



DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL

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

Telephone: (01305) 266861

Charmaine Denny, Town Clerk

7th October 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 13th OCTOBER 2026** commencing at **5.30pm**.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read '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), 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 21st July 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. **HARDY 2028 PROPOSAL UPDATE**

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

6. **HERITAGE OPEN DAY 2026 - FEEDBACK**

To receive a report from the Assistant Town Clerk.

7. **NEW THOMAS HARDY STATUE**

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

8. **PAST LIVES FUTURE PROOFED**

To receive a report from Maria Gayton, Dorset History Centre.

9. **THOMAS HARDY & DORCHESTER HERITAGE BOOK TO BE PUBLISHED FOR 2028**

To receive a report from Mark Chutter, Dorset History Centre.

10. **ONGOING PROJECTS**

To receive update reports on the following matters:

- a) The Story of Dorchester – J. Doak.
- b) Town Pump enhancement - update from Dorchester Civic Society (I. Gosling).
- c) Bayeux tapestry programme - update from Claire Dixon of Dorset Museum & Art Gallery.
- d) Roman Baths interpretation.
- e) Thomas Hardy blue plaque – M. Chutter

11. **UPDATE FROM MEMBERS**

To receive updates from members and partners.

12. **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.

13. **URGENT ITEMS**

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

ITEM 2: MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

DORCHESTER JOINT HERITAGE COMMITTEE

21st July 2026

At a Meeting of the Dorchester Joint Heritage Committee held on 21st July 2026:

PRESENT:

Dorchester Town Council

Councillors: G. Jones (Chair)
W. Gibbons
F. Kent-Ledger
S. Jones
D. Taylor

Officers: T. Hurley
M. Manley

Dorset Council

Councillors: L. Fry
R. Major
R. Biggs
R. Tarr

Dorset Museum & Art Gallery
Local Nature Reserve
Dorset Council - Archaeology
Dorchester Civic Society
Dorchester Civic Society / Town Crier
Dorset History Centre
Thomas Hardy Society
Dorchester Association

C. Dixon
L. Poulsen
S. Wallis
I. Gosling
A. Harrison
C. Skinner
M. Chutter
M. Rice

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs A. Canning (Dorset Council), J. Doak, V. Smith, A. Worth and R. Hattersley

2. **ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

Cllr Gareth Jones was elected as chair of the committee for the remainder of the 2026-27 Council year.

3. **ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN**

Cllr Stella Jones was elected as vice chair of the committee for the remainder of the 2026-27 Council year.

4. **MINUTES**

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

5. **DECLARATION OF PREDETERMINATION**

None were declared.

6. **BUDGET UPDATE**

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

RESOLVED

That the budget update be noted.

7. **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 the Poundbury architectural tour leaflet had been completed and printed. The Dorchester Walking Festival had been a great success and would be run again in May 2027. The summer tourism campaign for the Partnership was on the theme of 'show off your Dorchester', encouraging residents to show any visiting friends and family all that the town had to offer. Cllr S. Jones suggested that the Partnership find a way of engaging with Airbnb hosts. Mark Chutter noted that the Thomas Hardy Conference would introduce a visitor survey.

RESOLVED

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

8. **HARDY 100TH ANNIVERSARY PROJECT**

Matilda Manley provided an update on the development of the funding bid for the Hardy 100th anniversary events in 2028 – it was intended to submit the bid soon with hope of a decision by December. One option would be to bring the Hardy mural project forward and undertake it sooner rather than later if funding could be sought.

Claire Dixon reported that the Museum had applied to the Arts Council to have its Hardy collection designated a nationally significant collection. There should be a decision in August.

RESOLVED

- a) That the Committee supports both the Hardy 100th anniversary funding bid and 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.
- b) That the Committee supports the Hardy mural project and that a budget be agreed via email to the Committee members before the next meeting.

9. **HERITAGE OPEN DAY 2026**

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

RESOLVED

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.

