



DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL

Council Offices, 19 North Square, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1JF

Telephone: (01305) 266861

Steve Newman, Town Clerk

8th April 2026

You are invited to a meeting of the **DORCHESTER HERITAGE JOINT COMMITTEE** will be held in the **COUNCIL CHAMBER, MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS, HIGH EAST STREET, DORCHESTER DT1 1HF** on **TUESDAY 14th APRIL 2026** commencing at **5.30pm**.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Steve Newman'.

Town Clerk and Secretary to the Committee

Declaration of Interests

Members are reminded that it is their responsibility to disclose interests where appropriate. A Member who declares any interest must leave the room. A Member who declares a registerable interest as a Council nominee to a partner organisation may first address the meeting as a member of the public.

Membership

Dorset Council: R. Biggs, A. Canning, L. Fry, R. Major and R. Tarr.

Dorchester Town Council: S. Biles, S. Jones, F. Kent-Ledger, G. Jones and D. Taylor.

The following Members may attend and speak but not vote:

I. Gosling & J. Doak (Dorchester Civic Society), R. Hattersley (Dorchester Chamber for Business), E. Metcalfe (The Keep Military Museum), L. Poulsen (Dorchester Local Nature Reserve), C. Dixon (Dorset Museum & Art Gallery), J. Wallis (Blue Badge Tourist Guides) M. Rice (Dorchester Association), M. Gayton or S. Johnson (Dorset History Centre), R. White (National Trust (for Max Gate and Hardy's Cottage)), V. Smith (Shire Hall), A. Worth (Keep 106 Community Radio), M. Chutter & M. Woodgate (Thomas Hardy Society), S. Wallis (Dorset Council – Archaeologist), Giles Keating (Athelhampton House), and Anthony Harrison (Town Crier).

AGENDA

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

To receive any apologies for absence.

2. **MINUTES**

To read, confirm and sign the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 20th January 2026 (**enclosed**).

3. **BUDGET UPDATE**

To receive a report from the Finance Officer (**report enclosed**).

4. **HERITAGE TOURISM STRATEGY - UPDATE**

To receive an update on the work of the Tourism Partnership and Strategy (**report enclosed**).

5. **HERITAGE OPEN DAY 2026**

To receive a report from the Assistant Town Clerk (**report enclosed**) and accompanying proposals from the Thomas Hardy Society.

6. **HISTORY OF DORCHESTER FACEBOOK PAGE**

To receive a presentation from Joe Doak of the Dorchester Civic Society.

7. **THOMAS HARDY STATUE**

To receive a report from the Assistant Town Clerk (**report enclosed**).

8. **BAYEUX TAPESTRY EVENTS PROGRAMME - OUTLINE PROPOSAL**

To receive a verbal report from Claire Dixon of Dorset Museum & Art Gallery

9. **ONGOING PROJECTS**

To receive update reports on the following matters:

- a) Town Pump enhancement - update from Dorchester Civic Society (I. Gosling) - **report enclosed**.
- b) Thomas Hardy Victorian Fair 2026 – update from Assistant Town Clerk.
- c) Moule Project – update from M. Chutter.
- d) Hardy 100th Anniversary project – update from Matilda Manley.
- e) Roman Baths on-site interpretation – update from Assistant Town Clerk.

10. **UPDATE FROM MEMBERS**

To receive updates from members and partners.

11. **QUESTIONS**

To receive questions submitted by Members in writing to the Dorchester Town Clerk and in respect of which the appropriate notice has been given.

12. **URGENT ITEMS**

To consider any other items that the Chairman decides are urgent.

