



DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL

Council Offices, 19 North Square, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1JF
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Charmaine Denny, Town Clerk

16th July 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 21st JULY 2026** commencing at **5.30pm**.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Charmaine Denny'.

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: W. Gibbons, F. Hogwood, S. Jones, 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. **ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

To elect a Chairman for the remainder of the 2026-27 Council year.

3. **ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN**

To elect a Vice Chairman for the remainder of the 2026-27 Council year.

4. **MINUTES**

To read, confirm and sign the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 14th April 2026 (enclosed).

5. **BUDGET UPDATE**

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

6. **HERITAGE TOURISM STRATEGY - UPDATE**

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

7. **HARDY 2028 PROPOSAL**

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

8. **HERITAGE OPEN DAY 2026**

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

9. **THOMAS HARDY STATUE**

To receive an update from Cllr William Gibbons and Mark Chutter.

10. **BAYEUX TAPESTRY PROGRAMME - PROPOSAL**

To receive a proposal from Claire Dixon of Dorset Museum & Art Gallery (enclosed).

11. **THOMAS HARDY VICTORIAN FAIR 2026 – FEEDBACK REPORT**

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

12. **ONGOING PROJECTS**

To receive update reports on the following matters:

- a) Town Pump enhancement - update from Dorchester Civic Society (I. Gosling).
- b) Blue Plaque at 51 High West Street update – Mark Chutter.

13. **UPDATE FROM MEMBERS**

To receive updates from members and partners.

14. **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.

15. **URGENT ITEMS**

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

ITEM 4: MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

DORCHESTER JOINT HERITAGE COMMITTEE

14th APRIL 2026

At a Meeting of the Dorchester Joint Heritage Committee held on 14th April 2026:

PRESENT:

Dorchester Town Council	Councillors:	G. Jones (Chair) F. Kent-Ledger S. Jones S. Biles D. Taylor
	Officers:	M. Manley
Dorset Council	Councillors:	L. Fry R. Major R. Biggs
Dorset Museum & Art Gallery		C. Dixon
Local Nature Reserve		L. Poulsen
Dorset Council - Archaeology		S. Wallis
Dorchester Civic Society		I. Gosling
Dorchester Civic Society		J. Doak
Dorset History Centre		S. Johnston
Thomas Hardy Society		M. Chutter
Dorchester Chamber of Business		R. Hattersley
Dorchester Association		M. Rice
KeeP 106		A. Worth

39. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor R. Tarr (Dorset Council), A. Harrison, V. Smith and J. Wallis.

40. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 20th January 2026, a copy of which had been circulated, were confirmed and signed.

41. **DECLARATION OF PREDETERMINATION**

None were declared.

42. **BUDGET UPDATE**

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

about A. Braidwood's contribution in the Victorian Fair and Matilda Manley explained that he was co-ordinating the musical performers for the event.

RESOLVED

That the budget update be noted.

43. **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 Discover Dorchester's social media accounts were attracting more followers. A new competition was being run in conjunction with Visit Dorset to promote 'dog-friendly' Dorchester with contributions to the prize from several local businesses. A new full-page advert for Dorchester was being paid for in Resort magazine.

RESOLVED

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

44. **HARDY 100TH ANNIVERSARY PROJECT**

Matilda Manley provided an update on the development of the funding bid for the Hardy 100th anniversary events in 2028. The preference is to keep the total value of funding sought to just under the National Lottery Heritage Fund's £250,000 threshold for small grants. The project will include a 'refresh' of the Hardy information signs around the town. Cllr Stella Jones requested that improved gateway signage (with references to Hardy) be considered on the main roads coming into the town. It was agreed that a funding request for improved gateway signage would be presented to the Committee's meeting in July.

Mark Chutter highlighted the proposed service commemorating Hardy to be held in Westminster Abbey in 2028. The Abbey choir would be taking part along with the actor Anton Lesser.

45. **HERITAGE OPEN DAY 2026**

The Assistant Town Clerk presented proposals for Heritage Open Day in September 2026.

RESOLVED

That the Committee agreed that Heritage Open Day in Dorchester takes place on Sunday 13th September 2026 and that a budget of £2,500 be allocated to support the event.

