

Red Kite

Heritage Tourism Audit for Dorchester
Dorchester Town Council



Final report

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Heritage Tourism Audit for Dorchester

Dorchester Town Council



Red Kite

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Cover: Dorchester High West Street, RKE

This page: Dorset Martyr's Sculpture, in the time of Covid19, by Elisabeth Frink, RKE

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Dorchester Corn Exchange, RKE

Summary

This audit is the next stage in Dorchester Town Council's ongoing assessment of the town's heritage assets and opportunities. The audit has three aims.

1. It shows the quantity and complexity of Dorchester's heritage assets.
2. It identifies which heritage assets could best support the development of heritage tourism in the town, and makes suggestions about how that development could be best managed for the benefit of Dorchester's economy and its heritage assets.
3. It discusses the possibilities for, and the challenges in, developing marketing and interpretation approaches that could enhance visitor experiences of Dorchester.

The audit of heritage sites and the proposals for developing heritage tourism have been guided by the results of a digital survey of residents and current and potential visitors, and consultation with key organisations. The survey was completed by 276 local Dorchester residents and 116 current and potential visitors from a wider region of approximately 1.5 travel time. It was undertaken in September – October 2020.

The audit explains that heritage tourism needs both skilled management and marketing if heritage assets are to become attractive tourism products while retaining their physical and cultural integrity and their authenticity.

Suggestions are made about how Dorchester as a community, trading centre and as an authentic conservation-rich town could benefit from a carefully planned sustainable tourism strategy to boost its income from visitation in this highly competitive field.

1 Introduction

As the county town for Dorset, Dorchester has, since Roman times, been a major commercial and political centre. It has seen settlement since pre-history, with strong evidence of many Bronze Age people in the area, followed by powerful Iron Age tribes, a Roman garrison with walls and aqueduct, invasions by Vikings, Saxons and Normans. Then came medieval prosperity with textile trading and manufacturing, catastrophic fires in the 17th and 18th centuries, Georgian redevelopment and then expansion from Victorian times with industry, connected by railways to Southampton, London and Bristol. Dorchester also has some contemporary development including Poundbury, an urban village on the west of the town, built following HRH Prince of Wales's vision for architecture and urban planning.

Dorchester has witnessed significant events, such as the trials after the Monmouth Rebellion, the Puritan emigration to America, and the trial of the Tolpuddle Martyrs. It has also seen a flourishing of arts and culture with its literary and artistic connections through Thomas Hardy, William Barnes and Elisabeth Frink. This has resulted in

Dorchester becoming a place with a rich and varied history, a surprisingly homogenous architecture with many stone-built Georgian buildings constructed as a result of the fires, and, through its location next to the River Frome and its water meadows, a diverse and accessible natural environment.

Dorchester's heritage assets are special because they:

- are relatively unknown and very well preserved
- are complete, in the sense that they include Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman, medieval, and eighteenth, nineteenth, twentieth and even twenty-first century sites
- are easy to access
- are all within easy walking distance of the town centre and of each other.
- include a series of major museums which together form a "Museums Mile" in the town centre.
- include both man-made and natural heritage features.

But, like many similar towns, Dorchester is at a key point in its history. It is experiencing strong and conflicting pressures for change. The seemingly inexorable rise of on-line shopping is leading to numerous shop closures, the likely loss of its authentic market town character, loss of jobs and declining local services of many types. The Covid 19 pandemic has accelerated these changes, and currently there is no sign of the pandemic being overcome.

Dorchester is also of increasing interest to national house builders wishing to capitalise on its ability to offer – so far – the now popular uncrowded middle-class lifestyles away from the big cities, yet with direct rail links to London. These possible developments are likely to be of special potential interest to an influx of retired people, attracted partly because of Dorchester's rich natural and built heritage. Some residents believe that Dorchester's economy could diversify into heritage tourism, helping to justify heritage conservation expenditure, re-opening shops, providing jobs and helping to support community services including transport, hospitality, entertainment and health services. This could also prove attractive to younger people – balancing out trends towards an otherwise ageing population.

But other residents are not in favour of tourism, fearing that it could result in over-tourism, and change the character of the town for the worse. They may, or may not, know that these discussions are going on in many small towns across the UK and in Europe generally. They may not know that to attract visitors to small towns like Dorchester will not be easy: tourism is a highly competitive market. Over-tourism could be hard to achieve in Dorchester, and the tourism products need to be special, fashionable, and in line with the expectations of the market. Tourism is also increasingly driven by the opportunity to get new experiences; and experiences have to be designed. Earlier consultancy reports on the Dorchester – Weymouth area show that Dorchester has a specialised, up-market, older and much smaller market than Weymouth. The recent on-line survey for this audit confirms this, but adds that families with children are also interested in Dorchester's heritage.

Finally, those in fear of over-tourism may not know that it can be avoided by careful use of Sustainable Tourism development and management strategies. This concept is described in more detail below.

2 The Heritage Assets list and the Heritage Audit

Background

Dorchester Town Council produced an initial listing of 338 of the heritage assets of the town and its immediate surroundings in 2019. The listing included places, people, events and general observations about the town and was presented in an Excel spreadsheet. This listing accompanies this document.

The list of heritage assets was compiled from:

- A list of buildings on the Heritage England 'National Heritage List for England'
- A listing of the blue and other plaques in the town
- 'An Illustrated History of Dorchester', by Jo Draper, published by Dovecote Press
- 'The Buildings of England – Dorset' by Pevsner et al (2018 edition)
- Local knowledge of Dorchester and its surrounding area within Dorset

Heritage Audit

In April 2020 Dorchester Town Council commissioned Red Kite Environment (RKE) to develop the initial listing and produce a heritage audit for the town as a supporting document for the Town Council's Tourism Strategy. RKE was asked to identify the key heritage features that could be used to encourage tourism in Dorchester and to suggest ways in which the town's heritage could be marketed and promoted.

RKE staff walked the four town trails and visited many of the heritage sites presented in the heritage listing. These included sites in Dorchester town and in the surrounding area. Photographs were taken of many of these sites and are included in the audit spreadsheet.

Using the list of heritage assets as a starting point a selection has been made of those heritage sites and features that are likely to be most attractive to visitors and tourists, and these have been described in more detail in sheet 5, titled RKE Heritage Audit, of the Excel Spreadsheet. This can be used by the Council and businesses as a reference resource and can be updated as required.

