



## Dorchester Tourism Partnership Meeting

Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025

1.30 pm – 3.30 pm

Council Chamber, Corn Exchange, Dorchester

Attending 24

### 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
- Welcome additional Poundbury representatives
- What's On posters
- Recent press coverage and blog campaigns
- Upcoming events: Roman Festival, Easter Egg Rolling, Walking Festival, Food & Drink Festival, Hardy 2028
- Visit Dorset competition data and feedback
- Train station advertising
- Easter campaign: Day Out in Dorchester, weather-related posts, Egg Rolling & Roman Festival, Day Out photo shoot, SEO workshop planned after Easter.
- May-July action plan

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

- All partners to send Tourism Development Officer fresh imagery for the spring campaign.

### ACTIONS:

- Tourism Development Officer and Development Assistant to continue working on Easter/Spring Campaign and prepping for Summer Campaigns.
- All partners to help promote Roman Festival.

### 2. Finances

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

### 3. Discussion: Leaflet Revisions & Reprints

Tourism Development Officer asked for comments regarding the three Discover Dorchester leaflets currently in production. These comments can be found in Appendix 1.

### ACTIONS:

- Tourism Development Officer to consider comments and review leaflets.
- Tourism Development officer to form Task and Finish Group to include Kirsty Schmidt, Giles Keating, Judy Tate, and Esther Baker.

#### 4. Discussion: New Tourism Information Point at Dorchester Arts

Tourism Development Officer asked for comments regarding placing a new Tourism Information Point at Dorchester Arts.

According to feedback, the Dorchester BID Tourism Information Point at South Walks house is struggling with connectivity and visitor traffic. It is proposed that the TIP moves to Dorchester Arts in the Corn exchange. This will align with the opening of the new building in May.

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

- Potential spaces for a useful TIP include Duchess of Cornwall, Pips Poundbury, Poundbury Gardens, and Kingston Maurward.

#### ACTIONS:

- Tourism Development Officer to proceed with Dorchester Arts Tourism Information Point.

#### 5. Proposal: Dorchester Arts – Helios Exhibition

Dorchester Arts (DA) proposed that the Dorchester Tourism Partnership put some funding towards a new exhibition in 2026. DA are proposing to house Luke Jerram's 3D Helios sculpture.

Previously, similar exhibitions have brought in great numbers. The Moon sculpture brought in 9000 visitors, and the Mars sculpture brought 3900 visitors. Benefits will include footfall increase in Dorchester town centre for businesses, cafes, and restaurants. DA would create a programme of events to complement the exhibition including music, dancing, creative health, youth dance, drawing, art, and more, all underneath Helios.

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

- Weymouth & Kingston Maurward College expressed their interest for involving the students.
- Dorchester BID are interested in getting involved.

#### ACTIONS:

- Dorchester Arts to bring formal proposal to next partnership meeting to include numbers for funding amounts.
- All partners were happy to consider funding towards the project.

#### 6. Proposal: Katy Jones – The Hardy Har Comedy Festival

Tourism Development Officer brought forward a proposal from Katy Jones. Kay had requested £200 for a professional videographer to capture the Hardy Har Comedy Festival. The videos would be used for future promotion, expanding social media reach, and could be used by Discover Dorchester to promote Dorchester (with credit).

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

- Partners took a vote and were all happy to fund a videographer for The Hardy Har.

#### ACTIONS:

- Dorchester Tourism Partnership to pay Katy £200.

#### 7. Visit Dorset Annual Tourism Research Data

The South West Research Company (SWRC) asked if Dorchester would like to receive their town tourism data for 2024. The cost would be £288 + vat. If more than one town signs up, then the price would drop to £230 + vat. SWRC would organise the research on the partnership's behalf and the invoice would come from Visit Dorset as the intermediary. The research is carried out in late summer, and the partnership would receive the data in late autumn/early winter.

In previous meetings, it was noted the data was of excellent quality and useful to partners and the group were inclined to keep paying the fee for data to keep an eye on visitor trends over the years.

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

- Dorset Museum noted the data was invaluable and they would be paying for the data anyway.
- The group, again, felt they would like to continue receiving the data to see trends year on year.

#### **ACTIONS:**

- The group voted to purchase the town tourism data from The South West Research Company.