46. **HISTORY OF DORCHESTER FACEBOOK PAGE**

Joe Doak of the Dorchester Civic Society gave a presentation on the Society's highly successful 'history of Dorchester' Facebook page. This account currently had over 9,700 followers and its pages had been viewed over 2.36 million times within the last 12 months. This Facebook page required considerable input from Society members but helped to generate more material (photos and memories) from local residents. The Committee thanked Joe and the other

members of the Society for their hard work in developing such a valuable resource.

47. **BAYEUX TAPESTRY EVENTS PROGRAMME**

Claire Dixon of Dorset Museum & Art Gallery presented initial proposals for a programme of events at the museum and in Dorchester to complement the Bayeux tapestry exhibition in London. This programme would include working with local schools to create a 'Dorchester tapestry' and an exhibition in partnership with The Keep Military Museum. The Committee welcomed a proposal by Claire Dixon to bring forward a detailed project plan and funding request to the Committee's meeting in July.

48. **THOMAS HARDY STATUE**

The Assistant Town Clerk presented proposals from the Thomas Hardy Society for the relocation of the statue of Thomas Hardy. Mark Chutter and Cllr William Gibbons presented the Society's case for relocating the statue away from Top o' Town – which had been developed by the volunteers of the Society. Cllr Les Fry accepted the limitations of the current site but felt that more work was needed to identify alternatives. A statement by Cllr Kent-Ledger, opposing the relocation of the statue, was read out by the Chair. Cllr Stella Jones explained that previous proposals to relocate the statue, over the last 50 years, has been rejected for good reasons. If funding was available, then perhaps an additional statue or memorial to Hardy could be considered for another part of the town. Cllr Biggs considered the current location to be the right one as it was a prominent location along the line of the Roman town walls and at the entrance to the town. Ian Gosling suggested that the statue was well-positioned as visitors walking between the museums (and up to The Keep) would pass by on their way.

Sam Johnston suggested that the Committee might wish to support the maintenance / cleaning of the William Barnes statue outside St Peter's Church.

Following the discussion, the Committee declined the request to ask Dorchester Town Council to consider relocating the Thomas Hardy statue.

49. **REFURBISHMENT OF TOWN PUMP**

Ian Gosling presented a proposal from the Dorchester Civic Society for the refurbishment of the Town Pump at Cornhill – including the reinstatement of a water supply and drinking fountain. The proposal was welcomed by the Committee.

RESOLVED

That Dorchester Town Council be requested to support the Dorchester Civic Society proposals and contribute significantly towards the costs.

50. **UPDATES FROM MEMBERS**

Dorchester Civic Society: Rob Hattersley is giving a talk to the Society on the Reconnection Dorchester project and its research into suitable historic properties.

Dorset Council archaeology service – Steve Wallis reported that the Roman Town House had been cleaned and that Sam Scriven was researching the origins of the stone tesserae used in the mosaics.

Dorset Museum & Art Gallery. Claire Dixon reported that in order to meet a challenging financial situation, the organisation had made several staff redundant but that its focus was on protecting its core functions. Maintenance work was proceeding on the Victorian Hall and there was liaison with English Heritage with regard to tours of Maiden Castle.

Dorset History Centre. Sam Johnston reported that the Centre has secured a stage one grant from the Lottery of £600,000 to develop its ambitious scheme for £3.8 million of capital improvements.

Dorchester Association. Michael Rice reported that the Association was organising its day school on 31st October 2026 on the theme of maritime archaeology and its relation to the maritime history of Dorset.

Dorchester Chamber of Commerce. Rob Hattersley reported that the Reconnection Dorchester project was currently looking at the former Lloyd's Bank building and is enquiring about potential Lottery funding.

Cllr David Taylor was still working of the Dorchester (Boston) 400th anniversary commemorations and a proposal would come to a future meeting of the Committee.

Cllr Stella Jones reported that the Town Council was now operating Dorchester's Fairfield and Cornhill markets and these had the potential to be significant attractions for the town.

51. **QUESTIONS**

None were raised.

52. **URGENT ITEMS**

None were raised.

Chair.....

ITEM 5:

DORCHESTER JOINT HERITAGE COMMITTEE – 21st JULY 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.

