

DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL

DORCHESTER JOINT HERITAGE COMMITTEE

20th JANUARY 2026

At a Meeting of the Dorchester Joint Heritage Committee held on 20th January 2026:

PRESENT:

Dorchester Town Council	Councillors:	G. Jones (Chair) F. Kent-Ledger S. Jones S. Biles
	Officers:	M. Manley
Dorset Council	Councillors:	L. Fry R. Tarr
Dorset Museum & Art Gallery		C. Dixon
Local Nature Reserve		L. Poulsen
Dorset Council - Archaeology		S. Wallis
Dorchester Civic Society		J. Doak
Dorset History Centre		C. Skinner
Thomas Hardy Society		M. Chutter
Dorchester Chamber of Commerce		R. Hattersley

25. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor D. Taylor (Dorchester Town Council), Councillors R. Major and R. Biggs (Dorset Council), E. Metcalfe, M. Gayton, M. Woodgate, R. White, A. Harrison, V. Smith, M. Rice, J. Wallis, G. Keating and I. Gosling.

26. MINUTES

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

27. DECLARATION OF PREDETERMINATION

None were declared.

28. BUDGET UPDATE

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

RESOLVED

That the budget update be noted.

29. 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, to complement the walking leaflets for Dorchester, a new leaflet on the architecture of Poundbury was being developed with the involvement of Simon Conibear.

RESOLVED

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

30. THOMAS HARDY VICTORIAN FAIR 2026 - UPDATE

The Assistant Town Clerk presented proposals for the in-house management of the event by the Tourism Development Officer and also for the Fair to be located on South Street in order to avoid cost and inconvenience of closing High West/East Street. This was supported by the Committee. Cllr Canning asked if there could be some liaison with Brewery Square over the event.

RESOLVED

That the proposed arrangements as set out in this report for the organisation/co-ordination of the Fayre and the South Street location were agreed.

31. POTENTIAL EVENTS IN DORCHESTER LINKED TO BAYEUX TAPESTRY EXHIBITION

Claire Dixon outlined initial ideas as to how Dorset Museum & Art Gallery could run a programme of talks, displays and activities to complement the major Bayeux Tapestry exhibition at the British Museum. Cllr G. Jones suggested a Norman-themed family event and Cllr Tarr suggested inviting to Dorchester any dignitaries from Bayeux who may be invited to the exhibition in London. Cllr S. Jones mentioned that there was a very good leaflet about the Tapestry available from the Bayeux museum and perhaps this could be purchased for local schools. Claire noted the ideas and would update the committee at a future meeting.

32. THE STORY OF DORCHESTER

Joe Doak of the Dorchester Civic Society gave a presentation on the work of Bournemouth University history students to developing website content on Roman Dorchester. The Committee welcomed the material and it hoped that, following editing, the material can feature on the Discover Dorchester website later in 2026.

33. HERITAGE INFORMATION SIGNS & BLUE PLAQUES

The Assistant Town Clerk reported on the production of replacement heritage information

panels, in particular the Poundbury Camp panel that had been digitally restored as the original artwork was not available. This had provided the opportunity to update the text with input from Steve Wallis. The loss of the stone plaque referring to Thomas Hardy on the front of the Gorge Café was mentioned and it was hoped that any rebuilding of the property could include a replica plaque.

RESOLVED

- a) That the Committee agrees the purchase of replacement panel and new lectern stand for 'The Keep & Marabout Barracks' panel at a total cost of £2,123.
- b) That the Committee agrees the purchase of a replacement panel for the Poundbury Camp information panel at a cost of £420.

34. **ROMAN BATHS INTERPRETATION PROJECT**

To the Assistant Town Clerk presented an updated design for the first Roman Baths interpretation panel. The committee discussed how to improve the interpretation of Roman Dorchester and better link up the most significant sites with a trail. The need to improve the Dormouse website was mentioned.

RESOLVED

The revised wording for the Dorchester Roman baths panel be agreed.

35. **ONGOING PROJECTS**

The Committee received reports on the following:

- a) **Sylvia Townsend Warner project and funding for bench.** Mark Chutter presented a request for a grant of £700 from the Committee towards the cost of the bench element of the installation. Claire Skinner reported that the Dorset History Centre would be fundraising for the £50,000 cost of cataloguing the Townsend-Warner archive.

RESOLVED

That a grant of £700 be awarded to Visible Women UK from the Committee's budget as a contribution to the cost of the Sylvia Townsend Warner statue and bench.

- b) **Town Pump enhancement.** It was reported that the Civic Society, working with Crickmay Start and the Town Council, has submitted a planning application for the renovation of the Town Pump and installation of a drinking fountain.
- c) **Moule Project.** Mark Chutter reported that the working group would meet in two days' time.
- d) **Dorchester / Boston 400.** The approach to commemorating this anniversary was discussed as it was clearly a problematic period in history. It was agreed that small group would meet with Jo Loosemore via TEAMS to discuss the matter. The following volunteered to take part in the call: Cllrs Kent-Ledger and S. Jones, and Matilda Manley –

it was also suggested that Cllr David Taylor be invited to join the call given his knowledge of the subject.

e) **Hardy 100th Anniversary project.** Matilda Manley provided an update on the development of a funding bid for the anniversary celebrations and events. Matilda had met with colleagues from Dorset Council and the National Trust to discuss revisions to the Hardy cycle trail which would include Max Gate and Hardy's Cottage. Cllr Tarr offered to help the project. Matilda also mentioned the idea of large murals on significant walls in South Street. Linda Poulsen highlighted widespread concern about the impact of the North Dorchester development of the countryside.

36. **UPDATES FROM MEMBERS**

Dorset Council archaeology service – Steve Wallis reported that the annual cleaning of the Roman Town House was about to take place and that he could be leading Roman-themed tours for the Dorchester Walking Festival.

Thomas Hardy Society: Mark Chutter reported that the annual conference would be in September with walks around the water meadows. The Society was also planning a 'Bohemia in Dorset' conference.

Dorset Museum & Art Gallery. Claire Dixon reported that:

- Victorian Hall expected to close before the Spring, final interviews for build contractors taking place later this month
- Condition survey being undertaken for the floor mosaic in the hall, repairs and protective measures will be actioned during the works period
- People Watching exhibition opens on 31st January.
- New Trustees have been elected and will join the Board this month: Ann Abraham, Jonny Cotton and Professor Paul Gough.

Dorset History Centre. Claire Skinner reported that the Centre was supporting Reconnection Dorchester (led by Rob Hattersley) in researching the history of buildings to potentially house a new community hub.

Dorchester Chamber of Commerce. Rob Hattersley introduced himself to the Committee and hoped to establish firmer links between the two.

Cllr Roland Tarr reported that Dorset Councils Rights of Way team were looking to improve public access to the countryside around Dorchester by replacing stiles with gates.

Cllr Sue Biles suggested that the Committee write to Denise Dutton, sculptor of the Sylvia Townsend Warner statue, to express the Committee's appreciation of her work.

Giles Keating of **Athelhampton House** has asked the Committee to lobby for better connections in Dorchester by buses aimed at tourists, and it was agreed that this request would be referred to the Tourism Partnership.

Cllr Gareth Jones reported that he and Maria Gayton from the Dorset History Centre be meeting with a local person whose father and grandfather were 'drowners' involved in the

management of the water meadows adjacent to Dorchester. This would be an opportunity to record his memories.

37. **QUESTIONS**

None were raised.

38. **URGENT ITEMS**

None were raised.

Chair.....