The key heritage sites were selected by a combination of three approaches:

1. Consultation with a list of organisations and individuals, suggested by the Heritage Tourism Officer and the chair of the Heritage Committee. A list of consultees is included in Appendix 1.
2. A digital questionnaire survey of Dorchester residents and people living 1.5 hour's travel time of Dorchester, who were interested in heritage and in the town.
3. RKE's experience in developing interpretation for sites with cultural and natural heritage, and 30 years' experience of sustainable tourism management work in Europe, Asia and the Americas, concentrating on architectural conservation, rural

and small-town regeneration, private – public sector partnership creation and protected area management.

The audit was undertaken in 2020 during the Covid19 pandemic. As the analysis of heritage sites was conducted remotely the lockdown had little impact on the progress of the audit. The site visits and trail walking were carried out after the easing of the lockdown in July. The major impact was the prevention of face-to-face consultation, but this was resolved by holding ‘meetings’ by video conference call and developing an online questionnaire which is described in detail below.

3 Audiences

There are no overall statistics for the current numbers of visitors to Dorchester. The Tourist Information Centre (TIC) recorded the numbers of people visiting the centre and figures are available from 2014. The TIC was formally self-contained until March 2017, answered counter enquiries and sold local goods. In April 2017 it moved to the library and ceased having goods for sale. Since moving, fewer people have visited the TIC and this is reflected in the figures. The figures are:

Year	Visitor Numbers	Counter Enquiries	% locals	% visitors
2014-15	173,441	estimated 25%	appx 40%	appx 60%
2015-16	170,311			
2016-17	153,990			
2017-18		33,031		
2018-19		27,022		
2019-20		27,181		

The Blue Sail report of June 2016¹ identified the investment needs for tourism for Western Dorset. It considered that Dorchester has a clear identity as a cultural destination. It is an attractive town with good shopping and eating out facilities, and ‘has the potential to become a stronger year-round short break heritage destination.’ Its tourism is currently heavily reliant on day trips from holidaymakers staying elsewhere, especially Weymouth, as holiday accommodation is limited, particularly hotels and guest houses.

‘Dorchester is a cultural offer, appealing to the highly sought after ‘cultural tourist’. These cultural tourists are affluent couples, highly discerning, well-travelled in the UK and internationally, looking for high-quality, unique and meaningful experiences and not prepared to compromise on any aspect of their experience. The environment, food and drink and accommodation offer must all meet their expectations.’

Typical visitors to Dorchester were found to be aged 40+, in socio-demographic groups A and B, living within two hours travel time north and east of Dorset and are looking for:

- Rounded experiences.

¹ Western Dorset Growth Corridor Development of Tourism Product & Offer, Blue Sail, June 2016

- Character, quality, distinctive accommodation (hotels, guest houses, self-catering), independent restaurants and cafes serving quality food, independent quirky shops.
- Historic environment with good public realm and public spaces.
- Distinctive cultural attractions, history, heritage, crafts, local festivals and events.
- Relaxation and time together.

4 The Digital Survey

RKE's original bid proposed running focus groups in Dorchester during the summer of 2020 to gather residents' views and opinions on the heritage of the town. However, the restrictions imposed as a result of the Covid pandemic made it impossible to run focus groups, and two digital surveys were undertaken instead.

Although it was disappointing not to be able to run focus groups and discuss the issues with local residents, the digital surveys gathered more information from a greater number of respondents than would have been possible through face-to-face meetings. They also gathered information from previous and potential visitors living within 1.5 hours' travel time of Dorchester, which would not have been achieved through focus groups held in Dorchester.

SurveyMonkey Questionnaires

The survey was carried out using SurveyMonkey, a software company that provides surveys and "back-end" programmes. Two questionnaires were developed; one for Dorchester residents and the other for people from a wider region, approximately 1.5 hours travel time from Dorchester. The wider region survey targeted people interested in heritage and Dorchester, living within 10 miles of the major towns and cities in an arc from Southampton to Exeter. It included Bournemouth, Poole, Weymouth, Shaftesbury, Swindon, Bath, Bristol, Taunton and Yeovil.

The two surveys were designed to be compatible, with some similar questions, enabling the results to be amalgamated where appropriate. The questionnaire questions and the responses to each question are provided in Excel files to accompany this report.

Questionnaire duration and responses

The SurveyMonkey surveys ran concurrently for 4 weeks, from 10 September to 4 October. At least 69,016 people saw one of 5 advertisements on Facebook inviting them to help look after Dorchester's heritage. When the survey closed, a total of 392 people had completed the surveys; 276 local Dorchester residents and 116 from the wider region.

Profile of respondents

The distributions of age ranges for the respondents were:

Town	
Under 18	0%

18-24	3.93%
25-34	6.99%
35-44	13.10%
45-54	14.41%
55-64	22.71%
65+	35.37%
Prefer not to say	3.49%

Wider region

Under 18	0%
18-24	1.22%
25-34	10.98%
35-44	25.61%
45-54	26.83%
55-64	17.05%
65+	15.85%
Prefer not to say	2.44%

The respondents from the town, therefore, were generally more senior than those living outside Dorchester. Respondents from Dorchester were 94% white/white British, with 3.93% preferring not to say. Respondents from outside Dorchester were 93% White/white British, with 4.88% preferring not to say.

The question inviting people to participate in the survey that attracted most responses on the Facebook surveys was: 'Can you spare 10 minutes to help protect Dorchester's heritage?' The image that attracted most responses inviting people to participate in the Facebook SurveyMonkey survey was of The Keep Museum.

Key findings from the digital survey

The questionnaire responses included tickboxes to answer specific questions and invitations to make comments. The responses of both questionnaires are in the accompanying Excel files and a more thorough analysis is shown in Appendix 2. Question 6 in the wider survey is not included as it had no responses.

For the questions that have a choice of response from 'least likely' to 'most likely', for example for recommending specific sites to visitors, the percentage response is analysed using a 'weighted average' that provides an average rating for 'likelihood' for each site. This weighting provides a more consistent method of comparing the likelihood across the choice of sites.

The main points are:

- For Dorchester **residents** the heritage stories that are considered most interesting are Thomas Hardy, followed by Neolithic, Iron Age and Roman sites in Dorchester and the Tolpuddle Martyrs. For the **wider region respondents**, the most interesting heritage stories are Neolithic, Iron Age and Roman sites, historic buildings and architecture and green spaces and wildlife.
- The most popular museums for **residents** are County Museum, Shire Hall and The Keep.