Statement of Accounts			
Year ended 31st March 2027			
		Activities	Events
		£	£
	Balance Brought forward as at 1st April 2026	3,589.37	17,812.16
Income & Expenditure			
Contributions in Year			
20/04/2026	DTC Annual Contribution for Activities	3,000.00	
20/04/2026	DTC Heritage Events Contribution		8,500.00
		3,000.00	8,500.00
Expenditure in Year			
02/04/2026	Wallis Agency - Dora Dormouse mini-site hosting	70.00	
18/05/2026	Repayment from THVF account		-262.50
18/05/2026	Thomas Hardy Victorian Street Fair (net of income)		6,766.72
		70.00	6,504.22
Balance		6,519.37	19,807.54
	Total Balance		26,327.31
Outstanding Commitments			
	Refresh of Barracks & Marabout sign (panel only)	288.00	
	Available Balance	6,231.37	19,807.94

2. In 2026-27, Dorchester Town Council allocated to the Committee £3,000 for Activities and £8,000 for Events.
3. Elsewhere in this agenda, a report on the Heritage Open Day 2026 event is proposing a budget allocation of £3,000 from the Committee's Events budget and the Dorset Museum's Bayeux Tapestry Project is requesting a grant of £5,000 from the activities budget.

Assistant Town Clerk
Dorchester Town Council

ITEM 6:

DORCHESTER JOINT HERITAGE COMMITTEE – 21st JULY 2026 HERITAGE TOURISM STRATEGY UPDATE

The last Tourism Partnership meeting was hosted by Kingston Maurward estate and was well attended. The morning meeting time is working well for lots of people. However, the meeting was quite long though and the Tourism Development Officer will be working with the Chair to revise the agenda items for the next meeting.

The Tourism Development Officer gave an update and the key points were:

- New Poundbury Architecture Leaflet has been completed and now rolled out.
- 4th Dorchester 'Shop Front of the Season' Awards open – Summer (opens Friday 10th June).
- Thomas Hardy Victorian Fair was successful! Ruby Granger's (influencer) video is up and on approx. 50k views as of 7/7/26.
- Kite Festival rescheduled for 25th July 2026. Postponed due to high winds.

Mark Tattershall provided a report for Dorchester Arts' Helios event. Over 8000 people came to visit Helios. Footfall stats show visitors came from all over the UK.

The partnership reviewed the Dorchester Walking Festival 2026 evaluation report. 52 guided walks taking place over 9 days. 703 tickets sold. 23 volunteer walk leaders, offering one or more walks. Overall rating for this year's Walking Festival – 4.67 (out of 5). Overall rating for this year's Walk Leaders – 4.77 (out of 5). Most of the group agreed that the walking festival should happen again next year and made some recommendations for the festival next year.

Summer 2026 tourism partnership campaigns are:

- *Show Off Your Dorchester* - Visitor data shows 42% of people staying in Dorchester are visiting family and friends. Targeted messaging and communication with people who live in Dorchester. Events to invite your family and friends to come down for. Content will include summery vibrant images and reels, on street interviews, polls, blog itineraries.
- *Stop Off in Dorchester* – Stop off in Dorchester on your way to Cornwall and Devon and you will want to come back. Content will include targeted ads based on location (focused on Southeast England).

The tourism partnership also discussed the Hardy 2028 Heritage Lottery Bid. This will be discussed in a separate Heritage Committee agenda item later in this meeting.

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 7:

DORCHESTER JOINT HERITAGE COMMITTEE – 21st JULY 2026 **HARDY 2028 PROPOSAL**

The Tourism Development Officer and partners in the Heritage Committee and Tourism Partnership are working together on a Heritage Lottery Bid to mark the 100th anniversary of the death of Thomas Hardy.

This report to Heritage Committee provides details of bid proposal and seeks approval for allocation of tourism partnership and heritage committee funds to act as match funding for this bid.

The Tourism Partnership would like to seek approval from the Heritage Committee to allocate £15,000 of the remaining £26,253.12 in the Heritage Tourism budget to act as match funding for the “Welcome to Hardy's Heartland” subproject. This project involved branding, marketing and trail signage and printed materials, murals and bike route. It would be delivered by the Dorchester Tourism Development Officer.

The mural element of this project (two murals in central Dorchester celebrating Dorchester's links to Thomas Hardy) could be excluded from the BID if the Heritage Committee would like to see these done sooner. This will also make the bid simpler because it won't need to include all the paperwork for this work.

The Bid proposal includes a £10,000 match funding allocation from the Heritage Committee budget for the Thomas Hardy Victorian Street Fair in 2028.