10. **THOMAS HARDY STATUE**

Cllr Gibbons reported on a recent site visit with the Town Clerk to discuss potential sites for a Thomas Hardy statue – either relocation of the existing or commissioning of new. The outcome was that there was no better site for the existing statue but that there was potential for a new statue in South Street or Cornhill. The Committee expressed its support for a new statue, perhaps depicting a younger Hardy, perhaps with his bicycle. Other members suggested that a statue could depict the Mayor of Casterbridge or Tess.

RESOLVED

That the Committee would welcome a costed proposal for a new Thomas Hardy statue to be brought to a future meeting by the Thomas Hardy Society.

11. **BAYEUX TAPESTRY EVENTS PROGRAMME**

Claire Dixon of Dorset Museum & Art Gallery presented a proposal for the creation of a 'Dorchester tapestry' through engagement with local schools. Cllr Fry and Taylor were both supportive of the proposal and Cllr S. Jones suggested that the Town Council could loan its twinning memorabilia to the Museum as part of the project. Cllr Biggs was also supportive and asked if any match funding would be sought – Claire Dixon stated that any grant from the Committee would be matched with officer time from both the Museum and The Keep. Cllr Tarr considered that the project would attract national interest.

RESOLVED

That the Committee agrees the allocation of a grant of £5,000 to the Dorset Museum & Art Gallery for its Dorchester tapestry project.

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

The Assistant Town Clerk presented a report on the recent Thomas Hardy Victorian Fair.

RESOLVED

That the report on the Thomas Hardy Victorian Fair be noted.

13. **ON-GOING PROJECTS**

Town Pump renovation: Ian Gosling reported that the project was moving forward and expressions of interest were being requested from suitably experienced contractors. To help

with the cost of the project to the Town Council, the Civic Society was applying to Wessex Water for a community grant.

Blue Plaque at 51 High West Street: Mark Chutter reported that he had received an expression of concern over the accuracy of the new blue plaque and that the Thomas Hardy Society would investigate and report back at a future meeting.

14. **UPDATES FROM MEMBERS**

Cllr Les Fry highlighted that The Keep Military Museum was still closed with no indication as to when repairs to the building would take place and that the Committee should urge the MoD to take action. Cllr Biggs reported that discussions were in progress and that The Keep might request support in future.

Cllr Gareth Jones reported that he had arranged for a former bailiff of the water meadows to be interviewed by the Dorset History Centre as part of an oral history project.

Dorset Council: Cllr Richard Biggs reported that arts and culture were now part of his Cabinet role and that there would be restructuring of services to strengthen the Council's approach in this area. He also reported that the Local Visitor Economy Plan for Dorset had been approved and contained a focus on heritage tourism. Cllr Biggs also reported that the 'Roman' wall at Northernhay (around Colliton Park) would be repaired in Spring 2027.

Dorchester Town Council: Tony Hurley reported on the recent cleaning of Frink's martyrs statues. Matilda Manley reported on discussion over a potential folk festival in Dorchester and that she would bring forward plans for the return of the Roman Festival in 2027.

Dorchester Civic Society: Ian Gosling reported that in August the Society would be visiting Poxwell Manor and holding a series of lectures in the autumn.

Dorset Council archaeology service – Steve Wallis reported consent was being sought to undertake testing of the mortar in the mosaic floors in the Roman Town House and help inform future repairs. Steve Wallis also reported that he was giving free talks at Dorset Museum on recent archaeological discoveries.

Dorset History Centre. Claire Skinner reported the Town Council had increased its contribution to the Centre's capital project to £10,000. The Centre was also applying to Archives Revealed for funds to catalogue the Sylvia Townsend Warner archive. On 10th September the Centre was hosting a talk about the history of Dorchester water supply.

Dorchester Association. Michael Rice reported that the Association was running a series of guided walks in Dorchester, Cerne Abbas and Lyme Regis.

Thomas Hardy Society: Mark Chutter reported that the Conference had 250 attendees and that membership of the Society had increased.

Riverside Reserve: Linda Poulsen reported on the fire that had partly destroyed the boardwalk and thanked the Town Council for planning swift repairs. There had also been an increase in anti-social behaviour along the riverside area.