- The museums/exhibitions that would be most recommended by both **residents** and the **wider region respondents** are Shire Hall, County Museum and The Keep.
- The most visited heritage sites by **residents** are Maiden Castle, Maumbury Rings and the Thomas Hardy Statue.
- The heritage sites most likely to be recommended by **residents** are Maiden Castle and the Frome Riverside Walk. The sites most likely to be recommended by the **wider region respondents** are Max Gate, the Roman Town House and Hardy's Cottage.
- The most popular events attended by **residents** are the Dorset County Show, the Dorchester Christmas Cracker, the Thomas Hardy Victorian Fair and Heritage Open Days.
- The events most likely to be recommended by **residents** are the Dorset County Show and the Heritage Open Days. The events most likely to be recommended by the **wider region respondents** are the Dorchester Literary Festival, with the Dorchester Christmas Cracker, Heritage Open Days and Thomas Hardy Victorian Fair following behind.
- The most popular description of Dorchester as a tourist destination is 'Dorchester is perfect for history lovers', followed by 'Dorchester has a great range of nature walks, trails and green spaces' and 'Dorchester is a great place to take children'.
- Comments on potential ways of attracting visitors include:
 - Make more of local produce.
 - Support and attract new local independent shops.
 - Local pubs and cafes are an attraction, more independent restaurants are needed.
 - Create a quality farmers' market that could be 'the beating heart of the town'.
 - Make more of history, arts and nature.

Selection of comments

The responses include many comments, some of which are detailed and provide a wealth of perspectives about Dorchester and its heritage. The following is a selection of the more detailed comments from Dorchester residents.

Heritage sites

'The tunnels from Judge Jeffries that run to the old court room and Fordington, I believe. These would make an excellent tourist attraction'

'Places linked to Dorchester's role during WWI: Colliton House; site of prisoner of war camp, with hospital; memorial to German PoWs in Fordington Cemetery.'

'Old hospital site and well in Princess street, Henge in Waitrose car park, Henge in field off Casterbridge Road and Conquers Barrow, Water Meadows. Tunnels under the town.'

Heritage stories

'I think there is a historical/heritage story which is very important because it gives the town its special character and, in a sense, underpins the most significant of the

historical developments mentioned above. It is the link between the town and its countryside.'

'The story of the development of the town over the centuries eg main employers such as brewing and local government. How the town has served as the market town for the local area and the connections that were made with the surrounding hinterland including agriculture and associated industries.'

Places to recommend to others

'Athelhampton is interesting but not so child friendly. Maiden Castle is a great walk and fascinating site and Maumbury rings is both strange and convenient to visit! the river walk is lovely, well-used and a best route to the Sun!'

Events

'Dorset County show is without doubt the best Dorchester attraction – a fantastic mix of tradition, commerce, family fun, competition (both agriculture, horticulture and craft), produce, shopping and entertainment – all with a Dorset theme.'

'The independent shops that I have used in Dorchester have excellent service and quality goods and county town butchers and the independent bakery I shop at deserve a special mention...'

'Dorchester has so much going for it but its Main Street seems to have been left to fall down with empty rundown buildings other than multiple takeaways, whilst money has been spent on opening up new areas drawing people away from the main shopping area.'

5 Key findings of the heritage audit

Primary and secondary sites, people and events

The original Heritage Asset list contained 338 sites, 10 key historic people associated with the town and 28 events within the town and immediate parishes. Thirty new sites, people and events have been added to the original Heritage Asset list.

The heritage audit and the digital surveys have identified the following with potential for interpreting to visitors and residents:

- 22 primary sites and 42 secondary sites
- 3 primary people and 11 secondary people
- 5 primary events and 3 secondary events

Assets in *italics* are additions to the original Heritage Asset list.

Assets with heritage interpretation potential are in **red** font.

The 22 primary sites

Hardy's Cottage
Max Gate
County Museum

Maumbury Rings
Roman Town House
Maiden Castle

Dorset Martyr's Sculpture
Drummer sculpture
Poundbury
Kingston Maurward
High East and West Street
Dorset Shepherd
Frome Riverside Walk
Nature Trail

Borough Gardens
Town Walks
Great Field
Shire Hall Museum
The Keep Museum
Fairfield Market
Brewery Square
South Street

The 42 secondary sites

Thomas Hardy Statue
Stinsford Church
South Street Hardy Plaque
Old Post Office war memorial
Barclays Bank
Greys Bridge
Poundbury Hillfort
Roman Wall remains
Henge post holes
Roman Baths
Ceramic panels in Waitrose lift area
Dorchester 700 tapestry
POW camp
Napper's Mite
German War Memorial
Fordington
Community Orchard and Farm
All Saints wildlife garden
High Street listed buildings
Queen Mother's Sculpture
Royal Oak Inn

The Old Hospital
Ferrey, Crickmay and Hardy (all architects) buildings
War Memorial, Lutyens
DTC WW1 memorial
Holy Trinity Church
St Peter's Church
All Saints Church Fordington
Town Pump
Salisbury Fields
Dinosaur Museum
Tutankhamun Museum
Terracotta Warriors Museum
Teddy Bear Museum
Specialist shops
Micro breweries
Delicatessens
Kings Arms
The White Hart
Historic Inns and hotels
Plaza Cinema
Antelope Walk

Primary people

Thomas Hardy
Judge George Jeffreys

Elisabeth Frink

Secondary people

William Barnes
Shirley Page
Tolpuddle Martyrs
Frederick Treves
Cowper Powys
Tom Roberts

Tracy Chevalier
Minette Walters
Rev John White
Henry Moule
Denzil Hollies

Primary events

Dorset County Show
Dorchester Christmas Cracker
Thomas Hardy Victorian Fair

Heritage Open Days
Dorchester Literary Festival

Secondary events

Farmers Market
Cider Festival

Outdoor music and theatre
Urban Tree Festival

6 Developing Dorchester's heritage for tourism**Themes for marketing and interpretation**

The brief asked for suggestions for ways of promoting Dorchester's heritage assets to existing and potential tourists. The sites, people and events are allocated into six themes that capitalise and centre on Dorchester's unique heritage assets or 'selling points'. These themes can be used to plan the marketing and interpretation of Dorchester's heritage assets. They are listed below with key sites, people and events for each theme.

1. Thomas Hardy Country

Hunt down the history and heritage that inspired Hardy's writing.

- Hardy's Cottage
- Max Gate
- Thomas Hardy sculpture and plaque
- Stinsford Church
- Thomas Hardy Visitor Centre
- Thomas Hardy Victorian Fair
- Dorset Literary Festival

2. Internationally and nationally significant archaeology and history

From henge to hillfort; Romans to rebellion, walk in the footsteps Dorchester's ancestors.