1. HARDY 2028 PROJECT OVERVIEW

- Project Title - Hardy Heartland – A 100-year Legacy
 - Project Lead –Dorchester Town Council are the project leads.
 - Partners include Dorset Museum & Art Gallery, Dorset History Centre, National Trust, Thomas Hardy Society, New Hardy Players, The Grand Bard of Dorset, Dorchester Community actors, directors and folk musicians.
 - Project need - 2028 marks the centenary of the death of Thomas Hardy. Hardy lived and died in the Dorchester area. His heart is buried here; it is Hardy's Heartland and the centre of Hardy's literary Wessex.

Hardy was an internationally acclaimed poet and novelist. The Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition were both pallbearers at his funeral in Westminster Abbey.

Yet, if you drove through or past Dorchester (Hardy's Casterbridge) today, you wouldn't know that you were visiting Hardy's Heartland. What is present to celebrate him is out of date and/or disjointed and not fitting for this international literary treasure.

Dorchester's Youth Council members are not interested in the town's connection to Thomas Hardy. In a consultation event young people made jokes about the pervasiveness of Thomas Hardy in local branding and culture. Guided walks about Thomas Hardy are frequently the least popular in town events.

The risk is the loss of Thomas Hardy's importance to future generations. This project will ensure his legacy continues. To reshape our relationship, build pride and connection.

2028 is the centenary of equal suffrage. Hardy's opinions on equal suffrage and his relationships with women will also be explored through this project with the community.

2. SUB PROJECTS

Welcome to Hardy's Heartland

1. A proper welcome to Hardy's Heartland. Led by Dorchester Town Council – Dorchester Tourism Partnership.
 - New signage and trail map linking Hardy sites in and around Dorchester on foot.
 - A brand for promoting sustainable tourism to Hardy Heartland and to link all of the project elements together into one cohesive project.
 - A marketing budget for promoting sustainable travel to experience Hardy's Heartland.
 - The creation of a Hardy cycle route for road cyclists that takes in the Wessex landscape and key Hardy sites. Thomas Hardy loved to cycle. Promotion and marketing for this route.
 - Two Hardy murals in central Dorchester to increase the everyday visibility and connection to Hardy.
2. Project Coordination to ensure the cross working of project partners, collective evaluation, communications and on time delivery. Led by Officer based at Dorchester Town Council.

Hardy and Women

3. Curate and show a Hardy 2028 exhibition with a focus on Hardy's women. This is an opportunity not only to commemorate a literary icon, but to reshape how his story is told for generations to come. Based primarily on our own collection, a key loan would be requested from Yale University, reuniting Hardy's notebooks for the first time. Led by Dorset Museum & Art Gallery.
4. Engage and empower of women in the Dorchester community who may not typically engage with heritage or cultural programmes through 10 group sessions using the Give Voice methodology. In these sessions women will use guided storytelling, writing and spoken expression exercises to explore heritage themes, relationship between women's voices past and present, drawing on the suffrage movement, the social context of women's lives in Dorset, and the literary heritage of Thomas Hardy. In particular, the project will explore the women who influenced Hardy's writing and how women's voices were represented, constrained or overlooked during that period. Led by Jawbone Collective.

Interpreting Hardy

5. Publish a book which includes essays on fifty key items in the Hardy collection. A legacy for the Hardy Archive cataloguing project of 2024-5 in which over 5,500 catalogue entries were published on online archives catalogue. Led by Dorset History Centre.

6. Interpret Hardy's Bedroom at Max Gate (the actual room in which he passed away 100 years ago in 2028), Its adjoining Dressing room and then the Hallway, Landing and Stairs that leads to these rooms. Allowing visitors to experience these rooms as they may have appeared at the time of Hardy's death in 1928, providing deeper insight into his life and final years. Led by National Trust.

Youth engagement through poetry, theatre and performance

7. Community Play based on a Hardy short story, 'The Son's Veto'. This story focusses on the relationship between a mother and son in the face of his more privileged position and greater education. Its themes of social mobility through higher education and the challenges of women's independence are well-suited to modern interpretation and to encouraging reflection from the participants. There will be opportunities for young people from a range of backgrounds to work together with professionals to create a high-quality performance and to develop skills in teamwork, public performance, interpretation, film and photography and social media. Led by Dorset History Centre.

