

DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL

DORCHESTER JOINT HERITAGE COMMITTEE

15th APRIL 2025

At a Meeting of the Dorchester Joint Heritage Committee held on 15th April 2025:

PRESENT:

Dorchester Town Council	Councillors:	S. Biles G. Jones (Chair) F. Kent-Ledger
	Officers:	T. Hurley M. Manley
Dorset Council	Councillors:	R. Biggs R. Major R. Tarr
Dorset Museum & Art Gallery		C. Dixon
Dorchester Association		M. Rice
Local Nature Reserve		L. Poulsen
Dorset Council - Archaeology		S. Wallis
Dorchester Civic Society / Town Crier		A. Harrison
Dorchester Civic Society		J. Doak
Dorset History Centre		M. Gayton
Blue Badge Tour Guide		J. Wallis
Shire Hall Historic Courthouse Museum		V. Smith
Dorchester Heritage Magazine		M. Woodgate
Thomas Hardy Society		M. Chutter (attended online)
Athelhampton House		G. Keating
Dorchester Sheroes Project		A. Pearson

53. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr S. Jones, Cllr L. Fry, I. Gosling (Dorchester Civic Society), R. White (National Trust) and A. Worth (KeeP 106),

54. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 21st January 2025, a copy of which had been circulated, were confirmed and signed.

55. **DECLARATION OF PREDETERMINATION**

None were declared.

56. **BUDGET UPDATE**

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

RESOLVED

- a) That the budget update be noted.

57. **ROMAN FESTIVAL FEEDBACK**

Matilda Manley circulated a summary of key facts about the festival and its impact on the town. 68% of visitors to the festival had come from outside of Dorchester.

RESOLVED

- b) That the feedback report be noted.

58. **HERITAGE TOURISM STRATEGY - UPDATE**

Matilda Manley presented an update on progress with the Heritage Tourism Strategy and the work of the Tourism Partnership. The plans for the Spring promotional campaign were presented to the Committee.

RESOLVED

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

59. **HERITAGE OPEN DAY 2025**

Tony Hurley presented updated plans for Heritage Open Day in Dorchester on Sunday 21st September. Virginia Smith indicated that Shire Hall could be open to the public on that day. Cllr David Taylor also offered his services for any guided walks. Joy Wallis had agreed to lead various walks and was currently working to get access to buildings and sites that were not normally open to the public.

RESOLVED

That the proposals and budget for Heritage Open Day 2025 be agreed.

60. **HERITAGE PLAQUE AT DORCHESTER WEST STATION**

Tony Hurley presented a request from the Friends of Dorchester West Station for a grant of up to £500 for a heritage information sign to be installed at the station. It was considered by the committee that the project would be supported subject to its agreement to the wording/content and suggestions were made for information that the sign could include – such as photographs from the Dorset History Centre on the movement of German prisoners of war through the station in the First World War.

RESOLVED

That a grant of up to £500 be awarded to the Friends of Dorchester West Station for its heritage information sign project subject to the Committee agreeing the wording.

61. **MOYNTON ROAD COMMEMORATIVE STONE, THOMAS HARDYE GARDENS**

Tony Hurley reported on a request from Cllr Stella Jones for the Committee to support the renovation of the commemorative stone on Moynton Road in Thomas Hardy Gardens. A quote had been requested from a stonemason for the re-carving of the lettering. The Committee discussed the matter and considered that funding should be requested from Betterment Homes or The Old Hardyens before the Committee considers the matter further.