- Maiden Castle
- Maumbury Rings
- Roman Town House
- Judge Jeffreys
- Tolpuddle Martyrs
- Heritage Open Days
- County Museum displays and artefacts

3. A town with centuries of creative thinking

A town rich in beautiful buildings, sculpture and creative thinking.

- Poundbury urban village
- Kingston Maurward
- Dorset Martyrs
- William Barnes
- Elisabeth Frink
- Henry Moule
- Rev John White
- Transition and Fairtrade town
- Heritage Open Days

- Dorchester Literary Festival

4. A compact and green town, close to nature and easily explored by walking

Amble along avenues relax by the river and take time out in the park.

- Town walks
- Riverside walk and nature trail
- Borough Gardens
- Salisbury Fields
- Great Field
- Urban Tree Festival

5. Marvellous museums

Culture, coffee and cake along a museum mile.

- County Museum
- Shire Hall Museum
- The Keep Museum
- Heritage Open Days

6. Vibrant town with specialist shops and markets, and attractive inns and cafés

Chain stores, small stores, bars, bistros, markets and microbreweries; there's something for everyone.

- Historic inns and hotels
- South Street
- Antelope Walk
- Fairfield Market
- Brewers Square
- Farmers market
- Dorset County Show
- Dorchester Christmas Cracker
- Cider Festival

7 The background and context of heritage tourism

How does tourism work?

Tourism dates back to the eighteenth century. Modern tourism is, however, a post 1950 creation. Since then it has become a national and international fast-growing activity, expanding its visitor numbers and becoming not just one market but many **niche** markets. Heritage tourism is one of those many niches.

The supply side of tourism is essentially about income and profit for its providers, the great majority of which are private sector. These businesses rarely work together in formal ways. If tourism cannot pay its way it does not survive. Tourism is no longer a highly seasonal activity, it is year round, and heritage tourism is an especially non-seasonal activity. The market demand side of tourism is very competitive and requires skilled marketing, and market relevant and satisfying product development, often including regular product developments and a supply of new events and attractions.

Tourism is in many senses a fashion business. Tourists choose to visit destinations, and to take part in activities that they believe to be fashionable. They are guided in their choices by radio, TV and press reports, by their friends, and increasingly by social media. Marketing materials must be aware of all this.

The public sector provides much of the infrastructure for tourism to take place, including roads, signage and the granting (or not) of planning permissions for developments to take place. They also, to some extent, protect some heritage sites from development or demolition, using listed building legislation, and conservation areas and other methods, and rural area protection systems including National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs).

Some local authorities – but not all - intervene to assist and manage destinations as a whole by setting up tourist information centres, web sites and producing other marketing materials. They do that because in some places tourism is responsible for high levels of local employment, or because some areas need economic regeneration through tourism. But in the UK it is not a statutory requirement for the public sector to work with tourism in these ways, and public sector marketing of destinations is currently declining. The public sector has, however, two special features. It can market destinations as a whole, rather than individual businesses. And it can set policies for tourism development and management using the strength of its marketing powers. This leads to the discussion of tourism management using the concept of sustainable tourism discussed below.

What is Sustainable Tourism?

Sustainable tourism is a concept created in the European Alps in the late 1980s to control and plan tourism, protecting landscapes, townscapes and traditional ways of life from the impacts of tourism's rapid growth. It has since become a world-wide concept backed by research findings and a range of tested management tools. The concept is backed by the UK government, by many other national, regional and local governments, and by industry bodies including the UN's World Tourism Organization and the tourism industry's World Travel and Tourism Council.

Sustainable tourism is a positive approach intended to reduce the tensions and friction created by the complex interactions between the tourism industry, visitors, the environment and the communities which are host to holidaymakers. It is an approach which involves working for the long-term viability and quality of both natural and human resources. It is not antigrowth, but it acknowledges that there are limits to growth. Those limits will vary considerably from place to place, and according to the management practices available. Sustainable tourism planning techniques are used in many National Parks, architectural Conservation Areas, and World Heritage sites. Locally, sustainable tourism policies have been embraced by South Somerset, parts of West Dorset, and West Oxfordshire.

Sustainable tourism's success requires partnership working between tourism interests, local government planning policies and the communities involved. The aspirations and knowledge of tourism businesses, community concerns and natural and built heritage issues are, following stakeholder consultations, brought together in a sustainable tourism strategy agreed to, and managed by, the local or regional

sustainable tourism partnership. An independent broker normally acts as chairperson, with access to independent technical advice as necessary. Research shows that the skills of the broker are central to the success of most partnerships.

Sustainable tourism development and management strategies

Dorchester needs a Sustainable Tourism Development and Management Strategy if it is to create a viable, long term heritage conservation policy which can use tourism revenues to support the local economy. The strategy can be designed to:

- Create a viable long-term heritage conservation policy which can use tourism revenues as a tool to justify the conservation of specific and collective heritage sites and areas.
- Use the income from tourism spending to stop further shop closures, and help re-use empty shops as new retail and hospitality sites.
- Develop new jobs, while helping to preserve existing service sector jobs.
- Stimulate new overnight accommodation provision, providing high levels of locally retained income.
- Reduce reliance on low yield day trip tourism, which can bring damaging impacts to the character and fabric of the town.
- Support and encourage existing and new public transport systems and avoid pressure on town centre car parking.

Research shows that few tourists travel alone, and that successful destinations need more than one market niche. Heritage tourism needs to be backed therefore by quality shopping, food and entertainment / cultural attractions.

Is all sustainable tourism the same?

No – there are many different types. Even mass sun/sea/sand tourism sites can be made *more* sustainable by reducing the emissions of the tourists travelling there, reducing emissions from air-conditioning or heating, using local and or more organic food etc. In rural areas, ecotourism can deliver sustainable rural tourism. Of the other various forms of sustainable tourism used successfully in urban and small town situations, a new and as yet rare type known as Slow Tourism is probably most suitable for Dorchester.

Slow Tourism, as a concept, grew from the now well established Slow Food movement, and from the less well established Slow Cities concept. It is closely linked to Wellness Tourism, which concentrates on tourism which relaxes people, making them fitter and healthier. Walking, cycling and reduced car use is central. Dorchester has excellent easy walking opportunities.

