



DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL

DORCHESTER HERITAGE JOINT COMMITTEE

Dorchester Tourism Product

What is the Dorchester Visitor Offer

Background

This paper sets out to establish the principle paid for product and attractors in the town that are considered as part of the heritage, in particular, and tourism offer in the town. It neither seeks to be an exhaustive documentary of all paid for Heritage and Tourism facilities in the town, nor does it attempt to list all the ancillary elements of the town offer such as taxi services, food and beverage establishments etc.

Accommodation

Dorchester is not well provided for with accommodation (noted in the Blue Sail report – see paper B Research and Data).

A review of product listings through Visit Dorset, TripAdvisor, Booking.com etc identifies just 22 businesses offering serviced or self-catering accommodation in the town and immediate surrounding area. This includes B&B's, pubs and hotels.

The largest of these is the Premier Inn with over 70 letting rooms and reputed to operate at high occupancy levels. The Duchess of Cornwall and BW Wessex Royale each have between 20 and 30 letting rooms, as will the Kings Arms when fully open. The majority of the remainder, B&B's have between 3 and 7 letting rooms, while the one self-catering complex has a portfolio of 17 letting properties with up to 82 bed spaces.

Listed on Air BnB are 221 properties against a Dorchester location search, further map analysis (17.3.20) suggests there are 31 properties offering 81 bed spaces in 41 rooms in the Dorchester area.

Around the town there are several mobile home and touring camping and caravan sites both permanent and temporary on farm locations and established permanent sites. The most notable of these close to Dorchester is at Warmwell, with over 200 homes/pitches, with many larger establishments along the Jurassic Coast in and close to both Weymouth and Bridport.

Attractions

Dorchester is blessed with a selection of attractions that are both “paid for” admission and free to enter.

Four of the paid for attractions are part of World Heritage, and mainly present elements of global history or interest through their reproduction displays (Tutankhamun, Terra Cotta Warriors, Dinosaur and Teddy Bear).

Kingston Maurward House, Grounds and Animal Park (only the Gardens and animal park are open to the public) provides a blend of the Heritage attraction through the listed gardens, family day out (animal park) and accessible to the town events host (outdoor concerts and events).

The remaining paid for attractions can all be considered to be within the heritage sector (The Keep Military Museum, Dorset County Museum, Shire Hall Justice Museum, MaxGate, Hardy’s Birthplace). Each is owned and operated by a charitable trust, and highly dependent on volunteers from the local community to support and in many cases staff the attraction.

The town also benefits from several free to access attractions and “places”, including some of international standing including:

Maiden Castle and other early remains	Roman Town House
Maumbury Rings	Borough Gardens
Riverside Walk and nature reserve	Dorchester Market
Poundbury	Brewery Square
Frink Statues	Hardy’s Statue
St Peters Church	

Culture & Events

The Town is fortunate to have active events spaces and organisers, both paid for and free to access but these may in general be serving more of a local audience than staying visitors and include

Dorset County Show	Dorchester Arts
Borough Gardens events programme (inc events in Maumbury Rings)	
Thomas Hardy Victorian Fair	Heritage Open Dorchester
Brewery Square events programme	Poundbury events programme
Dorchester Literary Festival	

Many of the events are highly dependent on volunteers to organise, act as “hosts” or in a security capacity, and with the general operation of the events.

People

Dorchester has associations with many people from history either because of it being their place of birth or residence and or because of actions they have taken in the town. Their stories add to the many tales to be told about the town and link national and international events to the town. These characters include:

Thomas Hardy (author)
Revd John White
Sir Frederick Treves
Henry Moule
Tom Roberts

Thomas Hardy (Naval Admiral)
William Barnes
Denzel Holles
George Jeffreys (Judge)
Tolpuddle Martyrs

Conclusion

Dorchester has a history and heritage spanning 6000 years. Much of this is in untold stories of the people and buildings including at random

Birthplace and story of Frederic Treves

Fire from Heaven

Emigration to Massachusetts

Fighting Cholera with earth closets

Fictional Casterbridge and characters

First prorogation of Parliament

Castle and royalty

Multiple listed buildings displaying features from their past such as small glazed windows (former gunsmiths) and butchers hooks

Other elements of its history and heritage, particularly its archaeological heritage, and hidden beneath car parks, under buildings or modern facades

Opportunities therefore exist to develop and enhance the visitor experience with new and additional ways of presenting and joining together the interesting people, buildings, places and events that are the background to modern Dorchester. This may involve new technological interpretation facilities and experiences.

Events and heritage attractions particularly dependent on the willingness and capacity of volunteers to fulfil both customer facing and back office roles in order to paly their part in the visitor economy

The main focus of activity should be towards the growth of the day visitor market (resident locals and staying visitors within reasonable travel time), development of new visitor experiences infomed by the Heritage Audit, and increasing productivity by improving occupancy levels outside peak periods.