

Thorncombe Wood Visitor Centre

Dear Stinsford Parish Council,

I write as Chairman of the Thomas Hardy Society to hopefully enlist your help and support in our attempt to try to obtain some loosening of the opening hour restrictions on the Thorncombe Wood Visitor Centre.

The Thomas Hardy Society were involved in the Visitor Centre Project from the start and obtained over £50,000 in charitable funding towards the project. The intention of the steering group which comprised Dorset County Council, the National Trust and the Hardy Society was that the new Visitor Centre would be available for occasional evening events involving Hardy's Cottage or Thorncombe Wood: if not permitted seasonally appropriate general opening hours.

As I'm sure you are aware, a planning restriction was placed on the Visitor Centre only allowing opening up to 4 pm, at any season of the year or whatever the circumstances. (I presume by WDDC).

On Saturday 21st December this year, we will be holding our biennial 'Going the Rounds' event which is a very popular re-enacting of the proceedings of The Mellstock Quire in Hardy's *Under the Greenwood Tree*. On a cold winter evening, access to the Visitor Centre for refreshments & use of the toilets would be exactly the purpose for which the Visitor Centre was originally conceived.

We have been putting feelers out to the new Dorset Council about changing these restrictions. We have received quite a positive response but they are suggesting that the problem lies entirely with resistance to the Visitor Centre amongst residents of Higher Bockhampton. We have been told that if Stinsford Parish Council would state that they had no objection to limited appropriate occasional evening extension of the Visitor Centre opening hours, then Dorset Council would revise the planning restriction.

I hope that your council will see fit to support us over this problem. The Visitor Centre was funded through a mixture of charitable & public money; it is grossly unfair that it is not being used for one of the main purposes for which it was originally intended.

I wait to hear from you.

Yours faithfully,

Dr Anthony Fincham
Hon. Chairman, The Thomas Hardy Society.