

DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL

DORCHESTER JOINT HERITAGE COMMITTEE

14th OCTOBER 2025

At a Meeting of the Dorchester Joint Heritage Committee held on 14th October 2025:

PRESENT:

Dorchester Town Council	Councillors:	G. Jones (Chair) F. Kent-Ledger S. Jones
	Officers:	N. Hayes M. Manley
Dorset Council	Councillors:	R. Biggs R. Tarr L. Fry
Dorset Museum & Art Gallery		C. Dixon
Dorchester Association		M. Rice
Local Nature Reserve		L. Poulsen
Dorset Council - Archaeology		S. Wallis
Dorchester Civic Society		I. Gosling & J. Doak
Dorset History Centre		M. Gayton
Thomas Hardy Society		M. Chutter

13. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D. Taylor and S. Biles (Dorchester Town Council), Councillor R. Major (Dorset Council), M. Woodgate, J. Wallis, R. White, A. Harrison and V. Smith.

14. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 22nd July 2025, a copy of which had been circulated, were confirmed and signed.

15. DECLARATION OF PREDETERMINATION

None were declared.

16. BUDGET UPDATE

An update report on the committee's budget was presented by the Nigel Hayes. Councillor G. Jones gave an update on the Friends of Dorchester West grant and the event that ran alongside it in the Borough Gardens House. The event was covered by the Dorset Echo.

Councillor Tarr thanked Friends of Dorchester West and partners for their work on the project.

RESOLVED

That the budget update be noted.

17. **HERITAGE TOURISM STRATEGY - UPDATE**

Matilda Manley presented an update on progress with the Heritage Tourism Strategy and the work of the Tourism Partnership.

Tourism Partnership are re-doing the Hardy trail signs, making Dorchester the base for Hardy visitors, better walking routes from Dorchester to Hardy Cottage and Max Gate. Councillor Tarr highlighted Hardy's love for cycling, the National Trust have shown an interest in signposting Hardy cycling routes. Councillor Tarr to liaise with Matilda Manley.

Members raised questions about the footpath adjacent to the household recycling centre and if improvements could be made. Members requested better signage. Matilda Manley to contact Dorset Council Rights of Way.

RESOLVED

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

18. **PROPOSAL INFORMATION PLAQUE FOR SYLVIA TOWNSEND WARNER**

Mark Chutter reported a revised version of the information board wording is being worked on this week with less text and a better structure. This will be a freestanding board in between the two benches, and it has planning permission. The statue will be unveiled at the Christmas Cracker. Councillor S. Jones advised the board should not overshadow the Hardy board.

Councillor G Jones suggested the Hardy sign on the side of Hotter Shoes needs to be improved. The Thomas Hardy Society will investigate.

M Chutter thanked the committee and J Doak for all the work.

RESOLVED

That the Committee lends its support to the creation of the information panel regarding the Sylvia Townsend Warner statue subject to revised wording.

19. **PROPOSED BLUE PLAQUE FOR 51 HIGH WEST STREET, DORCHESTER**

Mark Chutter presented a request from the owners of 51 High West Street for the Committee to fund the fabrication of a Blue Plaque for the building to commemorate its association with Thomas Hardy and the house to be called 'Thomas Hardy Town House'

Councillor S. Jones requested the dates Hardy lived at the property are included on the plaque.

M. Chutter to review text for sign and bring back to committee for approval.

Members raised questions on the number and location of blue plaques in Dorchester. Dorchester Association to investigate.

RESOLVED

That the Committee agrees to fund the fabrication of a Blue Plaque for 51 High West Street to commemorate the property's links with Thomas Hardy.

20. PROPOSAL FOR THOMAS HARDY VICTORIAN FAYRE 2026

A proposal from the Assistant Town Clerk for holding the biennial Thomas Hardy Victorian Fayre was consider by the committee.

Councillor G. Jones, M. Chutter, and J. Doak requested to be involved with the event planning.

RESOLVED

That the Committee:

- a) agrees the date of 31st May 2026 for the Thomas Hardy Victorian Fayre.
- b) allocates £10,000 to the event from the Committee's events budget.
- c) agrees the procurement of the services of an event organiser to oversee the planning and implementation of the Fayre.

