



Dorchester Tourism Partnership Meeting

Tuesday 7th January 2025

1.30 pm – 3.30 pm

Borough Gardens House, Dorchester

Attending 20

1. Welcome and Introductions

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

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
- 2025 events calendar and What's On posters
- Recent press coverage and blog campaigns
- Upcoming events: Roman Festival, Walking Festival, Food & Drink Festival, Hardy 2028
- Footfall data and busiest days
- Success of free parking days
- Upcoming Spring campaign: Learning & Luxury, demographic inclined to research thoroughly before their trips, website home page to be refreshed to target campaign's audience.

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

- It was suggested that more than one footfall counter would be useful for a fuller data set. Potential sites could include Brewery Square and High East/West Street.

ACTIONS:

- Tourism Development Officer to continue working on Spring Campaign.

2. Finances

Tourism Development Officer shared an update on the Heritage Tourism Partnership's finances with the group (slides attached). There were no comments.

3. Discussion: Visit Dorset 2023 Tourism Data

Tourism Development Officer asked for comments regarding the recently acquired Visit Dorset Tourism Data for 2023.

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

- The group agreed the data was of excellent quality and useful to partners. While a little out of date, the data is still helpful.
- The group were inclined to keep paying the fee for data to keep an eye on visitor trends over the years.

4. Discussion: Poundbury

There was a group discussion highlighting that Poundbury is potentially neglected within the partnership.

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

- It was noted that there is a strong need for greater input and engagement from Poundbury businesses. There was general agreement that Poundbury businesses need to play a more active role in the partnership.
- It was reported that 48% of visitors staying with family and friends are likely to share knowledge about Poundbury and visit the area.

5. Discussion: Luxury Paid Advertising

Tourism Development Officer brought two proposals to the group from print magazines *Country Living* and *The Simple Things*. Discussions took place regarding whether to go ahead with either offer (offers on the attached slides).

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

- It was noted that while *Country Living* offers a larger audience, advertisements are placed too far at the back of the publication. *Simple Things* was deemed not worth the investment as the data collection would not be large enough.
- Tourism Development Officer instead suggested hosting a Visit Dorset competition with complementary boosted social media posts. The group agreed this would be a better plan.

ACTIONS:

- Tourism Development Officer to decline proposals from print magazines.
- Tourism Development Officer to move forward with Visit Dorset competition and accompanied posts.

6. Discussion: Events & Experiences Grant

Tourism Development Officer led the group in a discussion on whether to run the Events & Experiences Grant again next year (with no capacity to run it in 2025).

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

- Positive feedback was given regarding all three events (The Hardy Har Comedy Festival, The Amazing Drawing Festival, and Courtroom Opera).
- It was noted that additional funding would be required to run the Amazing Drawing Festival again, but the Comedy Festival has now found its legs and is running independently.
- The courtroom opera is seeking feedback from Shire Hall, looking to run again.
- The grant process was praised for being excellent, providing opportunities to trial new ideas, and supporting smaller organisations. The group thought the diversity of events and projects benefit the town.
- If the grant is to run again, the group decided postcode data is essential to determine whether the events are benefitting Dorchester's tourism economy.

ACTIONS:

- Tourism Development Officer to revise grant system potentially exploring a rolling fund throughout the year.
- Tourism Development Officer to request data from past grant recipients.

7. Discussion: Easter and summer holidays – Fun & relaxation Day Out Campaign

Tourism Development Officer led the group in a discussion regarding the Discover Dorchester Easter/Summer Campaign. This campaign will target families with kids looking for a holiday with both fun and relaxing activities.

Tourism Development Officer showed social media assets and planned itineraries to the group. Discussions then took place questioning how useful a listing on 'Days Out with Kids' would be and how to boost Dorchester's attractions low TripAdvisor ratings.

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

- Part of the campaign should target appearing in google searches 'days out', 'family' and 'Dorset'.
- The group felt a 'Days Out with Kids' listing was far too expensive with little to no reward. It was decided to no go ahead with the listing.
- The group worried focusing the campaign on children with only a few kids' attractions in dorchester.