Most people have little understanding of the term slow tourism. However, a national series of books is being published on the subject for tourists, county by county, across the U.K. Dorset's volume was published in 2012 by Bradt Slow Travel Guides: *Slow Dorset: Local, Characterful Guides to Britain's Special Places* by

Alexandra Richards. Alexandra Richards is a Dorset born international travel writer (see: <https://www.alexandrarichards.net/>)

Is Slow Tourism a well known and widely understood concept?

Evidence suggests that at the moment it is well known in academic circles and by professional tourism planners, but it is **not** well known by many market segments or by political decision makers. Intensive research on how to make the concept better known and understood is now being undertaken in Germany, Italy and the USA to find ways of changing this situation. Preliminary results are very encouraging. It may be that if Dorchester sought to develop Slow Tourism because of its heritage conservation and economic advantages, the term “slow” should not be used directly in marketing, but be replaced by terms that are better understood such as “green”, “environmentally friendly, low-emission or low impact tourism. But there are three key reasons for developing via Slow Tourism principles. It would help conserve heritage, and it would – see below – make tourism less stressful for the community. AND, it could be a Unique Selling Point (USP) when marketing Dorchester into the very crowded and competitive world of small town tourism.

Dorchester is special in that it has two main line railway stations very close to the town centre, linked to London and the South East, and to Bristol and Bath and onwards to the Midlands and South Wales. Older travellers can use Senior Rail Cards. As already noted, much of Dorchester’s heritage is within walking distance of the town centre. There is an adequate public bus service: older guests have free travel on most of these bus services. For some nearby but less easy to reach destinations, vintage bus hire could be set up in summer via Dekkabus in Poole, Shaftesbury and District Motor Services and other possibilities.

The on-line potential tourist survey showed interest in locally produced food, a now fashionable product, closely associated with Wellness Tourism.

Dorchester’s brand (see below) could benefit from being the first UK small town destination to link to Slow Tourism. Tourism attracts greatest press and media coverage more easily if it is new and eye catching.

Covid-19

The global Covid-19 pandemic has been a sudden, unexpected and growing problem for economies worldwide throughout 2020 and the problems arising from it now seem likely to last into 2021 and beyond. Tourism has been drastically reduced in terms of visitor numbers and economic value. Does this mean that heritage tourism is no longer a viable option for Dorchester?

To some extent that is hard to predict. But, although 2020 and 2021 may see less tourism than in previous years, tourism has not "stopped", and Dorchester's tourism may be better placed to recover than many other destinations. The reasons are:

- It does not rely on the international market, and on tourists flying in or driving across Europe. Domestic tourism has fared much better than international tourism in 2020.
- Research undertaken in Italy and Portugal shows that in 2020 large resorts, and heritage tourism to major cities such as Rome and Lisbon, have become

unpopular because of the fear of the virus in crowded places. Rural areas, including small towns and outdoor destinations such as inland north Portugal and Italy's South Tyrol, have retained popularity. Dorchester is a small town and has easy access to the countryside.

- Research also shows that for individual businesses, those that are in partnerships with access to advice on how to reduce Covid-19's risks, have felt greater confidence in continuing, and have not closed down. Dorchester's heritage tourism is envisaged in this report as working in a partnership and having access to the latest research via the University of Bournemouth and other sources.

8 Marketing and interpretation for heritage tourism

Creating a Dorchester Heritage Brand

Brand creation has an important role in modern marketing. A brand name can communicate a complex message quickly, an important asset in world of crowded competition. Tourism Destination choices are taken according to the perceived fashion status of a destination. Marketing which stresses the quality, product availability in terms of special experiences to be had, food and drink to be had, and the type of people – tourists and residents – to be encountered and met: all build the Dorchester Heritage Brand. This in turn means that Interpretation techniques must be interesting, satisfying, stimulating, and even exciting. The texts used must suit the niche markets targeted.

Adopt a slogan or strapline such as: *Dorchester: the caring county town that has it all* or *Dorchester, the jewel in the Dorset countryside* or a similar slogan with instant impact. This needs to be developed carefully, informed by consultation and research.

Using Dorchester's unique selling points to create a unique heritage experience

- Interpretation and niche marketing must be sold as something special. Audio transmitted interpretation with fashionable strong voices, and background stimulating sounds – including relevant music – could be used. See for example: <https://soundcloud.com/user-413441929/hidden-currents-tom-lane>.
- The overall brand of Dorchester's tourism should also be different and special, linked perhaps to wellness and environmental awareness. And even heritage can benefit from being presented as the modern thing to see, hear and "enjoy". See the discussion above of Slow Tourism.
- Social media marketing, featuring a "new" heritage site each month or each season has strong potential.
- Exploit the marketing potential of the Museums Mile concept, first used to good effect in Frankfurt-am-Main – see: https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/ShowUserReviews-g187337-d591791-r338259327-Museumsufer-Frankfurt_Hesse.html

The word(s) Museumsufer or Museums River Bank has now replaced the term mile in official statements, but lives on in the German public mind.

- Marketing should concentrate on the UK market. It is much more difficult to market relatively unknown destinations abroad, and within tourism it is believed that the European market will decline following Brexit.
- Developing a Visit Dorchester website as a standalone feature as well as it being part of Visit Dorset is essential. Personalities featured on the site are important.
- Develop partnerships with nearby towns in Dorset, such as Bridport, Lyme Regis, and Weymouth to develop ways to cross-promote the towns to residents and visitors.
- The big three Dorchester Museums (the County Museum, Shire Hall and The Keep) are a strong selling point. They should be helped to work together – to market themselves and to help lead the ideas to develop and manage heritage tourism in the town. Direct competition between the Big 3 should be discouraged in favour of allowing each one to develop its own special fields following discussions about avoiding overlapping product development. All Dorchester's main museums are highly dependent on entry ticket sales. Many of their competitors in other towns are free. Even Bridport's award winning museum is currently free of charge. They may be able to benefit from increasing footfall if one of them could become a tourist information centre. Joint ticketing of the three museums may be possible, and integrated retail goods initiatives could also help.
- This could be especially important to help The Keep if the Ministry of Defence reduces its support in any forthcoming post-pandemic government spending saving programme. Cut backs in Ministry of Defence funding for Army Museums have been mooted for many years following the Bourne-May Report on County Military Museums : see *The Museums Journal* (Issue 111/12, p5, 01.12.2011) for example and the 2017/8 annual report (<https://www.nam.ac.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/accounts-2017-18.pdf>).
- The Dorset History Centre is not a major tourist attraction; it is the major county archive. It could serve a special niche market of those who wish to visit Dorchester to research their family history. It could be a stand-alone item, or part of the working partnership between the three museums discussed above. See: <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/libraries-history-culture/dorset-history-centre/dorset-history-centre.aspx>
- Dorchester has a traditional Cricket Club with its own ground close to the town centre. Cricket matches could be a special attraction for non-English visitors. See: <https://dorchester.play-cricket.com/>
Dorchester also has its football club, with its ground (Avenue, or Clayson Stadium) just to the south of the cricket club. Yeovil Town Womens' Football Team use the ground. See: <https://dorchestertownfc.co.uk> There is potential for the sports grounds to attract visitors and tourists.

