



Dorchester Tourism Partnership (DTP) Meeting

Tuesday 7th July 2026

10.30am – 12.30pm

Kingston Maurward House

Attendees: Alastair Braidwood, Connie Hollings, Charmaine Denny, Ella Gibson, Esther Baker, Ginny Slade, Hazel Hoskin, Helen Moody, Joe Doak, Joy Wallis, Judy Tate, Katie Raven, Kirsty Schmidt, Lisa Cartwright, Marc Sweeney, Mark Tattershall, Matilda Manley, Robin Potter, Sue Clark, Steph Addison, Steve Wallis, William Gibbons.

1. Welcome and Introductions

Kirsty Schmidt, The King's Arms, chaired the meeting.

2. Introductions: Charmaine Denny & Marc Sweeney

Introductions were made to Charmaine Denny and Marc Sweeney – new staff members at Dorchester Town Council. Charmaine has just stepped into the role of Dorchester's new Town Clerk after previously working as Assistant Town Clerk for Weymouth Town Council. Charmaine has background in operations services, local government, and tourism. She is excited to work with everyone in the future. Marc Sweeney has been in post for around 3 months as the new Markets & Communications Officer. Originally from Jersey, Marc has experience in a wide variety of subjects. He will be running the Dorchester Markets and handling all general communications for Dorchester Town Council.

3. Tourism Development Officer Update

Tourism Development Officer gave an update on the following projects and marketing stats. A full set of presentation slides is attached:

- Recent social media, website, and app statistics
- What's On/Annual events posters
- Footfall statistics and highest count days
- New Poundbury Architecture Leaflet roll out
- Recent press coverage and blog campaigns
- Updated photography by Lara Jane Thorpe
- 4th Dorchester 'Shop Front of the Season' Awards open – Summer (opens Friday 10th June)
- Thomas Hardy Victorian Fair was a big success! Ruby Granger's (influencer) video is up and on approx. 50k views as of 7.7.26
- Key events: Kite Festival rescheduled for 25th July 2026, Hardy 2028 ongoing

The following comments, decisions and requests were made by the partnership:

- Attendees suggested it could be worth getting another footfall counter in the town centre.
- The What's On content is very useful to know what big events are coming up and to plan around them for attractions. E.g., FamFest, This Ain't Texas, Skyglow.
- The King's Arms residents provided very positive feedback for the Thomas Hardy Victorian Fair.

ACTIONS:

- Tourism Development Officer to look into getting second footfall counter.

4. Helios Review – Mark Tattershall

Mar Tattershall provided a report for Dorchester Arts' Helios event. This was the 3rd of Luke Jerram's artworks they have brought to the Corn Exchange. This year they received funding for Dorchester Tourism Partnership and Dorchester Town Council. Dorchester Arts contracted Pageant Productions to create a short film for the event. Watch the film here: <https://youtu.be/P1t3-Effrtw?si=XuOU3LMkQDb3v8Oi>

Statistics – over 10 days:

- Over 8000 people came to visit Helios
- Footfall stats show visitors from all over the UK
- 262 participated in the events under the sun, many of them for the first time.
- Ages ranged from 2 to 85
- Hundreds of people came to watch
- 160 local artists of all ages and experience submitted works for consideration for the 'Catch the Sun' exhibition.
- 55 artworks were displayed, over a third sold.

Dorchester Arts have reserved 'Gaia', the next of Luke Jerram's artworks for next Easter. This would be the 4th piece exhibited at the Corn Exchange to complete the collection as Earth.

The following comments, decisions and requests were made by the partnership:

- All partners to consider whether the DTP is interested in sponsoring the next Luke Jerram artwork at Dorchester Arts.

5. Walking Festival Evaluation Discussion

Tourism Development Officer reported on the Dorchester Walking Festival 2026 (see document attached for a full review).