62. **ONGOING PROJECTS**

Updates on the following were received:

- a) **Roman Baths Interpretation Project.** Tony Hurley reported that the project was on hold until a new member of staff was in place at Dorset Museum for the project to liaise with. It was reported that a public request had brought forward several local people who remembered working on the excavation, and had photographs of the site, and their memories were going to be recorded by the Dorset History Centre. The long-term aspiration to partially excavate an area of the baths was discussed although the challenges this faced were considered. The delay to the publication of the excavation report was also discussed.
- b) **Town Pump enhancement proposals.** Joe Doak reported on the Civic Society's project to enhance the Town Pump and confirmed Wessex Water's commitment to re-establishing a water fountain/dispenser in the structure. An update on designs were awaited from Crickmay Stark.
- c) **The Dorchester Story project.** Joe Doak reported on the Civic Society's project to develop online content initially about Roman Dorchester with support from a students from Bournemouth University. Initial drafts should be available by May and would eventually be hosted on Discover Dorchester.
- d) **Sylvia Townsend Warner stature project.** It was confirmed by Anya Pearson that the £60,000 target for the project had been reached and that further funds were being collected for both the on-going maintenance of the statue and for the cataloguing of the author's archive in the Dorset History Centre. Mark Chutter expressed his thanks to Visible Women UK for their support for the project.

63. **UPDATES FROM PARTNERS**

Dorchester Association: Michael Rice provided an update on the summer school in 17th May and offered to circulate the programme.

Athelhampton House: Giles Keating reported on a project to record recitals of fifty of Thomas Hardy's short love poems for You Tube and for their to be a launch event at Athelhampton on 9th May.

Thomas Hardy Society: Miranda Woodgate reported on the Society's new monthly newsletter and offered to circulate subscription details. Mark Chutter added that the study day had been a great success and that the Birthday Weekend conference in late May would include a performance of *A Beautiful Thread* at Stinsford Church.

Shire Hall: Virginia Smith stated that the museum currently has a Tolkein exhibition called *The Magic of Middle Earth* and more events were programmed for later in the year.

Dorset Museum & Art Gallery. Claire Dixon reported that the Museum's financial position had improved but there was still much to do. It was understood that the Arts Council would be reviewing its national portfolio funding soon. The Jane Austen exhibition would open in the June and an events programme was being planned with commercial sponsorship. The Museum was involved in the consultation on the future management of the World Heritage Site. The repairs to the Victorian Hall roof would commence in the autumn and extend into 2026. The new museums' passport had been launched, with Committee funding, and ordered the public a discount if visiting several museums.

Cllr Richard Biggs reported that Dorset had been given approval by Visit England to establish a Local Visitor Economy Partnership and this would open up the opportunity for further government funding.

Cllr Roland Tarr noted that a key element to the history of Dorset was its fishing ports / industry and links with Newfoundland.

Cllr David Taylor highlighted the forthcoming anniversary of the established of the Dorchester near Boston in the United States in 1630 and offered to bring a report with proposals for marking this anniversary. Claire Dixon highlighted that this period of history was particularly complex given the impact of the new settlement on the indigenous Massachusetts people.

Dorset History Centre – Maria Gayton reported on the new 'From the Stacks' monthly sessions which were aimed at opening up the collections to the public. Future events hosted by the Centre included a performance by the Wyvern musicians, a talk on the Drax estate by Paul Lashmar, and a women's history research event in June. Details of all these events to be circulated to the Committee.

Linda Poulsen reported that on the planned felling of trees in the Riverside Nature Reserve as a result of ash die-back disease. She also suggested that the town council could help to publicise the Environment Agency's water quality testing results for the Frome.

The Assistant Town Clerk reported that a request had been made by Ian Gosling that Dorset Council consider opening to the public part of the County Hall car park to assist visitors to the nearby museums. Cllr Biggs reported that this would not be possible as the car parks were in high demand by staff, especially as other public sector organisations were relocating to County Hall.

Dorset Council archaeology service – Steve Wallis reported that the annual cleaning of the Roman town house mosaic was planned.

Matilda Manley reported that **The Keep military museum** was apply to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for a resilience grant to assist with outreach whilst the museum is closed for repairs.

64. **QUESTIONS**

None were raised.

65. **URGENT ITEMS**

None were raised.

Chair.....