15. **QUESTIONS**

None were raised.

16. **URGENT ITEMS**

None were raised.

Chair.....

ITEM 3:

**DORCHESTER JOINT HERITAGE COMMITTEE – 13th OCTOBER 2026
BUDGET UPDATE**

1. In 2026-27, Dorchester Town Council allocated to the Committee £3,000 for Activities and £8,000 for Events. The table below sets out the Committee's income and expenditure in the current financial year.

		Activities	Events
		£	£
	Balance Brought forward as at 1st April 2026	3,589.37	17,812.16
<u>Income & Expenditure</u>			
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		5,866.64
03/09/2026	The Talk About Trust - Hire of community room		15.00
20/09/2026	Mark Chutter - Heritage Day Walks		250.00
		70.00	5,869.14
Balance		6,519.37	20,443.02
	Total Balance		26,962.39
Outstanding Commitments			
	Available Balance	6,519.37	20,443.02

Assistant Town Clerk
Dorchester Town Council

ITEM 4:

DORCHESTER JOINT HERITAGE COMMITTEE – 13th OCTOBER 2026 HERITAGE TOURISM UPDATE

1. The most recent Tourism Partnership meeting was held at the Corn Exchange at the end of September and was well attended. It was good to welcome back Rachel White from the National Trust, who has been on maternity leave, and Charlotte Spracklen from Brewery Square, both of whom have not attended for a while.
2. There was a presentation from and request for funding from Ooserfest which the partnership members voted to support with a £750 grant towards organisations costs and performer fees. Presentation and business plan for Ooserfest will be circulated to the Committee separately.
3. The partnership also received a presentation from Visit Dorset on the newly adopted [LVEP Dorset Destination Management Plan](#). In its introduction, the plan states:
 - Dorset's visitor economy is a major economic driver, attracting over 22 million visitors annually and generating £1.66bn in direct spend, yet 36% of domestic overnight trips occur in July and August, demonstrating the need to spread demand more evenly across the year.
4. The Destination Management Plan (DMP) focuses on addressing seasonality, enhancing visitor spend, improving perceptions of Dorset, strengthening accessibility, embedding sustainability, and enabling sector-wide collaboration. Growth opportunities centre on two high-potential year-round markets: the Nature & Culture segment and the Active & Mindful segment. By prioritising these audiences, Dorset can leverage its outstanding natural landscapes, rich heritage, cultural offer and variety of outdoor experiences. Key actions include developing off-peak product, targeted marketing, experience mapping, and building cultural programming in quieter months. Improving data quality, empowering local businesses, and increasing Dorset's national profile are critical to unlocking long-term economic, environmental and community benefits. Delivery of the DMP will rely on coordinated partnership across the industry, facilitated by the Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP).
5. The notes and the Tourism Development Officer Updates from the last meeting and all other previous meetings can be found online at: <https://discoverdorchester.co.uk/about-us/>

**Tourism Development Officer
Dorchester Town Council**

ITEM 6:

DORCHESTER JOINT HERITAGE COMMITTEE – 13th OCTOBER 2026 HERITAGE OPEN DAY 2026 – FEEDBACK

1. Heritage Open Day (HOD) was held on 13th September.
2. On the day, the HOD co-ordination stall was at the Town Pump and was shared with the Dorchester Civic Society along with the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) and The Keep Military Museum – their kind contribution of both expertise and enthusiasm was greatly appreciated.
3. The main activities comprised:
 - tours of historic buildings (e.g. Top o' Town House, Municipal Buildings, Colliton House and Sunninghill), St Peter's Church and belltower, St George's Church and Dorset Museum;
 - guided walks around the town centre, Fordington, Poundbury and the Roman aqueduct;
 - heritage information stalls at the Town Pump.
4. The day was a great success and made possible by the following individuals: Jeremy Pope, Simon Conibear, Mark Chutter, Anthony Harrison, Steve Wallis, Steve Newman and John Lowe. In addition, Sunninghill School and the owners of Top o' Town House were very helpful in allowing public access to their historic buildings.
5. The event is relatively inexpensive and relies on the generosity of the many contributors.
6. For 2027, a request could be made (via publicity early in the year) to all the owners of historic building and sites in Dorchester to consider opening their properties for limited / supervised public access. This open invitation may result in more opportunities for the public to see buildings and sites that they can't normally access – and thereby creating an expanded offer for the day. This could supplement guided walks and museum tours.
7. The Committee is invited to provide its own feedback on HOD 2027 and suggest areas for improvement.