- At the moment there is a discussion about the future of the “on-street” Tourism Information Centre in Dorchester. There seems to be a belief that in the digital age, tourism information can be provided 24/7, and more economically, on-line. However, the largest target market group for tourism to Dorchester – older Social Classes ABC1 – do appear to respond well to information delivered by human interaction. Information giving costs can be drastically reduced by using volunteers, and despite claims to the contrary, volunteers can be very effective if well trained and managed. And, the volunteers are known to benefit from the human interactions involved. This issue needs careful further discussion.
- Dorchester is known to have relatively few hotel beds. Overnight visitors contribute much more to local economies than day visitors, and have fewer damaging impacts on the environment, and on local communities. There is a strong case for seeking to attract at least one more hotel to the town, either from a national chain, or by crowd funding (see www.ucliva.ch for an example of crowd funding)

Opportunities for interpretation

- Revise and update existing exterior interpretation, including the heritage ‘Dora Dormouse’ panels and other panels such as those at Maumbury Rings.
- Revise and update the town trails leaflet and also develop this as a downloadable resource with maps, audio and video on the website.
- Develop a series of printed and/or downloadable themed circular walks leaflets for excursions into the surrounding countryside, to provide a ‘string of pearls’ of walks around the town and surrounding countryside. These could include some new walks and existing promoted trails such as the ‘Dorset Walk – Maiden Castle and Winterbourne St Martin’ promoted by Dorset Life Magazine, which follows a route that includes Maiden Castle, Clanton Barrow, the village of Winterbourne St Martin, and further barrows to the south west of Maiden Castle.
- Dorchester Town Council should work with the Museums to promote the collection of items from different periods in history, including pre-history, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman and later periods up to present day, linking them to sites in and around Dorchester. This work should link with the development of the circular trails above.
- Develop a visitor app for Dorchester, suitable for families and adult groups, utilising an existing platform, such as Global Treasure Trails, (www.globaltreasuretrails.com), Travelstories (travelstories.com), or Nubart (https://www.nubart.eu/?gclid=CjwKCAjw0On8BRAGeIwAincshHGxkmHQRxKIQxSdKOom4Hc9TojnqjM9mH5Gsr_waLukCOEmM56klxoCnIIQAvD_BwE). English Heritage have an Echoscope audio for Maiden Castle, and something similar could be developed for Dorchester key sites.

- Develop a series of short films and interviews with experts and local residents and enthusiasts for the key heritage sites, available as videos and self guiding audio downloads via the website. South Gloucestershire Council's Forgotten Landscape in the Severn Valley uses this approach to good effect. This could include musical and vocal interpretation based on recent projects in Cork and Dublin. (see earlier and <https://soundcloud.com/user-413441929/hidden-currents-tom-lane>).
- Work with Dorchester Arts (<https://www.dorchesterarts.org.uk/>) to create and present short plays, and even opera, interpreting local history. The classic model of good practice in this area comes from Tasmania, where the Round Earth Company, (<http://www.roundearth.com.au/>) presents an almost daily 75 minute performance of " The Ship that Never Was " interpreting the lives and escape efforts of convicts transported from the UK. Dorchester Arts productions could be daytime stand-alone stagings, or part of longer festivals or events.
- Develop a range of personal interpretive outdoor tours for small pre-booked groups, similar to the Roman tours offered by Dorchester Roman Tours. (see: https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Attraction_Review-g186263-d21138995-Reviews-Dorchester_Roman_Tours-Dorchester_Dorset_England.html)
- Develop a wellbeing project of short, themed walks to encourage people to enjoy the green spaces and the heritage of the town, promoting enhancements in physical and mental health.
- Develop a programme of on-line learning resources for schools and youth groups linked to the National Curriculum to encourage students from schools in Dorchester and the wider Dorset region to find out more about Dorchester's heritage.
- Extend the Dorchester Ambassador scheme, as suggested in the Tourism Strategy, to include heritage ambassadors who could offer short walks, talks and tours at the key sites and also work with the museums to link the key sites with relevant collections and archive materials at the museums and the History Centre. The ambassadors could also help with general tourist information delivery. The Town Council could offer training in this.
- Dorchester Town Council could also work with the managers of key heritage sites such as English Heritage at Maiden Castle, The National Trust at Max Gate and Thomas Hardy's Cottage and the Director of Kingston Maurward to develop opportunities for Dorchester Ambassador volunteers to become more involved in aspects of heritage sites' management.
- Dorchester Town Council can help local business and attractions to increase the number of visitors coming to Dorchester by providing a 'one-stop-shop' on their website, as noted above on page 16, promoting days out that include a museum or attraction visit, enjoying some outdoor space at a heritage site as well as eating and drinking at the local cafes and inns and retail shopping.

9 The next steps

The next steps for Dorchester's heritage tourism and interpretation should include some or all of the following:

- Bring tourism, heritage conservation and residents' groups together: form a Heritage Tourism Management Partnership.
- Discuss product development and marketing initiatives and priorities.
- Establish an Action Group. This should have a Press Officer with the ability to write and issue Press Releases on a regular basis.
- Establish a Tourist Information Centre development group to explore this area.
- Establish an Hotel Development Group to explore potential sites (working with Dorset County Council Planning Department) and Hotel groups. The success of that project will depend on the progress made with heritage tourism: it should not be a first priority.
- Get funding to employ a permanent Tourism Officer.
- Establish contact with the University of Bournemouth's Tourism Department to establish a working relationship, especially about marketing and about Slow Tourism. Your contact should be Professor Janet Dickinson: she knows about this potential link.
- Set up a Dorchester Tourism Web Site
- Begin negotiations with Great Western Railways and South Western Railways to establish the railways' role in the creation of the Slow Tourism concept in Dorchester, and show how this could benefit all parties. Refer to the success of the Heart of Wessex Rail Partnership, and the national Community Rail Network (<https://communityrail.org.uk/community-rail/community-rail-partnerships/#:~:text=Community%20rail%20partnerships%20are%20the,community%20engagement%20and%20promotional%20activities.>)
- Launch a nationally ground-breaking small-town Interpretation and Tourism initiative, geared to boosting tourists retail and hospitality expenditure. This would draw inspiration from the ongoing success of national projects in the USA, and in Canada, in the 1980s and 1990s. (see: <https://www.mainstreet.org/about-us> <https://archive.nationaltrustcanada.ca/resources/regeneration/main-street>)
- Seek funding for the above from post pandemic retail regeneration funds.

