



DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL

DORCHESTER HERITAGE JOINT COMMITTEE

**The Current Extent of Town Marketing**

**How visitors find out about Dorchester**

**Background**

It has already been identified in background paper D (Local Context and Issues) that the visitor awareness as reported by the towns accommodation providers is low.

This paper has been prepared following an investigation into the content about Dorchester as featured on websites from national level such as [www.visitbritain.com](http://www.visitbritain.com) through to the Dorchester content on the local business websites.

It has also looked at the frequency of most recent posts to social media undertaken by organisations and businesses and featuring content on the Dorchester visitor offer.

**Web Information**

National

At a national level, websites are directed at promoting the UK to international visitors ([www.visitbritain.com](http://www.visitbritain.com) – VB) , and to promoting England and its regions across the UK ([www.visitengland.com](http://www.visitengland.com) -VE). In both instances, Dorset content can be found by following links to nations and regions pages. Neither website duplicates the other, and both have an eclectic mix of attractions presented, with little duplication and have links to [www.visit-Dorset.com](http://www.visit-Dorset.com). There is no reference on either site to Dorchester, and only a passing reference to Thomas Hardy in the context of the county.

Content featured in these sites is informed by content from the local Destination Management Organisation (DMO), in this case Visit Dorset ,but only on request from and subject to selection by VB or VE. Current processes at VE and VB to secure content for their locality pages are under review and likely to seek recommendations from visit-Dorset as the local DMO.

Regional

There is no South West Region web presence beyond the host website <http://www.visitsouthwest.co.uk/> which consists of links to the 8 county or other destination DMO websites in the south west.

Dorset

The DMO site for Dorset, is the Visit-Dorset website administered by Dorset Council and part funded by memberships from the accommodation and attraction businesses that appear within the site. It

covers all of the Dorset Council administrative area and also features some businesses as members located outside of the Dorset Council area. It has multiple search options for accommodation, attractions, events and things to do/places to go. Businesses feature if they have paid for membership. Events are maintained via a self-entry form on the website and it is free to add to the site.

General location searches are derived from mapping “polygons” and so cover a wider geography than just the town or villages selected. A Dorchester site search returns summaries of accommodation and attractions (paid for entries on the site) events activities eating shopping etc (some of which are paid for entries), and eventually links to a town and to surrounding villages pages. The Town page, once reached, has a comprehensive description of the town and its offer including all heritage attractions, and a link to a pdf download of a town guide.

Dorchester represents a small element in the Dorset offer promoted via the Visit Dorset website. It is supported by a dedicated team of c3.5FTE and a total marketing and activity budget about £160k comprising member income and council subsidy.

Visit Bournemouth website (official Bournemouth tourism site) includes an explore page with links to Dorchester and some of the key attractions.

Poole Tourism website (official Poole tourism site) lists Dorchester as a day out without a car (visits by train).

### Town

DorchesterDorset.com is the website of the Dorchester Business Improvement District (DBID). DBID has a remit in its current 2018-2023 business plan under town promotion and marketing to attract more visitors and residents to visit the town, staying longer, visiting more frequently, and spending more in local businesses. The BID allocates 40% of its annual income to town promotion and marketing (c £48k).<sup>1</sup>

Under the Experience tab, there is an explore feature that includes town museums, gardens and river walks. There is a good brief history summary, and an extensive discover our secrets section listing almost all attractions. It should be noted however that some entries are out of date.

WEAreWeymouth is the town promotion site for Weymouth Business Improvement District. The beyond Weymouth pages has a Day Out in Dorchester page with a comprehensive summary of the Dorchester offer.

Bournemouth Poole and Wimborne BIDs do not include days out or similar content or mention Dorchester. BIDs are town centre focused and there should be no expectation that they should include details about other towns.

### Business Sites

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.dorchesterdorset.com/docs/DBID\\_BP2018\\_web\\_version.pdf](https://www.dorchesterdorset.com/docs/DBID_BP2018_web_version.pdf)

Most of the tourism business websites for the town focus on their particular business offer and include little if any details about the town's tourism offer. Any tourism offer included is as an "about the area", or (Dorset attractions) or similar tab, with just a very few exceptions, include more about neighboring towns and attractions than the offer available in Dorchester.