ITEM 2: MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

DORCHESTER JOINT HERITAGE COMMITTEE

20th JANUARY 2026

At a Meeting of the Dorchester Joint Heritage Committee held on 20th January 2026:

PRESENT:

Dorchester Town Council	Councillors:	G. Jones (Chair) F. Kent-Ledger S. Jones S. Biles
	Officers:	M. Manley
Dorset Council	Councillors:	L. Fry R. Tarr
Dorset Museum & Art Gallery		C. Dixon
Local Nature Reserve		L. Poulsen
Dorset Council - Archaeology		S. Wallis
Dorchester Civic Society		J. Doak
Dorset History Centre		C. Skinner
Thomas Hardy Society		M. Chutter
Dorchester Chamber of Business		R. Hattersley

25. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor D. Taylor (Dorchester Town Council), Councillors R. Major and R. Biggs (Dorset Council), E. Metcalfe, M. Gayton, M. Woodgate, R. White, A. Harrison, V. Smith, M. Rice, J. Wallis, G. Keating and I. Gosling.

26. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 14th October 2026, a copy of which had been circulated, were confirmed and signed.

27. **DECLARATION OF PREDETERMINATION**

None were declared.

28. **BUDGET UPDATE**

An update report on the committee's budget was presented by the Tony Hurley.

RESOLVED

That the budget update be noted.

29. **HERITAGE TOURISM STRATEGY - UPDATE**

Matilda Manley presented an update on progress with the Heritage Tourism Strategy and the work of the Tourism Partnership. Matilda reported that, to complement the walking leaflets for Dorchester, a new leaflet on the architecture of Poundbury was being developed with the involvement of Simon Conibear.

RESOLVED

That the report on the activities of the Tourism Partnership was noted.

30. **THOMAS HARDY VICTORIAN FAIR 2026 - UPDATE**

The Assistant Town Clerk presented proposals for the in-house management of the event by the Tourism Development Officer and also for the Fair to be located on South Street in order to avoid cost and inconvenience of closing High West/East Street. This was supported by the Committee. Cllr Canning asked if there could be some liaison with Brewery Square over the event.

RESOLVED

That the proposed arrangements as set out in this report for the organisation/co-ordination of the Fayre and the South Street location were agreed.

31. **POTENTIAL EVENTS IN DORCHESTER LINKED TO BAYEUX TAPESTRY EXHIBITION**

Claire Dixon outlined initial ideas as to how Dorset Museum & Art Gallery could run a programme of talks, displays and activities to complement the major Bayeux Tapestry exhibition at the British Museum. Cllr G. Jones suggested a Norman-themed family event and Cllr Tarr suggested inviting to Dorchester any dignitaries from Bayeux who may be invited to the exhibition in London. Cllr S. Jones mentioned that there was a very good leaflet about the Tapestry available from the Bayeux museum and perhaps this could be purchased for local schools. Claire noted the ideas and would update the committee at a future meeting.

32. **THE STORY OF DORCHESTER**

Joe Doak of the Dorchester Civic Society gave a presentation on the work of Bournemouth University history students to developing website content on Roman Dorchester. The Committee welcomed the material and it hoped that, following editing, the material can feature on the Discover Dorchester website later in 2026.

33. **HERITAGE INFORMATION SIGNS & BLUE PLAQUES**

The Assistant Town Clerk reported on the production of replacement heritage information panels, in particular the Poundbury Camp panel that had been digitally restored as the original artwork was not available. This had provided the opportunity to update the text with input from Steve Wallis. The loss of the stone plaque referring to Thomas Hardy on the front of the Gorge Café was mentioned and it was hoped that any rebuilding of the property could include a replica plaque.

RESOLVED

- a) That the Committee agrees the purchase of replacement panel and new lectern stand for 'The Keep & Marabout Barracks' panel at a total cost of £2,123.
- b) That the Committee agrees the purchase of a replacement panel for the Poundbury Camp information panel at a cost of £420.

34. **ROMAN BATHS INTERPRETATION PROJECT**

To the Assistant Town Clerk presented an updated design for the first Roman Baths interpretation panel. The committee discussed how to improve the interpretation of Roman Dorchester and better link up the most significant sites with a trail. The need to improve the Dormouse website was mentioned.

RESOLVED

The revised wording for the Dorchester Roman baths panel be agreed.

35. **ONGOING PROJECTS**

The Committee received reports on the following:

- f) **Sylvia Townsend Warner project and funding for bench.** Mark Chutter presented a request for a grant of £700 from the Committee towards the cost of the bench element of the installation. Claire Skinner reported that the Dorset History Centre would be fundraising for the £50,000 cost of cataloguing the Townsend-Warner archive.

