

DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL

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.....