

DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL

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.....