8. Hardy Theatre Trail - Rather than recreating Hardy's world, this project invites a new generation to respond to it. Work with five secondary schools in the Dorchester area, delivering structured workshops that explore:

- The social pressures in Hardy's novels and their modern equivalents
- Issues of gender, class, fate, education, climate and inequality
- What young people in Dorset today feel constrained by or are fighting for

The concerns raised by students will directly inform six commissioned emerging writers from Dorset. These writers will create short response pieces (10–15 minutes each), inspired by Hardy but rooted firmly in contemporary experience. Each piece will link to one of his 6 most famous novels and 6 themes will be chosen after the workshop period. The result will be a one-day, town-wide theatre trail in late spring/early summer 2028. Led by Penny Levick and Alastair Braidwood.

9. A Centenary Memorial Service of Thomas Hardy in Poets' Corner, Westminster Abbey. Musicians and performers from Dorchester will join Westminster Abbey Choir to perform in this very special service. A coach of young people Dorchester schools will attend the service to further nurture the literary links of Hardy. Led by The Hardy Society.
10. Poetry in Schools workshops - Professional poets directly into schools to introduce students to Thomas Hardy's work and empower them to respond with their own creative voices. Proving that the heritage of Hardy is dynamic and relevant in our contemporary society and landscape. 20 half-day school visits which will include performances, guided interactive workshops and activities. Direct, meaningful cultural engagement for 400–600 secondary school students. If most of the schools opt for a performance to a large body of students, indirect engagement will be up to approx. 2500-3000 students. Led by Grand Bard of Dorset and Mark Chutter.

11.

Reigniting connections to Hardy's rural heritage and landscape

12. Reestablish a connection to Hardy's Birthplace and the rural crafts he loved through woodland charcoal making and sketching with charcoal sessions (Hardy loved to sketch). Led by Hardy's Birthplace and Visitors Centre, Dorset Council.
13. Celebrate Hardy's love of folk music and connect young people to Dorset Heritage Folk and dance traditions. Hardy himself played the fiddle and his family tunebooks are a snapshot of the music being played and enjoyed in Dorset in the 1830s and '40s. Led by Alastair Braidwood. There will be:
 - Mass Ceilidh workshops gathering primary school students together
 - Youth folk band workshops to learn tunes from the Hardy family tunebooks.
 - Family ceilidhs - hour-long session for young families to learn folk dances together, promoting the enjoyment of ceilidhs. The main ceilidhs allow people of all ages to enjoy dancing together, crossing the generations
 - Tunebook edition - a published edition of the complete Hardy tune books along with simple arrangements of every tune with chords, bassline and harmony, digital download recordings of the tunes.
14. Photography Exhibition - Unmasking Hardy: Portraits in the Wessex Landscape - The project will consider the relevance of Hardy and his writing in the twenty-first century alongside the themes of his work such as the family, class, religion, women , mental health . There will also be a focus on the farming community within his Wessex with reference to the poetry and novels. Portable exhibition to take to Westminster Abbey and throughout Dorset during 2028 to raise awareness of Hardy through the lens of relevant themes to a twenty-first century audience- what does Hardy mean to people.
15. Thomas Hardy Victorian Street Fair 2028.

3. TIMELINE

- Bid submitted Summer 2026.
- Start December 2026 - Hardy interpretation, branding, trail and other project prep work until December 2027
- January - December 2028 - Main project delivery in commemorative year
- Complete April 2029 - Use Spring to pull together project reports, evaluation and embed legacy.