Overall:

- 52 guided walks taking place over 9 days. Suitable for all levels of ability and interests.
- 703 tickets sold – 467 orders placed
- Total Net Sales: £3,585
- 23 volunteer walk leaders, offering one or more walks
- 50% of walks were fully booked.
- All 52 walks took place.
- 16 charities supported.
- 19 local businesses noted by participants.
- Overall rating for this year's Walking Festival – 4.67 (out of 5)
- Overall rating for this year's Walk Leaders – 4.77 (out of 5)

The following comments, decisions and requests were made by the partnership:

- Mark Chutter ended up doing 6 walks instead of 1 due to interest.
- Lots of the same people are booking for walks year after year.
- There were still no-shows, many people book onto too many walks and cancel due to tiredness for alter in the week.
- It could be beneficial to spread the event over three weekends/two weeks to avoid the cancellations from eager walkers.
- Dorset Museum & Art Gallery get a lot of last-minute bookings for their walks, mostly due to being weather dependent.
- Preference from visitors for walks with links to public transport.
- Dedicated walkers (those who go on walking holidays etc.) are looking for longer walks.
- An effort should be made to spread information further afield prior to the regular attendees.
- The group took a vote to decide whether to run Dorchester Walking festival in 2027. Majority vote for yes.

ACTIONS:

Dorchester Walking Festival to go ahead again next year 2027.

Tourism Development Officer to feedback comments to Walking Festival organiser and to set up DWF email address.

Walk Leaders get-together to be organised as a thank you for all their hard work. Without them, there would be no Walking Festival!

6. Finances

Tourism Development Officer shared an update on the Heritage Tourism Partnership's finances with the group (slides attached).

The following comments, decisions and requests were made by the partnership:

- The group discussed Mailchimp prices and whether they are too high for the output. Suggestion to include questions on demographics in the next email send out.
- Could the use of tags on Mailchimp work for Discover Dorchester?

ACTIONS:

Tourism Development Officer to add demographics questions to next send out and collate information for next meeting.

7. Work plan for Summer: "Show off your Dorchester" & "Stop off in Dorchester" Campaigns

Tourism Development officer and Development Officer are working on the "Show off your Dorchester" and "Stop off in Dorchester" campaigns.

Show Off Your Dorchester

- Visitor data shows 42% of people staying in Dorchester are visiting family and friends.
- Targeted messaging and communication with people who live in Dorchester
- Events to invite your family and friends to come down for
- Use #MyDorchester to encourage user generated content (UGC), seeking photos, recommendations, and interactions.
- Content will include summery vibrant images and reels, on street interviews, polls, blog itineraries.

Stop Off in Dorchester

- "Stop off in Dorchester on the way. You will want to come back"
 - Convenient
 - Dog friendly
 - Open Spaces
 - Great cafes
 - Experiences to break up the journey e.g., museums
- Content will include targeted ads based on location (focused on Southeast England).

The following comments, decisions and requests were made by the partnership:

- Idea to frame Dorchester as a central meeting point for those coming east to west.
- Rise in staycations to target closer visitors.

ACTIONS:

Tourism Development Officer and Development Officer to continue working on these campaigns.

8. Hardy 2028 bid presentation & discussion

In 2028, Dorchester will be commemorating the 100th anniversary of Thomas Hardy's death. The project will be titled 'Hardy's Heartland - A 100 Year Legacy' and led by Dorchester Town Council with many partners. Sections of the project will include:

- Welcome to Hardy's Heartland – signage, wayfinding, routes, and visibility.
- Hardy and Women – exhibitions, cultural programmes.
- Interpreting Hardy – collated essay publication, interpreting Hardy's bedroom at Max Gate
- Youth engagement – through poetry, theatre, and performance. Community play, Hardy theatre trail, Centenary memorial service, poetry in schools' workshops.
- Hardy's rural heritage and landscape – reigniting connections. Woodland charcoal making and sketching, heritage folk and dance traditions, photography exhibitions, Thomas Hardy Victorian Fair 2028.

The following comments, decisions and requests were made by the partnership:

- Could there be an architecture angle to add? Civic Society would potentially be able to lead. Joe Doak to feed back after their next meeting.
- Dorchester Town Council have been investigating moving the Thomas Hardy Statue to somewhere more prominent. This is unlikely to happen. Potential for a smaller memorial statue elsewhere.
- Is there an opportunity to involve Kingston Maurward?
- The Hardy Trail spreads as far as Salisbury. Many towns have expressed the need to update the boards.
- Thomas Hardy Society events can be included in the details: THS conference in July and August, THS birthday weekend, wreath laying and procession for THVF.
- Branding throughout Dorset could be coherent. Connect with Dorset to allow visibility Dorset-wide.
- Matilda cannot lead on a Dorset wide project alone. Any activity included in the bid needs to have a lead ready to deliver it.
- The requested amount in the Hardy 2028 project bid is £243,296. Could the Dorchester Tourism Partnership provide £15,000 in match funding from the Heritage Committee pot? This was put to a vote and majority ruled yes. The spend will still need to be approved by Dorchester Town Council Heritage Committee.

