interest as good examples of their age and type. The Westleaze Road bridge also has some historical associative value because of its association with the former Weymouth, Melcombe Regis and Dorchester.

**4.95** In terms of setting, the bridges' functional relationships with the road and river are important to their illustrative and aesthetic values. The water meadows provide historic context, but do not contribute to the significance of the bridges or their understanding.

#### Contribution of the site to significance

**4.96** The contribution of the site to the significance of the asset is **high**. This is principally because the site includes the roads and river which are the very reason for the bridges' existence and their specific siting. The site also includes the water meadows and open agricultural landscape which allow for an appreciation of these assets in their historical context, and a vantage point from which to view their architectural qualities.

#### Sensitivity and potential harm

**4.97** The sensitivity of the significance of the assets to the development of the site is **high**. This is because there is the potential for increased traffic along the roads served by these bridges as they lead towards a large area of proposed housing on the indicative masterplan. There is also potential for changes to drainage within the site, both of which could lead to direct physical impacts on these heritage assets.

**4.98** The road, river and water meadows that form the principal components of the bridges' setting are identified on the indicative masterplan as being in open space and so it is highly unlikely that significance would be affected through setting change.

#### Level of effect

**4.99** The development of the site has the potential to result in a high level of harm to assets of high significance. Therefore, the overall level of effect on the historic environment is **high**.

#### Options for sustainable development

**4.100** The structural integrity and capacity of the bridges needs to be considered in more detail as part of any proposals for the site, as well as what the potential increase in traffic will be. This will help establish how likely the bridges are to experience damage as an indirect result of the development.