



## Dorchester Tourism Partnership (DTP) Meeting

Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026  
10.30am – 12.30pm  
The King's Arms, Dorchester

Attending:

Attendees: Claire Dixon, Connie Hollings, Ether Baker, Francesca Evans, Gary Jarman, Ginny Slade, Helena Conibear, Joy Wallis, Katie Raven, Katie Stamper, Katy Jones, Kirsty Schmidt, Lisa Cartwright, Mark North, Mark Tattershall, Matilda Manley, Phil Gordon, Robin Potter, Steph Addison, Steve Wallis, William Gibbons.

### 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
- What's On/Annual events posters
- Recent press coverage and blog campaigns
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Dorchester 'Shop Front of the Season' Awards open – Spring (noms end 17<sup>th</sup> April)
- Ruby Granger (influencer) to visit for Thomas Hardy Victorian Fair (Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> May)
- Key events: Kite Festival 6<sup>th</sup> June 2026, Dorchester Walking Festival May 2026, Hardy 2028 ongoing

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

- All partners to send Tourism Development Officer fresh imagery for campaigns.

### ACTIONS:

- Tourism Development Officer and Development Assistant to continue working on campaigns and pushing short form video content harder.

### 3. Finances

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

### 4. Proposal from "In the Bag" PR Agency

In previous meetings, it had been discussed whether the partnership would like to work with a PR agency. The group were presented a range of services by In the Bag PR Agency from Weymouth. Since 2013, In the Bag have highlighted food, luxury, and lifestyle. They have worked with clients such as Catch, Dorset Seafood Festival, Crab House Café, Champagne Pommery, Dorset Town of Culture, Spellbound at Kingston Maurward, and more.

The main wants and needs of the Tourism Partnership were identified as visibility and footfall. In the Bag would be able to:

- Get Dorchester's brands in front of journalists
- Manage PR stays, bringing journalists/content creators in and creating itineraries for them

- Find and work with content creators specifically for niche audiences
- Use existing relationships with journalists/media/influencers
- Obtain raw footage from PR visits which will allow Discover Dorchester and attractions to repurpose content
- Organise all work under one Account Manager
- Report with analytics on all activity

In the Bag currently work with We are Weymouth (Weymouth BID) which could cause a clash of interest. Pippa will check with the levy payers but is hopefully they would be on board, and we can work collaboratively with them.

DTP could choose a monthly retainer for start-ups and small brands which equates to 1 day per month at £1000 + VAT (£12,000 + VAT per year). This would focus on tying their work into our marketing plan and constantly pitching to journalists etc. In the Bag have also offered a separate option of quarterly retainer to focus on separate campaigns with 4 PR visits per year.

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

- Coastland College noted their experience working with a further agency in Surrey was very difficult as they didn't understand the area.
- It was essential to the group the agency is local and passionate about the area. In the Bag seem to be the only impressive PR agency locally so there is no need to enquire with other agencies.
- The analytic reports wouldn't show instant results but will be usually over a longer period of time.
- A suggestion was made that organisations could put a small amount of personal funds into the pot. The Dorchester BID will not be able to contribute as this would limit resource to Town Centre only.
- Tourism Development Officer doesn't have the time or contacts to be able to spread good content around. There are some great assets but not able to make use of them enough!

Decision on which retainer (monthly/quarterly):

- No matter how many days the DTP go for, In the Bag will see us as a client and therefore think of us naturally when opportunities come up.
- Messaging from specific events need to reinforce the year-round content – could be campaigns (e.g., dog friendly, family friendly, hardy country)
- If quarterly, starting in September would work well.
- Accommodation providers would not be able to host people as regularly as monthly. 4 times a year is much more accessible.
- Vote: Monthly retainer for a year – 2
- Vote: Quarterly retainer for a year – 17

#### **ACTIONS:**

- In the Bag PR to respond regarding potential conflict with We are Weymouth.
- Tourism Development Officer to proceed with quarterly retainer by writing a detailed brief.
- Dorchester Tourism Partnership to review progress after the first year and decide whether to continue.