#### **8. Partner updates**

- **Alistair Braidwood** – New Hardy Players had a quiet start to the year preparing for a touring production this summer 'A Few Crusted Characters' in four venues around Dorset (Dorchester Arts handling ticketing). The first script draft has been finished.
- **Athelhampton House** – Visitor numbers up at Athelhampton. Switching from full price to discounted tickets. Lots of events planned to include new residency with Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. Very big marketing focus. Thomas Hardy 50 love poems social media campaign beginning soon (10–15-minute video readings released every two weeks until 2028, performed by Dorchester youth Theatre and the New Hardy Players).
- **Art in Poundbury** – December's 9-day exhibition in Jubilee Hall had 2.5k visitors. Currently 85 members of the club. Projects/events include social prescribing project with Miles King (People Need Nature), supporting after school club at Pips, hosting Art in the Sunflowers again after success last year, Arts in Hospital with DCH, attending Easter Market in Crown Square.
- **Chamber for Business** – Monthly networking breakfast coming up. Large event upcoming on the showground. Quarterly business briefing newsletter being made to update Dorchester on what's happening in the business community.
- **Dorchester Arts** – Key handover for building works to be the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May, there will be a private opening and viewing of the gallery on the evening of 12<sup>th</sup> May with public access on 13<sup>th</sup> May. New catering manager for the Corn Exchange. The Script's the Thing 2 organisation ongoing, received 160 scripts so far, up from 73 last year! Will be cutting it down to 100 scripts, with final yesses being sent out on 3<sup>rd</sup> May. season planning underway for programme and outdoor performances.
- **Dorchester BID** – Town maps are going out soon. Continuing to promote businesses after fire on South Street.
- **Dorchester Civic society** – 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary happening until July, 9 projects underway to 50 years. Restoration of the town pump being planned. Rob Hattersley has been appointed as new lead of Civic Voice (parent organisation) with a new headquarters in Poundbury (focus on increasing membership).
- **Dorchester Town Council** – Preparing summer events/heritage open day in September. Focus on marketing DTC's own sites for event hire.
- **Dorset Museum & Art Gallery** – Gladiators of Britain Exhibition open. Record February half-term. Great evening event with Weymouth College about decolonisation. Becoming more involved with social prescribing. Jane Austen Down to the Sea with Arts University Bournemouth coming soon. Funding has been acquired for the Victorian Hall. Fossil Festival coming soon, treasure acquisition in progress. Dorchester museum passport launching soon at all museums (in place from Easter to October half term).
- **Jason (Duchy of Cornwall & Dorset County Show)** – DTC now in charge of The Great Field – lots of events happening soon. Beryl Bikes are now in Poundbury. Dorset Spring Show on May bank holiday weekend. Buses will be available from Dorchester to Showground. Dorset County Show will be the first weekend in September.
- **Joy Wallis (Blue Badge Tours Guides)** – Guided walks are increasing with the better weather. Friends of the Gardens – creating leaflet on the monuments in Borough Gardens.
- **Kingston Maurward** – Weymouth & Kingston Maurward Collage merger has happened; new name is coming soon. Marketing both elements of the college (6<sup>th</sup> form and land based) as a whole. Extended commercial programme happening: Easter trails, Walking Festival, British Eventing event. Looking for paid invigilators for exams.
- **Maiden Castle Farm** – Starting to prepare for Sunflower Trail in August (5<sup>th</sup> year). Seeds are to be sewn towards the end of April.
- **National Trust** – Properties just opened for the new season, Max Gate and Hardy's Cottage decorated with daffodils. Massive publicity due to the Flagstones discovery. New strategy being put into place with focus on increasing community engagement and working with partners.
- **Robin Potter DTC** – VE Day soon (8<sup>th</sup> May), plans for beacon lighting and music on the Sunday.
- **Shire Hall Museum** – Music in the Hall fundraising events planned (next 25<sup>th</sup> April). Middle Earth Exhibition now open. January/February footfall in line with forecasting, March footfall below expected. More advertising incoming re activities/exhibition/music.

