



Dorchester Tourism Partnership Meeting

Tuesday 1st October 2024

1.30 pm – 3.30 pm

Casterbridge Room, The Kings Arms, Dorchester

Attending 17

1. Welcome and Introductions

Kirsty Schmidt, The King's Arms, chaired the meeting. Kirsty began the meeting by welcoming Cllr William Gibbons to the meeting for the first time and Ella and Claire from Dorset Museum & Art Gallery for the first time. Kirsty also thanked Tamsin Little for her contributions to the Tourism Partnership during her role at Shire Hall Museum and wished her well for the future.

2. 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
- 2024 events and What's On posters
- Recent press coverage and blog campaigns
- A potential Super TIP at Dorchester Arts
- Report: Summer Campaign
- Dorchester Events and Experience funding – Drawing Festival success, 'Trial of Iago' coming up
- New footfall and car parking data

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

- A potential issue with Places2Go distribution was mentioned.

ACTIONS:

- Tourism Development Officer to get Places2Go summer data and check distribution.

2. Discover Dorchester Sustainable Tourism Marketing Plan 2025-2028

Tourism Development officer presented the draft of the 'Discover Dorchester Sustainable Marketing Plan 2025-2028'. The group broke into groups to discuss the proposed plan and presented their comments.

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

Group 1:

- Aim 1 – scope to consider younger audiences.
- Aim 2 – broaden the audience to older grandparents and target the kids themselves. Change the tone to 'more value' rather than 'cheaper'
- Aim 3 – felt as if Dorchester 'can't compete' with the natural draw of wider Dorset.
- Aim 4 – more direct approach needed for ferries e.g., more physical presence at the ports. Packages are being booked 2 years ahead (Dorset Museum are getting bookings for 2026)
- General – tap into performers at festival/events and use them to promote Dorchester

Group 2:

- Aim 3 – promote internationally especially for big anniversaries.

- Aim 4 – promote with coach companies. Create specific tour for Dorchester as opposed to just fitting it in e.g., 5000 years of history in 500m.
- General – more promotion in Dorchester including more noticeboards, post office posters, rolling noticeboards. Brown signs.

Group 3:

- Aim 1 – utilise guides more. Feel the Southeast and London areas are too narrow, expand the audience goals. Focus on promoting bespoke experiences with itineraries.
- Aim 2 – like the ‘rain or shine’ straplines.
- Aim 3 – advocates and influencers are very important for promotion.
- General – feel footfall data is generic, want to focus on postcode data.

Group 4:

- Aim 1 – aim for highbrow/sophistication. Add in radio for marketing activity.
- Aim 2 – lowering the age bracket as younger parents are common. Accommodate for these younger ages by focusing on Instagram/TikTok as a medium of marketing.
- Aim 3 – add luxury magazines as a marketing focus.
- General – focus on website traffic and email campaign data.

3. Finances

Tourism Development Officer shared an update on the Heritage Tourism Partnership’s finances with the group (slides attached). Tourism Development Officer presented the partnership’s proposed spend for 2025 (slides attached).

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

- The groups felt the spend for print magazines was too high. Discussions took place on whether print is too ‘niche’ and how useful the spend would be as collection of data is difficult.
- The group felt the spend on leaflets should be lowered and spend should be increased in holiday parks.
- It was noted that all spends could be subsidised by partners involved.
- The group discussed subsidising press trips for Dorset Museum by extending the press stay to wider Dorchester. This would be linked to the high publicity Gladiators of Britain exhibition in 2025.

4. Proposed Dorchester Tourism Partnership Marketing Action Plan for 2025

Tourism Development officer presented the draft of the ‘Dorchester Tourism Partnership Marketing Action Plan for 2025’. The group discussed this plan and agreed with the proposed festivals and events planned for the year.