Appendix 1

Consultation for the Heritage Audit

Many people have contributed to the audit. We have had face-to-face, telephone, Skype and Zoom meetings and have carried out a digital survey to replace the proposed focus groups.

Face-to-face, telephone, Skype and Zoom meetings have been held with:

- Roger Maughan, Commercial Director, Dorset County Museum
- Abbie King, Director, Shire Hall Museum
- Laura Jayne Gardner, Curator, The Keep Military Museum
- Cathy Lewis, Marketing and Digital officer, Wessex Museums
- Sam Johnston, Manager, Dorset History Centre, with input from other team members including Maria Gayton, Jacqueline Halewood, Luke Dady and Owen Simons
- Janet Schofield, Dorchester and Sherborne TIC manager
- Myles Provis, Dorchester TIC
- Alison Naylor, English Heritage, Free Sites Partnership Manager
- Kate Forrester, Dorchester Transition Town and Dorchester Community Farm and Orchard
- Frances Hogwood, Dorchester Town Councillor, Heritage Committee member
- Richard Bradford, tree-co-ordinator for Transition Town Dorchester and the Urban Tree Festival
- Kingston Maurward Front of House staff
- Thomas Hardy Visitor Centre, Front of House staff

We have had regular Zoom progress meetings with Gareth Jones, Chair, Dorchester Heritage Committee; Trevor Hedger, Heritage Tourism Project Manager and Steve Newman, Deputy Town Clerk, Dorchester Town Council.

Appendix 2

Questionnaires analysis

Two questionnaires were developed – one for residents of Dorchester and the other for people living within 10 miles of major towns and cities from Southampton to Exeter. A total of 392 people completed the questionnaires – 276 from Dorchester residents and 116 from the wider region. The following is a summary of responses to the key questions. The questions not summarised here include those asking for further information and for demographic data. All the responses are available on Excel spreadsheets except for one question – Q6 on the wider survey for which there were no responses.

For the questions that have a choice of response from 'least likely' to 'most likely', for example for recommending specific sites to visitors, the percentage response is analysed using a 'weighted average' that provides an average rating for 'likelihood' for each site. This weighting provides a more consistent method of comparing the likelihood across the choice of sites.

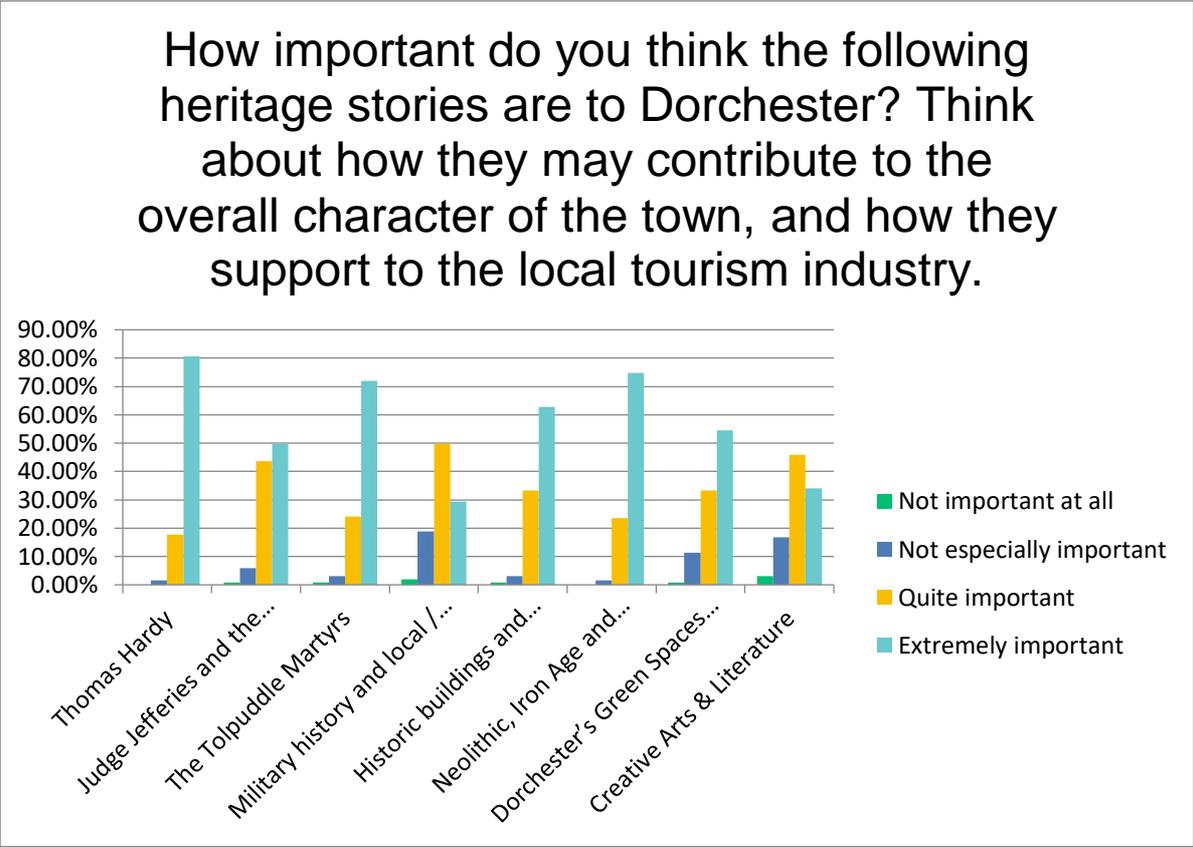
1 Which heritage stories about Dorchester are the most important?

Heritage stories are clearly important for both Dorchester residents and for those visiting Dorchester. 81% of residents felt that Thomas Hardy was extremely important, followed by Neolithic, Iron Age and Roman Dorchester at 76% and Tolpuddle Martyrs at 73%. For those people who live outside Dorchester the most interest is in Neolithic, Iron Age and Roman (48%) followed by historic buildings and architecture (46%) and Dorchester's green spaces and wildlife (38%). Only 25% of people outside Dorchester had a lot of interest in Thomas Hardy, though 54% had some interest.