4. Budget

<u>Sub Project Title and Description</u>	<u>Requested</u>	<u>Match</u>	<u>In kind</u>
Welcome to Hardy's Heartland Branding, Marketing and Signage, printed materials, murals and bike route.	£10,000	£15,000	Officer time
Overall Coordinator 2-year part time (2 days per week) coordination role	£38,600		
Dorset Museum & Art Gallery – “Thomas Hardy and the Women who made him” exhibition	£50,000	£50,000	£50,000
Women’s Voices of Dorchester sessions	£6,000		
Hardy Revisited: Fifty Highlights from the Thomas Hardy Collection. published book	£16,082		
National Trust - Interpreting the World of Thomas Hardy at Max Gate.	£45,000	£20,000	Staffing Cost (internal allocation): £10,000
Dorset History Centre with Angel Exit Theatre and Dorchester Arts - The Son’s Veto.	£28,276		£3,980- rehearsal space and venue hire from Dorchester Arts, project support from DHC and costumes from the New Hardy Players.
Penny Levick and Alastair Braidwood - Hardy Theatre Trail 2028	£14,600		
Thomas Hardy Society - The Centenary Memorial Service of Thomas Hardy in Poets’ Corner, Westminster Abbey	£5,000		
Schools Poetry Workshops	£20,018	£5,250	
Dorset Council – Hardy’s Birthplace and Visitors Centre – Woodland Charcoal Making Experience.	£1,410		Volunteer time, timber, use of kiln,
Alastair Braidwood – Hardy Perennial Folk	£6,910	£0	In-kind room use and printing from Dorchester Arts.

Photography exhibition - Unmasking Hardy: Portraits in the Wessex Landscape	£5,000		
Thomas Hardy Victorian Street Fair	£0	£10,000	Volunteer time
	£243,296		

5. **Recommendation:** It is recommended that the Committee supports the allocation of £15,000 of the remaining £26,253 of the Heritage Tourism budget to act as match funding for the *Welcome to Hardy's Heartland* sub-project.

ITEM 8:

DORCHESTER JOINT HERITAGE COMMITTEE – 21st JULY 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. The 2025 event was achieved within the available budget of £2,500 and so a similar amount is proposed for Heritage Open Day 2026.
4. Many partners have already volunteered to lead guided walks and arrange guided tours of their historic buildings. There should, therefore, be a wide-ranging programme with activities in the town centre, Poundbury and Fordington. Dorset Museum & Art Gallery can offer free tours subject to receiving a grant from the Committee. Once the details of these tours are confirmed, then a suitable allocation can be made from the budget for the event agreed by the Committee.
5. The programme of events will be promoted via the national Heritage Open Day website, via the Dorset Architectural Heritage Week brochure, and the Discover Dorchester website – with bookings via Eventbrite.
6. **Recommendation:** That the Committee agrees that Heritage Open Day in Dorchester takes place on Sunday 13th September 2026 and that a budget of £3,000 is allocated to support the event.

**Assistant Town Clerk
Dorchester Town Council**

ITEM 10:

DORCHESTER JOINT HERITAGE COMMITTEE – 21st JULY 2026 BAYEUX TAPESTRY PROGRAMME - PROPOSAL

DORSET NATURAL
HISTORY AND
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
SOCIETY

Dorset
Museum
& Art Gallery

Joint Heritage Committee, Dorchester Town Council

Request for funding support - Bayeux Tapestry Programme

The context



The loan of the Bayeux Tapestry to the British Museum from the French government is a historic moment.

It will be on display in London between September 2026 and July 2027, and we want this to be a significant, resonant and relevant moment for people throughout the UK, not just in London. By working in partnership with the British Museum, we are helping to build a programme that touches all parts of the country. It will mark the exhibition not only as a historic loan, but as a memorable and significant event which extends to the entire nation.

The British Museum will provide groundbreaking and beautiful audiovisual content developed in parallel with the London exhibition for display in DMAG. Paired with high-resolution images of the Bayeux Tapestry and text interpretation from the Bayeux Tapestry curators, this will allow us to bring out the story of the tapestry, as presented in London, alongside our own displays and programming. The British Museum is also leading a national celebration of craft and making inspired by the Bayeux Tapestry.

The British Museum is also delivering a range of activities and opportunities for schools and learners, and there are chances for us to get involved.

On 14 October 2026 we will be broadcasting live into hundreds of schools and classrooms across the UK, bringing the story and experience of the Bayeux Tapestry to life in an inspiring, curriculum-linked event that meets KS2-3 learners where they are.

The Bayeux Tapestry National Programme will be supported by the British Museum Communications and Marketing teams, and their website will include a list of all partner venues taking part in the programme. The British Museum Communications and Marketing Team will be looking to the National Programme for social content, blogs and frequent pulses of press activity throughout the year. This will drive traffic to the National Programme area on the British Museum website, which in turn should drive traffic to the linked pages on our site.