21. ON-GOING PROJECTS

Updates on the following were received:

- a) **Heritage Open Day 2025**, was deemed a success. The walks and visits worked well. Councillor Fry raised an issue with people booking on Eventbrite and not turning up, suggested raising the capacity. Councillor G. Jones considered it a success. Mark Chutter felt it went well. Matilda Manley questioned if it should be a two-day event based on feedback received. Dorset Museum was full to capacity for the events. History Centre numbers were low they would not do it in the same format in the future, possibly just tours in 2026. Thanks for support were noted to J Doak and Civic Society, and the Kings Arms. The date for 2026 was noted as likely the 13th September 2026.
- b) **Town Pump enhancement project**. Ian Gosling stated that the project is progressing, stonemasons (Tudor Rose) have been consulted and looked at the project with architect. X-Ray results recommended not lifting the column in one piece or trying to get mortar in. It has been agreed it will be dismantled allowing the pipework to be installed inside. Cost c.£42,000 inc VAT plus cost of scaffolding and work site, total c.£50,000.
- c) **The Dorchester Story project**. Joe Doak updated, a rolling program of work focused on sections at a time, starting with Roman Dorchester, working with 3rd Year History students at Bournemouth University, material handed over to Matilda Manley. A meeting to be

arranged with Discover Dorchester website provider to upload the Roman section. Preview of work to be shown at next committee meeting. Going forward the Civic Society is looking to work with BU students again.

- d) **Thomas Hardy statue.** M Chutter updated to say it will be cleaned by Tudor Rose. It cannot be turned around due to cost. More information on the statue was requested. THS have images of the unveiling, request for an information board. Matilda Manley stated that the statue cleaning will be photographed. Members agreed information was needed. L Fry suggested William Barnes statue also needed information. Thomas Hardy Society to investigate information boards.
- e) **Moule Project.** A meeting has taken place; they will come back to Heritage Committee when more details are available.
- f) **Roman Baths interpretation project.** Gareth Jones put forward his aspiration of the better interpretation of the Roman Baths. Joe Doak felt it would be well supported. Steve Wallis reported a lot of the baths were under the trees, but he backed the idea. Matilda and Gareth to meet with Tony Hurley to move forward.
- g) The Civic Society water meadows assessment is ongoing.

22. **UPDATES FROM MEMBERS**

Councillor R Biggs: Dorset Council asset disposal going to Cabinet. Amongst other items the old library and All Saints Church are assets under consideration in Dorchester. The Civic Society raised concerns about disposal of All Saints Church.

Dorchester Association: Michael Rice provided an update on the Association's event on the 1 November at the Dorford Centre, marking 40 years since the last excavations at Maiden Castle. Tickets are selling well, with over 100 sold.

The Dorchester Association have been working with a podcaster from the USA enquiring about John White's house and the movement of people to USA including visits to the History Centre and Dorset Museum. With the 400th anniversary of sailing to USA approaching, Michael Rice requested this item goes on the next agenda.

Maria Gayton followed up by requesting Jo Loosemore gives a presentation on what they have done in Plymouth (Plymouth 400). Maria Gayton to investigate.

Thomas Hardy Society: Mark Chutter reported on the war poets conference coming to Dorchester for Remembrance weekend, based at Dorford Centre, bringing c.200 people into town.

Dorset Museum & Art Gallery. Claire Dixon reported digital guide set to go live to access content and stories. Digitisation of publications will save on printing costs. The Jane Austin exhibition was a success. Open Art Exhibition opens on 17th October in partnership with Dorset Visual Arts. The 2026 treasure exhibition is already generating interest.

Dorset History Centre – Maria Gayton reported on capital project bid is due to be submitted on 7th November, results in March. History Centre now has an events page on its website with many events coming up.

Dorset Council archaeology service – Steve Wallis reported that excavation took place in West Walks on old tennis courts in August. Previous research suggested it was likely to be have been built on pits that were dug to build the Roman defences, this was confirmed. A number of objects were also discovered.

Dorchester Civic Society: Several events coming up, including running a joint event on the 28 October event with Crickmay Architects about the restoration of buildings in Dorchester.

Shire Hall: The Committee Clerk read out an update on behalf of Shire Hall: A new exhibition entitled 'Fabrics of Protest' opens in November, showcasing historic banners from the Unite Union. The museum is also in the process of recruiting consultants to draft options for the future of Shire Hall with support from National Lottery and in partnership with Dorset Council and the National Trust.

23. **QUESTIONS**

None were raised.

24. **URGENT ITEMS**

None were raised.

Chair.....