- **The King's Arms** – new Events Manager Katy started in February. Focusing on increasing client base with corporate groups/meeting spaces/tour groups. Marketing: gaining content for campaign of the 'Dorchester experience' to showcase local attractions from point of view of Dorchester visitor.
- **Vinyl Van** – Brewery Square summer programme plans with music/events. Visitor numbers are increasing at Premier Inn. Featured in an Escape to the Country episode! Currently working with local partners to organise Pop-Up Pride in June. Record Store Day on 12<sup>th</sup> April with DJs all day and band in the evening.
- **Visit Dorset** – Spring Campaign going well (1.7 million people reached so far). Lots of blogs being written, some featuring Dorset businesses, and monthly visit blogs to different towns. Visit England Meet the Media event went well, with lots of journalists, influencers, content writers etc. Key trends were: Railways (with anniversary of the steam railway), Jane Austen, anything wild e.g. wild camping/swimming, multigenerational getaways, off season breaks, anywhere without tourists, interest in the salt path. Dorset is made for walking campaign launching soon and ties in with Dorchester Walking Festival. Recently received a lot of good content from Adventures with Alice. 2025/2026 packages have been launched for advertising, call to partners to purchase.
- **William Gibbons (Poundbury)** – Duchess of Cornwall has increased their food menu. Monart Spa looking to increase their business in the summer.

#### **ACTIONS:**

- Partners to let Development Assistant know about any pride events they are holding and whether they would like to be included in Pop-Up Pride marketing.
- Tourism Development Officer to investigate putting leaflets in Brewery Square Premier Inn.
- Tourism Development Officer to send out Visit Dorset marketing package links.

#### **9. Date of next meeting and close of meeting**

Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> July 2025, 1pm-3pm  
Kingston Maurward College

## Appendix 1.

### **Walking leaflet:**

- Design
  - New, fresher, brighter images
  - Dull cover
  - Makes Dorchester look like a grey blob
- Content
  - *'Discover Dorchester and surrounding areas'*
  - *'Discover Dorchester and Poundbury on foot'* – includes walks in Poundbury
  - Max Gate, Athelhampton and onwards included in the maps
  - More Poundbury walks needed including Poundbury Hillfort, the Great Field
  - Include aqueducts
  - Walks around Dorchester – marks on pavement?
  - No sites around Dorchester connected to Thomas Hardy.
  - Whole trail for the walks
- Other
  - Good – have seen people using it
  - Information board on wall at Charles St.

### **Summer leaflet 2024:**

- Design
  - Brighter map
  - Cut out images – not rectangular
  - Too many pictures of the Roman Town House
  - Poundbury picture on front to have the swale and flowers
  - Make link to app and website stand out more
  - Consistency on top of the flyers – semi circle design
  - *What's on in Dorchester* – needs to be more prominent
  - Colourful package
- Content
  - *Events* ranging from May to September (previously June to September)
  - *Places worth paying a visit* – images needed for all, add the Plaza, world heritage museums need more details
  - *Great day out* – add cafes
  - *Trains* – say direct to London, direct to Bristol with map
  - Good flavour of variety – to do, to see, what's on, for families etc.
  - Points out 'free' – good
  - *Markets* – one column for regular, one for one-off
  - Mention Athelhampton under Hardy

### **Discover Dorchester leaflet:**

- Design
  - Image of Poundbury needed on front
  - Matte paper doesn't work well, makes colour less vibrant – needs gloss
  - Like the recycled paper
  - More imagery and increased images – less text
  -
- Content
  - Dorset Museum – add '& Art Gallery', Dorchester Arts – add gallery space, WKMC – now free & name change
  - World heritage museums – expand with more info
  - Add brewery square fountains to *free activities* list
  - Good content – like the free things to do

- Use of QR codes to drive website visitors
- Include broader points above history of our town
- Maps
  - Dorchester and Poundbury on one page with information on the reverse
  - Poundbury shops marked with different colour in blocks
  - Add shopping/food & drink/stay sections
  - Highlight Poundbury squares on map – architecture points
  - Scale of map too small
  - *Getting to Dorchester* map – do we need this? who is this map for? People in Dorchester or people that might come? Add train times
  - Do we need a separate map for Poundbury?
  - PTO needed to tell Poundbury is on the back
  - Bigger map to include Poundbury as opposed to it being separate – use a key with images and codes
  - Confusion in presentation of Poundbury map in relation to Dorchester map – needs updating
  - Hate that Poundbury see themselves as somewhere separate
  - No consistency in inclusion of sites e.g. playgrounds, also Poundbury Gardens

#### **Leaflets in general:**

- Combine the two to avoid leaflets going out of date
- Get rid of single leaflets and combine into one multi-page A5 booklet
  - Double pages with walking maps
  - QR for what's on events with fresh events
  - Take inspiration from Frome's new booklet