National Partners

- English Heritage
- The British Library
- The National Archives

Channel Islands

- Guernsey Museums & Galleries
- Jersey Museum

East

- Colchester + Ipswich Museums Service
- Epping Forest District Museum
- Ipswich County Library
- Norwich Castle

East Midlands

- Lincoln Museum and Art Gallery
- The Picture House, Grantham
- Lincoln Cathedral London
- Fulham Palace • The Migration Museum
- Valence House Museum

North East

- Hartlepool Borough Council
- Tees Valley Museums
- The Maltings (Berwick) Trust and Berwick Record Office
- Ushaw Historic House, Chapels and Gardens

North West

- Knutsford Heritage Centre
- Lancashire County Museum Service
- Macclesfield Silk Museum and Paradise Mill

- Tullie (Tullie House Museum & Art Gallery Trust)
- Williamson Art Gallery
- Grosvenor Museum

Northern Ireland

- Carrickfergus Museum

Scotland

- Dovecot Studios
- The Great Tapestry of Scotland
- Stirling Smith Museum

South East

- 1066 Country Marketing
- Berkhamsted Castle
- Canterbury Cathedral
- Rochester Cathedral
- Battle Abbey
- Hampshire Cultural Trust
- Hastings Borough Council
- Hastings Museum & Art Gallery
- Leominster Priory
- Bodiam Castle (National Trust)
- Oxford University Department for Continuing Education
- Reading Museum
- St Mary's Battle
- The D-Day Story
- Battle Museum of Local History
- Hastings Castle
- De La Warr Pavilion
- Bexhill Museum
- East Sussex College

South West

- American Museum & Gardens
- Corfe Castle (National Trust)
- Dorset Museum & Art Gallery
- Museum of Cornish Life
- Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery
- Somerset Heritage Centre

- STEAM Museum/Museum & Art Swindon
- The Box
- The Roman Baths
- Tewkesbury Abbey

West Midlands

- The Herbert
- Herefordshire Museums & Galleries
- The Nicholson Institute

Yorkshire & Humber

- Boston Cultural Quarter
- Bolling Hall Museums
- Champney Treasure House Museum
- Leeds Art Gallery
- Dorman Museum
- National Coal Mining Museum for England
- North Lincolnshire Museum
- Woodend Studios and Gallery
- Wakefield Museums and Castles
- York Museums Trust

Dorset Museum & Art Gallery Proposal

To support this national programme, we would like to undertake three strands of activity:

1. A display in the community cabinet in the People's Dorset Gallery

In partnership with the Keep Military Museum, we will display objects related to the Dorset Regiment during the Second World War. We will use these collections to highlight the role the regiment played, as the first to enter Bayeux as part of the liberation force in 1944, which led to our two towns being twinned.

2. A programme of talks

In partnership with the Twinning Society, we will present a series of free daytime talks in the Alice Ellen Cooper Dean Community Space, that reveal more about the stories of Dorchester and Bayeux, celebrating our connection both past and present.

3. A tapestry for Dorchester

We will recruit an artist or practitioner to work with all primary schools in Dorchester, to create a Dorchester tapestry. This will be displayed in the Alice Ellen Cooper Dean Community Space and all participating schools will be invited to participate in the live broadcast on 14 October 2026, in the Victorian Hall at DMAG.

Costs

We estimate the full programme will cost £10,000 including staff time as follows:

£500 – labels and interpretation for the display in People’s Dorset

£500 – speaker fees for talks programme

£2,500 – freelance fees to create a Dorchester tapestry

£2,500 – resources to create and display the Dorchester tapestry

£5,000 – staff costs to support the programme

We kindly request £5,000 from the Joint Heritage Committee to support this project. Any financial support will be acknowledged in our interpretation and on our website.

Timeline

Date	Activity
Sept 2026	All primary schools in Dorchester approached and invited to participate in creating the Dorchester tapestry
Oct 2026	Live broadcast for schools, linking to British Museum and the tapestry
Nov 2026	Freelance practitioner recruited to support schools project
Jan – Jul 2027	New display installed in People’s Dorset
Mar – Jul 2027	Talks programme delivered with at least 5 free daytime talks
Jan – Mar 2027	Tapestry is created with schools
Easter – Jul 2027	Tapestry is displayed at DMAG in the free to visit Alice Ellen Cooper Dean community space

ITEM 11:

DORCHESTER JOINT HERITAGE COMMITTEE – 21st JULY 2026 THOMAS HARDY VICTORIAN FAIR 2026 – FEEDBACK REPORT

1. The Thomas Hardy Victorian Fair took place on Sunday 31st May 2026 and, as agreed, took place along the length of South Street with additional activities in Brewery Square
2. The event was organised so that there were three performance areas:

- The Town Pump for music (e.g. Wessex Military Band), the end of the wreath laying parade, and the hokey cokey.
- Outside Barclays Bank – mainly for dance
- Outside the United Reform Church for live music, choirs and readings.