#### Other sites

There are several other general travel or tourism websites and blog sites that include some good Dorset content. Some exist to promote published travel guides, or accommodation agencies and so will include a snapshot of some iconic Dorset attractions (Corfe, Durdle Door etc.) as a draw to the real website purpose.

Others are blog sites from travel writers and bloggers, often involving multiple contributors and/or part of an international array of destinations at all geographies. While some of the content is very good for the town, finding Dorchester or Dorset content on such sites is perhaps more a matter of luck than judgement. Some of the sites are dependent on local tourism product acting as a feed to the web host or author.

Tripadvisor includes a good representation of the Dorchester offer, but has geographical boundaries that exceed the town by several miles. Its comments are user generated.

Booking.com covers a wide area up to some 10-15 miles distant from the town. Apart from the accommodation offer, each property entry includes a Property Surroundings entry. The listing for Dorchester properties seem to be broadly the same, with coastal attractions, supermarkets and nearest airports frequently listed. Almost none include an attraction, feature or event in the town.

#### Social Media

There is social media activity (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter) across the marketing spectrum above.

National, Regional and County activities in social media are frequent across all three platforms with followers in 0,000s and 000,000's.

At general town level, Dorchester BID's social media activity is more focussed towards Facebook and Twitter, and emphasizes the events and offers available in the town.

Local Accommodation businesses have all indicated through 1-1 meetings their use of social media as a marketing tool, and accounts can be identified for all on Facebook and Twitter, with just a few on Instagram. Activity levels vary, with several posting very infrequently (2-3 times pa). Some are more active with periodic monthly posts, and just a few post more frequently. Content varies but is mostly related to the business offer.

Local attractions all have social media accounts and are very active, posting at least weekly. Content varies but is generally about the organisation, the offer from the attraction or a related post informed by reports in the local regional and national media.

Total followers from Visit Dorset and identified local social media feeds at the time of writing are

Facebook	102607	Instagram	24174
Twitter	46298		

The most followed feeds are on Facebook from Brewery Square, Visit Dorset and Dorchester BID Attractions followers are considerably higher than accommodation followers. This may reflect a higher number of local followers able to make repeat visits.

## COVID 19

At the time of writing and during the audit, the country is in lockdown with all except essential businesses closed. Marketing activity on websites at all levels including nationally, and in social media (where it is active – see earlier note) has a consistent messages about not visiting and helping to spread infection, but does have a consistent message about visitors being welcome when it becomes safe and appropriate to travel again. In the case of attractions, particularly on social media, the messages are about behind the scenes activity to conserve and improve the collections, and linking to national and international events and news stories relevant to their offer.

The intent is clear, to keep the destination or attraction at the forefront of peoples minds so that when restrictions are lifted, a visit to the destination or attraction appears early on visitors “to visit” lists.

## Conclusions

Background paper D, concluded that staying visitors in the town had little awareness of the Dorchester offer prior to their visit, and that some staying visitors had spent a night for other reasons than to be a tourist in the town, and wished they’d stayed longer.

National websites have no Dorchester content currently, and while there is content on regional sites, their focus is more about individual businesses (accommodation and attractions) which in turn are dependent on the business having a membership package on the site. It is often not easy to navigate to pages with detail about the towns visitor offer in a single place on regional websites, and their content is not often proactively and routinely maintained.

Town based websites exist for other purposes and or a multitude of audiences with different needs. Where there is content about the visitor offer, it is not always easily to identify

Local businesses frequently do not have comprehensive content about the towns visitor offer.

There is a need clearly to improve the accessibility to and ease of search for visitor content for the town across websites at all levels. This may or may not be through a new dedicated website. However, with small numbers of tourism businesses in the town, most of whom are already paying a BID levy, it is unlikely that a commercial or exclusive membership approach to such a website will derive sufficient income to justify costs of debt collection and administration.

Social media activity is mostly carried out by larger organisations promoting Dorset generally, town centre offers or features of specific attractions. There is little social media activity amongst accommodation businesses.

There is an opportunity to increase social media activity and develop some common stories for all to share, as well as contributing to improved content on town and regional destination sites.