RESOLVED

That a grant of £700 be awarded to Visible Women UK from the Committee's budget as a contribution to the cost of the Sylvia Townsend Warner statue and bench.

- g) **Town Pump enhancement.** It was reported that the Civic Society, working with Crickmay Start and the Town Council, has submitted a planning application for the renovation of the Town Pump and installation of a drinking fountain.
- h) **Moule Project.** Mark Chutter reported that the working group would meet in two days' time.
- i) **Dorchester / Boston 400.** The approach to commemorating this anniversary was discussed as it was clearly a problematic period in history. It was agreed that small group would meet

with Jo Loosemore via TEAMS to discuss the matter. The following volunteered to take part in the call: Cllrs Kent-Ledger and S. Jones, and Matilda Manley – it was also suggested that Cllr David Taylor be invited to join the call given his knowledge of the subject.

- j) **Hardy 100th Anniversary project.** Matilda Manley provided an update on the development of a funding bid for the anniversary celebrations and events. Matilda had met with colleagues from Dorset Council and the National Trust to discuss revisions to the Hardy cycle trail which would include Max Gate and Hardy's Cottage. Cllr Tarr offered to help the project. Matilda also mentioned the idea of large murals on significant walls in South Street. Linda Poulsen highlighted widespread concern about the impact of the North Dorchester development of the countryside.

36. UPDATES FROM MEMBERS

Dorset Council archaeology service – Steve Wallis reported that the annual cleaning of the Roman Town House was about to take place and that he could be leading Roman-themed tours for the Dorchester Walking Festival.

Thomas Hardy Society: Mark Chutter reported that the annual conference would be in September with walks around the water meadows. The Society was also planning a 'Bohemia in Dorset' conference.

Dorset Museum & Art Gallery. Claire Dixon reported that:

- Victorian Hall expected to close before the Spring, final interviews for build contractors taking place later this month
- Condition survey being undertaken for the floor mosaic in the hall, repairs and protective measures will be actioned during the works period
- People Watching exhibition opens on 31st January.
- New Trustees have been elected and will join the Board this month: Ann Abraham, Jonny Cotton and Professor Paul Gough.

Dorset History Centre. Claire Skinner reported that the Centre was supporting Reconnection Dorchester (led by Rob Hattersley) in researching the history of buildings to potentially house a new community hub.

Dorchester Chamber of Commerce. Rob Hattersley introduced himself to the Committee and hoped to establish firmer links between the two.

Cllr Roland Tarr reported that Dorset Councils Rights of Way team were looking to improve public access to the countryside around Dorchester by replacing stiles with gates.

Cllr Sue Biles suggested that the Committee write to Denise Dutton, sculptor of the Sylvia Townsend Warner statue, to express the Committee's appreciation of her work.

Giles Keating of **Athelhampton House** has asked the Committee to lobby for better connections in Dorchester by buses aimed at tourists, and it was agreed that this request would be referred to the Tourism Partnership.

Cllr Gareth Jones reported that he and Maria Gayton from the Dorset History Centre be meeting with a local person whose father and grandfather were 'drowners' involved in the management of the water meadows adjacent to Dorchester. This would be an opportunity to record his memories.

37. **QUESTIONS**

None were raised.

38. **URGENT ITEMS**

None were raised.

Chair.....

ITEM 3:

**DORCHESTER JOINT HERITAGE COMMITTEE – 14th APRIL 2026
BUDGET UPDATE**

1. The table below sets out the Committee’s income and expenditure in the financial year 1st April 2025 to 31st March 2026.