In between, these three 'stages' there were vintage fairground games, a mechanical organ, the Nothe Fort Garrison and food/craft stalls. The event also received excellent support from the Dorchester Civic Society, Thomas Hardy Society, SPAB, and the Town Crier, who was active throughout the day promoting the Fair. At Brewery Square there was the Hayden Princess steam engine, blacksmith and Punch & Judy.

3. In general, the weather was good and the Fair was well attended with high level of visitors throughout the day. The Town Council's footfall counter in South Street recorded a total footfall for the day of over 14,000, which is 50% more than the previous Sunday when the Artisan Market took place. Those hospitality businesses that were open were very busy based on anecdotal information.
4. The Tourism Development Officer also invited the online influencer Ruby Grainger and her video of her stay in Dorchester and visit to the Fair can be viewed on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N8XAtBzrgZc>. The video has been viewed 55,000 times to date. The event also features in The Guardian newspaper:



5. The event was allocated a budget of up to £10,000 by the Committee and attracted £500 sponsorship from the Dorchester BID and income for pitch fees for trading stalls. The net cost of the event was £6,504.22.
6. The event organisers from the Town Council (Assistant Town Clerk and Tourism Development Officers) and Alastair Braidwood have met to review the event with the aim of informing its development for 2028. The following have been noted:

Positives:

- The support from volunteers from the Rotary and other groups, particularly Mr Anthony Harrison (Town Crier) was outstanding.
- The support from team at Brewery Square was excellent and they went to great lengths to bring the Hayden Princess to the town.
- The three different performance areas worked well.
- The excellent support and contribution from the community choirs, drama groups and dancers was key to making the Fair a community event showcasing local talent.
- The hokey cokey remains hugely popular and attracts national press attention.
- The vintage fairground games were very popular with children.
- All those who participated in dancing and music were in costume and would then wander through the crowd before and after their performance adding to the historical feel of the event.
- The 'fringe' events at Tom Brown's and elsewhere were popular and extended the Fair in to other parts of the town and at other times.
- The indoor craft demonstrations at in the Victorian Hall offered a more peaceful experience for all ages and allowed visitors to experience traditional craft skills.
- The Nothe Fort Garrison were located by the War Memorial and although they had planned to parade through the Fair they were in fact very busy with a continuous stream of visitors fascinated by the costumes, weaponry and displays.

Potential improvements:

- Vintage fairground rides would be popular and increase the range of activities for families.
- More traditional market stalls with a wider variety of food and crafts.
- Although South Street is an easier location for the event, it does not provide as picturesque a background as the historic frontages of High West/East Street.
- If the event does offer indoor craft demonstrations in the Museum, then ease of access from the street could be improved along with the booking of places on demonstrations.
- Produce a printed brochure with timetable for the event.
- Encourage the public to dress in Victorian clothes – with a simple guide available online as part of the promotion. There clearly is a desire for those who like wearing period clothing to be part of a large festival.
- Better / separate promotion of the 'fringe' programme of talks and performances across the weekend.
- Perhaps engage the 'steam punk' community in a separate, fringe event – this seems to be a very popular theme.

- Some sort of parade through the fair – with music.
 - Entertainers/musicians moving through the fair (similar to the pennyfarthing).
7. The above review has highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of the 2026 events but it is clear that the event attracts a lot of attention and is a wonderful opportunity to showcase the creativity and talent of local community theatre groups and musicians. Whatever the format of the Fair in 2028, this focus on bringing together community performers as a celebration of local creativity should be a key element.
8. Looking ahead to 2028, it would seem that the best date the Fair will be Sunday 4th June. However, the matter of the date along with the venue and format of the event will be the subject of a report to the Committee early in 2027 to ensure the Fair has an appropriate place within the wider Hardy 100th anniversary celebrations.

Assistant Town Clerk
Dorchester Town Council