- With attraction ratings being so low for Dorchester organisations, Tourism Development Officer suggested rank improvement training open to all Dorchester businesses and attractions. The Tourism Partnership would subsidise the training, but individual attendees would pay a small amount. The group was in favour of this idea.
 - Dorset Museum gave helpful advice to improve TripAdvisor rankings: with more reviews and replies to those reviews, rankings will shoot up.
- Other suggestions from the group included: google ad words campaign leading to a family day out in Dorchester page, sponsored posts for blogs, newsletter send outs the week before rainy weather (& push notifications on the day).

ACTIONS:

- Tourism Development Officer to take comments and add to Easter/Summer campaign plans.
- Tourism Development Officer to investigate rank improvement training with Key Digital Agency.

8. Partner updates

- **The King's Arms** – Up 16.2% year on year for Christmas, up 17% overall year on year. Record year for December.
- **Dorset Museum & Art Gallery** – Closed for the next few weeks. British Museum Gladiator exhibition coming in soon until 11th May. Press evening on Friday 24th January. Jane Austen exhibition in the summer, working with AUB for the interactive aspects. Open art exhibition for local artists. Find out soon about funding for the roof of Victorian Hall.
- **Brewery Square** – Planning to have a quieter summer than last year, felt too filled. Christmas market was a difficult experiment, Dorchester does not seem to have the footfall for a month-long market, weather was quite bad. Will not be doing the market next year but may discuss joining up with Christmas Cracker.
- **Dorchester BID** – Great Christmas period. Fire has caused a challenging period for South Street but no update regarding when the blocking will be gone.
- **Dorchester Civic society** – Number of projects ongoing. Winners announced for Derek Beauchamp Design Award: Poundbury Nature Project, Dorset Museum, Brewery Building in Brewery Square.
- **Steve Wallis** – Digging for Britain series begins on TV 7th Jan, will show Roman Town House and Dorchester on it. Roman Town House undergoing annual clean. Tours: updated with Dorset Museum & Art Gallery, Roman Dorchester Tour.
- **Dorchester Town Council** – Preparing for Borough Gardens Summer Sessions, 80th anniversary of VE Day & beacon lighting.
- **National Trust** – Properties are closed until Easter Successful year for the properties, changed the name of Max Gate to Thomas Hardy's Home Max Gate. Tv appearance planned. Trying to connect the properties to Dorchester more and get the community involved.
- **Dorchester Arts** – Building work still ongoing – can now look across the lobby for the first time in 160 years! Work is running behind but front of building should be opened in Easter, new toilets in 3 weeks, Town Hall finished in 2 weeks. First three art exhibitions are planned for the new gallery space. The Script's the Thing 2 planning underway, received thirty-three scripts in one month and will probably get much more.
- **Kingston Maurward** – Officially merged with Weymouth College, name has now changed to 'Weymouth and Kingston Maurward College.' Successful Christmas: doggy grotto sold out; A Kingston Christmas completely sold out. Lambing coming up, animal park trail in Easter. New brand launching in Summer combining colleges, commercial and educational aspects together.
- **Shire Hall Museum** – Events and exhibitions planned. January event coming up with musician Robbie Mackintosh. Cafe has reopened and full for first day.
- **Jason Bowerman (Duchy of Cornwall and Dorset County Show)** – 6th and 7th September 2025. Weather was bad for 2024 but didn't dampen the atmosphere. New adjustments and attractions planned for 2025, with alpacas back. Dorset Spring Show 3rd and 4th of May near Puddletown, buses will be running from Dorchester for both Spring and County Show. Asks partners to share the news of buses.
- **Maiden Castle Farm** – Sunflower Trail raised £16,800. Lots of activities in 2024. Now preparing for August to run again.
- **Tom Browns & Pub Watch** – Very successful year for pubs and Tom Browns. Smallest number of recorded incidents this year over Christmas.

9. Date of next meeting and close of meeting

Tuesday 1st April 2025, 1.30pm-3.30pm
Venue TBC (potentially Kingston Maurward College)