		Activities	Events
		£	£
	Balance Brought forward as at 1st April 2025	6,257.19	11,908.78
Income			
01/04/2025	DTC Contribution for activities	3,000.00	
01/04/2025	DTC Contribution for events		8,000.00
		3,000.00	8,000.00
Expenditure			
01/04/2025	DD Passport + Poster Design	150.00	
14/05/2025	Advantage Digital Prints Ltd - Museum postcards	621.54	
27/05/2025	Wallis Agency - Website Hosting for town trail	410.00	
06/08/2025	Rural Services Partnership Ltd - Membership	143.85	
13/08/2025	Friends of Dorchester West Station - Grant	500.00	
30/09/2025	Cover meter survey for the Town Pump	580.00	
06/10/2025	Heritage Open Day (to date)		1,834.12
10/12/2025	Ward Signs Cast Aluminium Plaque	925.00	
30/01/2026	Roman Baths Panel	82.73	
30/01/2026	Poundbury Camp Sign Replacement	419.30	
04/03/2026	Alastair Braidwood - THVF Organiser		262.50
13/03/2026	Swift Signs Weymouth - Poppy trail panel	1,835.40	
		5,667.82	2,096.62
Balance		3,589.37	17,812.16
Total Balance			21,401.53
Outstanding Commitments			
	Thomas Hardy Victorian Fayre		10,000.00
	Barracks & Marabout heritage panel	288.00	
	Available Balance	3,301.37	7,812.16

2. In 2025-26, Dorchester Town Council allocated to the Committee £3,000 for Activities and £8,000 for Events and the same contributions has been made to the Committee for the financial year 2026-27.
3. As a result, the Committee is starting the new financial year with £15,812 for Events and £6,301 for Activities.

4. Elsewhere in this agenda a report on the Heritage Open Day 2026 event is proposing a budget allocation of £2,500 from the Committee's Events budget.

Assistant Town Clerk
Dorchester Town Council

ITEM 4:

DORCHESTER JOINT HERITAGE COMMITTEE – 14th APRIL 2026 DORCHESTER TOURISM PARTNERSHIP UPDATE

The last Tourism Partnership meeting on 31st March 2026. Some highlights of the meeting were:

- 3rd Dorchester ‘Shop Front of the Season’ Awards open – Spring (noms end 17th April).
- Ruby Granger (influencer) to visit for Thomas Hardy Victorian Fair (Sunday 31st May).
- Key events: Kite Festival 6th June 2026 and Dorchester Walking Festival in May 2026 – preparations for the Hardy 2028 programme is ongoing.
- The Forum received a presentation from *In the Bag* marketing, who undertake promotional work for the Weymouth BID. This provided some very useful ideas for improving the Forum’s promotion of the town and will inform the review of the 2026 marketing action plan.
- The Tourism Development Officer is collaborating with Resort Magazine to create a Discover Dorchester feature in the magazine.
- It was reported that English Heritage will soon commence a major restoration project at Maiden Castle with improvements to the footpaths and also an accompanying programme of community engagement.

All notes and slides from the last meeting can be found online at: <https://discoverdorchester.co.uk/about-us/>

**Tourism Development Officer
Dorchester Town Council**

ITEM 5

DORCHESTER JOINT HERITAGE COMMITTEE – 14TH APRIL 2026 HERITAGE OPEN DAY 2026 – UPDATE

1. As previously reported to the Committee, the ideal date for this year's Heritage Open Day in Dorchester would be Sunday 13th September (avoiding IronMan and the County Show).
2. Initial requests for proposals for talks and guided tours have been sent out and many members of the Committee and other partners have kindly offered their services and access to their premises.
3. Some of the learning points from the last Heritage Open Day event were as follows and these will be taken into account when designing this year's programme:
 - It is important that there are sufficient tours and events that don't require pre-booking (e.g. Corn Exchange and St Peter's bell tower).
 - The guided walks were very popular but there needs to be flexibility for participants to join on the day if those who have booked don't turn up.
 - 'Behind the scenes' tours are very popular, as are tours of notable buildings not normally accessible to the public (e.g. Sunninghill).
 - Better planning of itineraries – for those who want to attend more than one event during the day and would like time to get from one venue to the other.
4. The 2025 event was achieved within the available budget of £2,500 and so a similar amount is proposed for Heritage Open Day 2026.
5. If the budget and date are agreed, then a more detailed programme will be presented to the Committee at its meeting in July.
6. **Recommendation:** That the Committee agrees that Heritage Open Day in Dorchester takes place on Sunday 13th September 2026 and that a budget of £2,500 is allocated to support the event.