**Assistant Town Clerk
Dorchester Town Council**

ITEM 7:

DORCHESTER JOINT HERITAGE COMMITTEE – 13th OCTOBER 2026 PROPOSAL FOR NEW THOMAS HARDY MEMORIAL STATUE

1. At the last meeting in June the Heritage committee fully endorsed the proposal to commission a new statue of Thomas Hardy to commemorate the 100th Anniversary of his death in January 1928.
2. The Thomas Hardy Society (THS) Council of Management met on 26th September and agreed that the project would be led by the Society. A memorial committee was agreed co-chaired by William Gibbons and Mark Chutter with a total of six members. The first meeting took place on 5th October.
3. The co-chairs have met with two sculptors, Sean Hedges-Quinn from Suffolk and Brendon Murless from Dorset and both of them have submitted sketches. The committee have decided to go with Sean Hedges-Quinn as the more conventional and traditional sculptor. He is well known for his statues of football managers Bobby Robson and Alf Ramsey, and of Captain Mainwaring from Dad's Army
4. The main criteria is that the position of a life size statue should be in a place that is visible and accessible to the public in the heart of historic Dorchester. Hardy should not be facing vehicle traffic. The redeveloped Cornhill area around the Town Pump is the best position to fulfil these conditions
5. The plan is to depict the younger Hardy either in his thirties when he wrote Far from the Madding Crowd or in his forties when he wrote the Mayor of Casterbridge. This will contrast with the existing statue which depicts Hardy as an old man in his 80s. He was bearded between 1870 and 1890. He did not start bicycling until around 1895, when he was in his mid-50s. We are looking at the options of him standing or sitting on a Bench. **Please see drawings Appendix A.**
6. In terms of timing we need 9 months to 1 year to complete a bronze statue, so as long as we can start before say Feb/March next year then May 2028 is easily acceptable as an unveiling date. Payment terms are usually £12,000 +VAT to produce a maquette (miniature) of the proposed pose of Thomas Hardy and then, once the maquette/pose has been approved, we need to pay 40% of the remaining total budget at the commencement of the project, then 40% on the approval of the finished full size clay statue. Then the final 20% on completion of the finished bronze.
7. The installation date would be May 2028 to coincide with the Victorian Fare. We hope to be in a position to commission the work early in the New Year. The cost quoted is approximately £80k plus VAT plus extras
8. **Funding opportunities:** Thomas Hardy Society (over 700 members) , local businesses, national companies, Heritage Lottery Fund, Dorchester Town Council, Dorset Council etc.

9. In the meantime, I have consulted Ian Gosling from the Civic Society, and Anthony Williams/Rachel Osborne from Crickmay Stark Architects.
10. **Why does Dorchester need two statues of Thomas Hardy?** The THS have looked at moving the existing Statue, as it could have been in the right position when installed in 1931, but is now surrounded by heavy traffic. There was some opposition to moving and it would be expensive. An inspection by `WG , the Town clerk and the Deputy concluded that there was no other suitable site for the statue other than the re-developed Fairfield Market , which is away from the historic centre.
11. The Society feels it is very important to commemorate Hardy's death with a new memorial, which should generate national publicity and increased visitors to our town. The Committee's views and feedback on this proposal are requested.

William Gibbons
Thomas Hardy Society

APPENDIX A – OPTIONS FOR DESIGN OF THOMAS HARDY STATUE



THOMAS HARDY - YOUNG



THOMAS HARDY - 2-11