Tourism Development Officer presented the potential of a ‘Dorset Food and Drink Festival’ in 2025. This would be based off the ‘Taste East Devon’ Festival. Dorchester would be the hub for the festival and integrate drink and food farms, vineyards, restaurants and more. It was suggested the festival be marketed as a ‘West Dorset’ festival instead, so the offerings are not spread too thin. The festival would target multiple audience bases e.g., learning and luxury, nature and adventure.

Therefore, the big events the Tourism Partnership will support in 2025 are: Roman Dorchester, Dorchester Walking Festival, and West Dorset Food & Drink Festival. The following partners will be on the respective subgroups for each event:

- Roman Dorchester: Claire, Joe, Steve
- Food & Drink: Steph, Virginia, Kirsty, Alastair

5. Dorchester Museum’s Passport Update (from Claire Dixon, Dorset Museum & Art Gallery)

Dorchester’s Museums proposed to repeat the project in 2025, to print more passports, and extend the dates from March to September. Almost all 5000 passports were given out in 2024, and many were brought back to other museums. The group discussed adding a prize for completed passports.

The passports cost £559 to print in 2024, likely to be increased next year as more would be printed. It was decided by the group to approve this proposal and increase the numbers next year, with funds coming from the Heritage Committee Pot.

6. Partner updates

- **The King's Arms** – 8% year on year sales growth with an average 86% room occupancy. Aims to crack the corporate market with push on private meeting spaces and private functions.
- **Dorset Museum & Art Gallery** – Increased numbers from last year. Wildlife photography exhibition success, British Gladiator planned for 2025. October half term plans to be busy and another year of Museums After Dark.
- **Joy Wallis** – slightly lower interest in tours. Had a few Americans using Dorchester as a base for Dorset.
- **Alistair** – New Hardy Players 'Six Men of Dorset' went very well. Michaelmas Caleigh had a good turnout, looking for a new venue as they need to increase capacity.
- **Thomas Hardy Society** – Challenging year but have been able to continue with help from Dorchester Town Council. Focusing on promoting events, website traffic, target audiences, and partnership working.
- **Brewery Square** – very successful summer! Lots of plans for Halloween including a second attempt at the ghost record. Christmas light switch on and market coming up, this will include alpine lodges, skating/activities every day, rotating stalls (Sat 24th November to Christmas eve).
- **Dorchester BID** – Flags in town being collected. Planning beginning for Christmas Cracker 2024. BID AGM in November.
- **Dorchester Civic society** – Restoration of the Town Pump has plans and costings. Derek Beauchamp design award winners have been decided and will be announced at the AGM on 22nd October.
- **Steve Wallis** – Digging for Britain filming completed at the Roman Town House, should be showing around January. Dorset Museum tours are going well. Walks starting at the Kings Arms have been going very well – great place to start.
- **Dorchester Arts** – Corn Exchange works underway and progressing well. Full programme is still ongoing. Funding video for partners to share. Offer to do guided tours of the building works for groups if requested.
- **Visit Dorset** – Received award for best digital marketing campaign ('World Less Travelled'). Currently in the process of applying to become a Dorset LVEP which will encourage better links with Visit England and international tourism bodies.
- **Robin Potter** – **Dorchester Town Councillor** – Dorchester Town Council events have been going very successfully. The Dorchester Artisan Markets successful.
- **William Gibbons** – **Dorchester Town Councillor** – Interested in seeing a TIC in Dorchester Library after seeing tourists turned away for information.
- **Kingston Maurward** – Officially merged with Weymouth College, looking to expand their offer with gym, theatre, etc. Recruitment up from last year. Award for best agricultural stand at Dorset County Show. Halloween: pumpkin trail, witches broom making workshop. A Kingston Christmas: decked out house, Santas grotto.
- **Shire Hall Museum** – Current photography exhibition on the Windrush generation 'Searching for the Motherland'.

7. Date of next meeting and close of meeting

Tuesday 7th January 2025, 1.30pm-3.30pm

Venue TBC