ITEM 7.

DORCHESTER JOINT HERITAGE COMMITTEE – 14th APRIL 2026 THOMAS HARDY STATUE

1. A proposal has been submitted by the Thomas Hardy Society for consideration by the Dorchester Joint Heritage Committee (see **Appendix A**). This proposal sets out the rationale for the relocation of the Thomas Hardy statue at Top 'o Town.
2. The statue is the property of Dorchester Town Council.
3. **Recommendations:** It is recommended that the Committee:
 - a) agrees the allocation of a grant of £500 to the Thomas Hardy Society as a contribution to the cost of a survey of the statue's plinth;
 - b) request to Dorchester Town Council's Management Committee that it considers the Society's proposal for the relocation of the Thomas Hardy Statue.

**Assistant Town Clerk
Dorchester Town Council**

APPENDIX A – PROPOSAL FROM THOMAS HARDY SOCIETY

1. The Thomas Hardy Society's Council of Management has been considering the present siting of the Thomas Hardy statue. The Society feels that repositioning the statue to a more visible and accessible site in the town centre would be a great improvement. The project could form part of the planned 2028 commemorations of the 100th anniversary of Hardy's death.
2. History of the Statue
 - 2.1 A Thomas Hardy memorial committee was established following Hardy's death in 1928. The committee met in private and was chaired by Lady Ilchester and any minutes taken are not in the public domain.
 - 2.2 On 10 September 1929 an application from the memorial committee to the Dorchester Borough Council was considered "For the erection of a memorial for the life of Thomas Hardy at the North end of West Walks".
 - 2.3 The Council owned the land proposed for the statue and permission was granted. The statue was to be far enough back from Grove Road to allow for road widening and a Sycamore Tree (part of the Avenue of Trees) would need to be felled.
 - 2.4 On 19 September 1929, the Dorset Echo report states:

"Life Size Statue to be Erected" – "The site has been agreed by the Council is Top of the Town in a prominent and commanding position where the statue can be seen at the best possible advantage. Eric Kennington has been invited to undertake the sculpture. The sculpture should be in bronze as it will survive better from the Tree drippings."
 - 2.5 There was also a mention that the statue should be swivelled to face Top of the Town. There is no record of discussion of alternative sites other than a suggestion in 1928 , that the junction of Trinity Street and South Street adjacent to the new War Memorial would be a good place.
 - 2.6 Anecdotal reasons for the existing site include:
 - As a child Hardy used to play under the avenue of Sycamore trees
 - The position guards one of the main roads in and out of the town
 - The statue of Hardy can/could survey the surrounding countryside
 - He has his back to the Town Roman wall.
 - 2.7 £1,267 was collected in subscription to pay for the statue. There were 107 subscribers. The amount of donations varied between one Guinea and £250 (Hardy's publisher Macmillan &co).
 - 2.8 The statue was unveiled by J.M Barrie (The author of Peter Pan) at a Civic Ceremony on 2 September 1931. A short clip of the speech and the ceremony is available on UTube. The memorial committee gifted the Statue to the ownership of the then Dorchester Borough Council. It remains in the Town Council ownership.
 - 2.9 The statue was Listed Grade II on 8 May 1950.

2.10 Since the early eighties there have been frequent discussions about moving the statue to a more suitable site. Most recently in 2016 , when it was proposed that the statue be moved to North Square as a part of the prison redevelopment.