ACTIONS:

Joe Doak to feedback on architecture angle after their next meeting.

Tourism Development Officer to take spend request to Heritage Committee and feed back at next meeting re decision.

9. Partner updates

- **Alastair Braidwood** – Series of live ‘audiobook’ readings went well and attracted people from all around Dorset. Ceilidhs are moving back to the Corn Exchange. Thomas Hardy Victorian Fair went very well, lots of ideas for next time!
- **Art in Poundbury** – Ongoing projects: Tiny Art Gallery, working with Arts in Hospital to create art for GP surgeries. Free ‘en plein air’ schedule available. Still ran Art in the Park online (Dorchester Kite Festival rescheduled) with lots of entries. Now running a drop in and draw at the rescheduled event, completely free, just bring something to sit on and draw with, artists demos. Art in the Sunflowers taking place on Sunday 16th August.
- **Chamber of Business** – Things are ticking along nicely. Steph recently joined board of agricultural society e.g., Dorset County Show. Worzels have been announced and monster trucks are back. Sponsorship opportunities are still available – contact James Cox at show office.
- **Coastland College** – First year end of Coastland College. Spellbound was a huge success! 100,000 estimated in that month. Planning similar events going forward. Animal Park busy but enormously hot. Horse trials were popular. Next big one is Christmas!
- **Dorchester Arts** – Noticing a trend of people booking incredibly late. Outdoor theatre sales are going decently but now worrying about being too hot. Gallery shows are successful, recent Sarah Constable exhibition has been featured on BBC national news. Script’s the Thing 3 taking place on 10th & 11th of August.
- **Dorchester Civic Society** – Focus for this year is the proposal for north of Dorchester re planning. Had a recent meeting with CPRE, Stand, Thomas Hardy Society, Charminster etc to coordinate approach. Planning application has gone in for Phase 1 although local plan hasn’t been finalised. Pros and cons to be considered from a tourism point of view.
- **Dorset Museum & Art Gallery** – New Treasure: Lost & Found exhibition opened mid-June. Featured on BBC One Show. Coverage has multiple strands including research, metal detectorists, and student involvement. June had higher visitor footfall compared to last year. October and December exhibition from The Keep Military Museum as they’re still closed.
- **Joy Wallis** – Walks still being booked from the website. Particularly like Americans from cruise ships and visitors from Dorchester, Massachusetts.
- **The King’s Arms** – 10% year on year. Sales for past quarter up 5%. Last week 25% up year on year. Room occupancy great. 5 rooms on top floor yet to be refurbished.
- **Maiden Castle Farm** – Year 6 of Dorset Sunflower Trail with theme ‘Love the Buzz’. Events include Sunflower Stride, Yoga, Art in the Sunflowers, Sun Baths. Branding ‘As featured on the One Show’. Fundraising again for Dorset County Hospital Emergency and Critical Care Unit.
- **Robin Potter DTC** – Events coming up include Love Parks, Food & Arts Festival, One World, Anonymous Festival. 20mph consultations to start soon. New Town Clerk and Markets & Communications Officer starter. DTAG cycle ride Sunday 12th July.

- **Steve Wallis** – Wildflowers displays at Roman Town House. Sorting out repairs to the path. Dorset Council staff have started asking for tours! Four free talks this summer at Dorset Museum & Art Gallery. Maiden Castle tours going well. Input on background information for new AI Roman soldier at Dorset Museum that can respond to any question.
- **Thomas Hardy Society** – Study Day in Town Hall. Birthday weekend with Thomas Hardy Victorian Fair successful. Thomas Hardy conference coming up from 25th July to 1st August.
- **Vinyl Van** – Seeing a steady increase in sales, June was not that profitable. Brewery Square would like to be included in Artisan Market as it is affecting trade. Footfall not going great in BS. Families come to play in fountains but aren't spending money.
- **William Gibbons DTC** – New Poundbury Architecture leaflet – when you have family staying send them on the walk!

ACTIONS:

- All to share each other's content and press.

10. Date of next meeting and close of meeting

Tuesday 29th September 2026, 10.30am-12.30pm.

Dorchester Corn Exchange, Council Chamber