#### **5. Partner updates**

- **Chamber of Business** – Chamber is doing very well. Always looking for new members. Recently hosted the first business lunch of the year at Al Molo. It is the Chamber's 110<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2026 to be celebrated with a big party! Dorchester Ghost Walks are to start again and a new website incoming.
- **Coastland College** – 7 months into the merger with Weymouth College working very well. Coastland Events hosting 'Spellbound' which has had great attendance so far – working with external marketing company. Recently held the High Sheriff appointment ceremony at the Weymouth Campus with students catering. Heritage and Harmony event coming up on 18<sup>th</sup> April showcasing heritage skills e.g. book binding, cheese making.
- **Dorchester Arts** – Helios has been performing well with over 2000 people in the first 3 days! Postcode analysis is being done. Art space working well. A small pop-up pride exhibition in lobby. Scripts the thing opens in May. Outdoor season tickets going on sale soon.
- **Dorchester BID** – Premier Inn unfortunately pulled out of Dorchester space. Winter months always difficult and business rates going up. Lots of new businesses opening, more than 20 in end of year report.

- **Dorchester Civic Society** – Currently working on local plan and North Dorchester proposal. Lots of research on Eldridge pope and to be presented at the Thomas Hardy Victorian Fair.
- **Dorset Museum & Art Gallery** – Has been a difficult start to the year as returned funding for the roof because tenders were too high. However, have retained funding for Victorian Hall. Busy start to Easter and split holidays will hopefully extend the Easter business stretch. Dorset Council have not extended the Arts Development Company contract so looking to see what that means. Arts Council are going through a restructure. People Watching exhibition switching to treasure in Summer. Visible Women exhibition currently in community space. Dorset Art Weeks coming up. Roman Town House tours and walks starting again. World Heritage Day line-up very busy. In conversation with British Museum re Bayeux Tapestry. Have been nominated for Visitor Awards!
- **Mark North** – New signs for historic dorchester. Thomas Hardy birthday lectures coming up for birthday weekend. Working with English Heritage for new Maiden Castle tours.
- **English Heritage** – Maiden Castle will be undergoing a big conservation project, 'Conservation in Action', including re-chalking the footpaths and new steps. Working on community engagement to get people involved (businesses, community groups, schools, etc.). A helicopter will be bringing chalk. Looking to improve wildlife and ecology on the King's Meadow, created to celebrate coronation of King Charles III (working with DWT). New volunteer role of a Heritage Ranger. Partnered with Dorset Museum to deliver Maiden Castle tours. Will be creating own FB page for Maiden Castle.
- **Greenwood Grange** – Family took over 3 years ago from corporate. Corporate owners were spending £50k on marketing – now spending £300 on FB adverts. New website last year and focused on making everything feel synergised.
- **Joy Wallis** – Conducting lots of tours in Dorchester. Cruise ships from Caribbean coming but no bookings yet. Lots of inquiries for tours but no accommodation available to stay in. Creating a tree leaflet as part of Friends of Dorchester Borough Gardens.
- **The King's Arms** – Corporate client base doing very well. Upcoming: grill and groove events, £4 happy hour on Sundays. Teasel and Skylark have been doing a series of author talks that have been very successful!
- **Robin Potter DTC** – Dorchester's new Town Clerk, Charmaine Denny, starting end of July. New Market and Communications Officer starting end of April. Supporting all events in town. Dorchester's new Mayor will be Les Fry.
- **Steve Wallis** – Roman Town House has had its annual clean, working on restoring the path. Wildflowers starting to come out! DC geologist providing info on individual tesserae of mosaics. Presenting a World Heritage Day talk at DM&AG and four walks for Walking Festival.
- **Tom Browns** – Great start to the year especially for room bookings – every room in use. Hosting regular creative nights, quizzes, crafts, and more. Duck race is back for this year! No Hardy Har in 2026, however lots of comedy-based events coming. Oak Taverns picked up award for Best Community Pubs. Have created a Tom Browns zine (artwork by Lucy Newnham from Don't Forget 2 Play). Looking forward to Thomas Hardy Victorian Fair when Tom Browns will be holding the annual hokey cokey on South Street. Kirsty was Introduced as pub manager.
- **Vinyl Van** – Sales going well! Brewery Square footfall has been quite low for winter but is steadily increasing. Involved with Pop-Up Pride Dorchester – any businesses holding pride events will be complied into a programme. Lots of visitors coming from Bournemouth and Poole for day trips on the train. Record Store Day soon.
- **William Gibbons DTC** – Crime is officially down in Dorchester with shoplifting down 20%. New constable due to be appointed soon.

#### **ACTIONS:**

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

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

Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> July 2026, 10.30am-12.30pm.  
Venue TBC.