3. Issues with the Existing Site

- 3.1 The site may have been suitable in 1929, but the local environment has changed considerably in the last 100 years or so.
- 3.2 Tony Fincham, in his book *Hardy's Landscape Revisited* talks about the unsuitability of the current site and road traffic. "As you approach Top-o-Town you encounter Eric Kennington's effigy of Hardy, seated with heathland vegetation around his feet. This is a somewhat awkward statue, its position rendered increasingly more awkward by the rise and rise of the ubiquitous motor car. It is not an easy place to remember the quiet, thoughtful man from the Heath, it is hard to notice the man , who used to notice such things 'when to do so involves continuous battle with the traffic."
- 3.3 The original road crossroads at Top o' Town was replaced with a roundabout in around 1949 (the County Council vetoed a proposal to place the statue on an enlarged roundabout in the 1980s).
- 3.4 There has been further and considerable road widening, house demolishing and hugely increased traffic in the area since the statue was installed.
- 3.5 The statue cannot be viewed from the front except at a distance and across a main road (see photo below).
- 3.6 The site is out of the way and must be sought out by visitors.
- 3.7 The site is not at all suitable for the Council's annual wreath laying event.



4. Alternative sites

4.1 The Society has not yet identified a preferred site, but any site chosen should allow for the memorial to be easily found and viewed and within the town centre area and away from main road traffic. Suggestions include:

- Adjacent to war memorial
- Corn hill by Town Pump
- North Square
- Salisbury Fields
- Jubilee Gardens

4.2 Another option might be the proposed rainwater garden space at the Brewery Square end of Fairfield Road. Any other suggestions are welcomed.

5. Next steps

5.1 If the Heritage Committee is minded to support the principle of moving the statue to an improved location it will be necessary to seek the support of the Town Council, which is the owner of the statue and on whose land it presently sits.

5.2 As well as identifying a suitable alternative site an estimate of costs would be required, this would most likely include a professional survey of the statue to ascertain its present condition and the work likely required to move it safely and without damage. The Committee is asked if it would consider funding this preliminary work up to a sum of £500. The plans of the statue and its foundations are available in the History centre archives.

5.3 If the project was to go ahead it would be subject to consultation and receipt of appropriate permissions, including planning and Listed Building. Funding would also need to be identified, and an application made to the Heritage Lottery Fund. A very rough estimate of the cost of moving would be between £30,000 and £50,000.

6. Sources

- Borough Council Minute Book 1928-32
- Dorset Echo Archives 1921 to Date
- Dorchester History centre Archives
- Hardy's Landscape Revisited, Tony Fincham, published 2010

Councillor William Gibbons
Thomas Hardy Society - Council of Management
April 2026

ITEM 9 (a)

DORCHESTER JOINT HERITAGE COMMITTEE – 14th APRIL 2026 REFURBISHMENT OF TOWN PUMP

1. Over the last year, the Dorchester Civic Society have been developing a project for the renovation of the Town Pump at Cornhill in Dorchester. The aim being to realign the structure, clean the stonework and reinstate a drinking-water dispenser near the base.
2. This preparatory work has involved liaison with Wessex Water with regard to the installation of a drinking fountain – which would need to meet Wessex Water’s hygiene / public safety requirements and a connection to the mains supply.
3. The preparatory work has also involved a ‘cover survey’ (funded by the Joint Heritage Committee) to reveal the internal structure of the monument and inform its rebuilding/realignment.
4. Both the structural survey and the discussions with Wessex Water have informed the drawing up of a costed renovation scheme prepared by Crickmay Stark Architects and which has secured listed building consent from Dorset Council. Click on this link to see the details of the planning application and consent:
<https://planning.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/plandisp.aspx?recno=420060>
5. The likely cost of the project will be between £50,000-£60,000 including VAT, and up-to-date estimates are being sought from the architects.
6. The Dorchester Civic Society would now like to raise the necessary funds for the project and secure consent for the works from the monument’s owner, Dorchester Town Council.
7. The renovation of the Town Pump fits well within the Town Council’s overall plan to refurbish the Cornhill area with improved surfacing and street furniture in order to provide a more attractive setting for the Pump. The Town Council has set aside funding for the overall Cornhill enhancement project, and perhaps some of this money could help part-fund the renovation of the Town Pump with other funds sought from the appropriate heritage lottery grants programme.
8. **Recommendation:** That the Town Council is requested to consider approving the Town Pump renovation project and contribute significantly towards its cost.

Ian Gosling
Dorchester Civic Society

Tony Hurley
Assistant Town Clerk