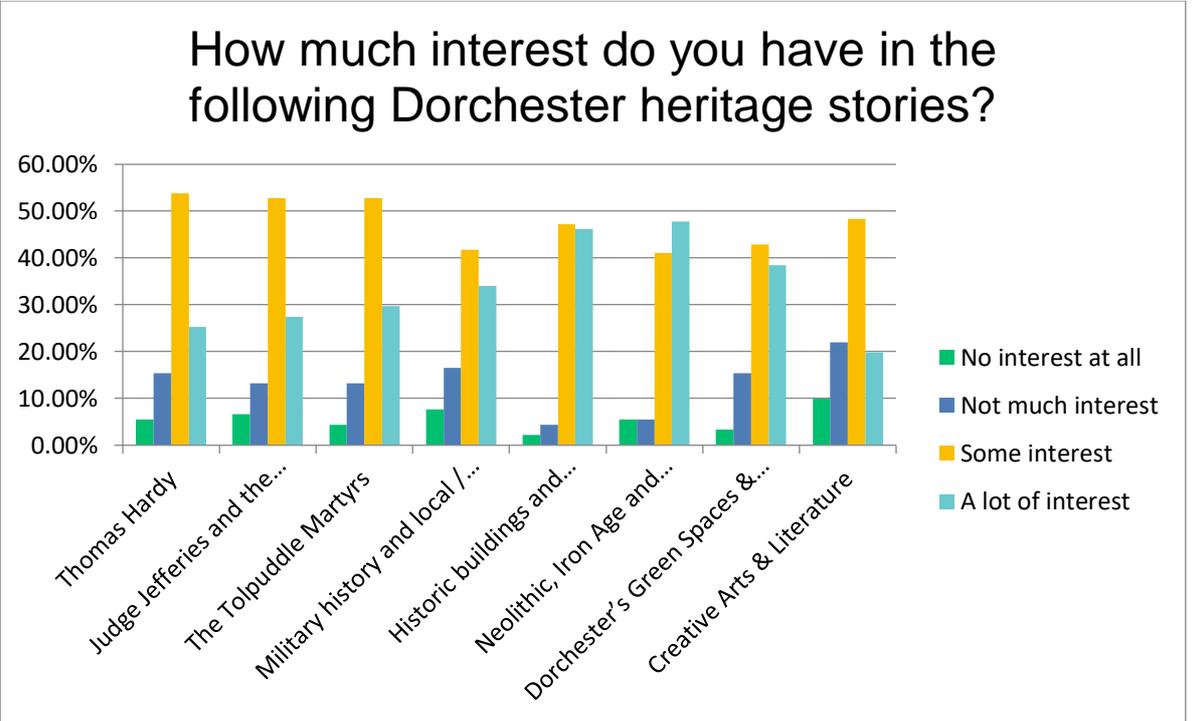
Many respondents commented that William Barnes should be included in the list, as well as some of the forgotten heritage such as Mary Hardy. Other comments included the link between the town and the local countryside, characterised by Thomas Hardy's 'Casterbridge'.

'Thomas Hardy's characterizations of "Casterbridge" ... still ring true, despite all the changes in rural life and agricultural practice which have occurred since they were written.'

Dorchester residents



Wider region respondents

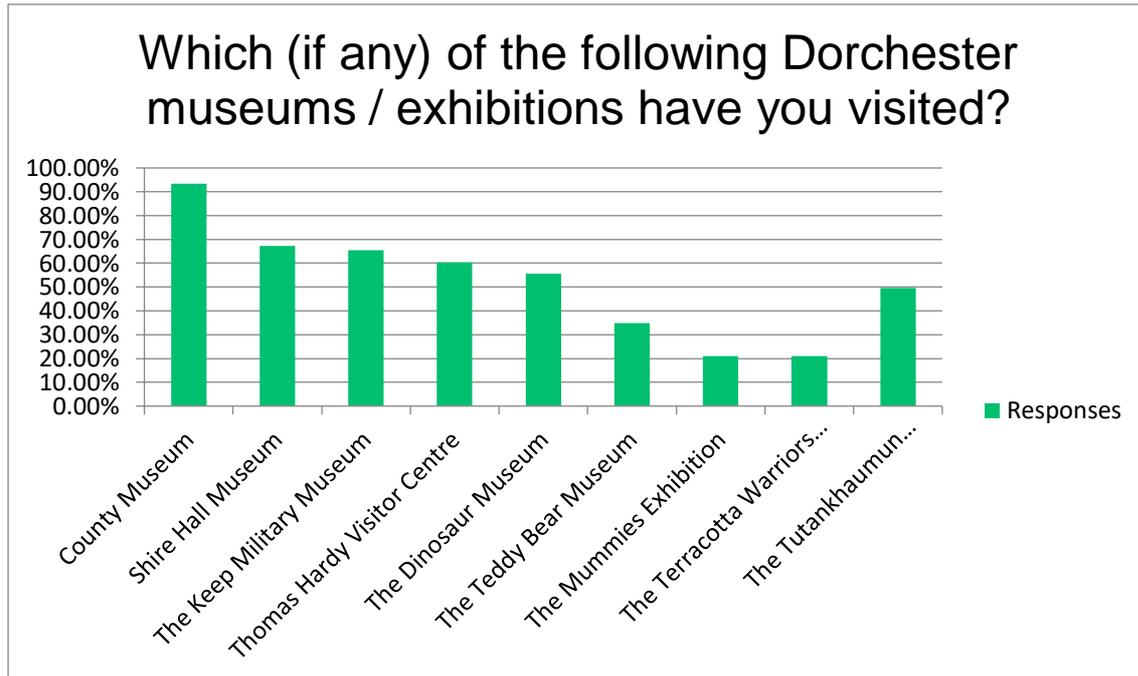


2 Which Dorchester museums have you visited?

The most popular museums visited by Dorchester residents are the County Museum (93% visited), the Shire Hall Museum (67%) and the Keep (66%). The Thomas Hardy Visitor Centre was also popular at 60% and the Tutankhamun Exhibition at 50%.

Other sites visited, mentioned in the comments, include the Roman Town House, St Peter’s Church, Fordington Cemetery, Poundbury Fort, and Stinsford Church.

Dorchester residents

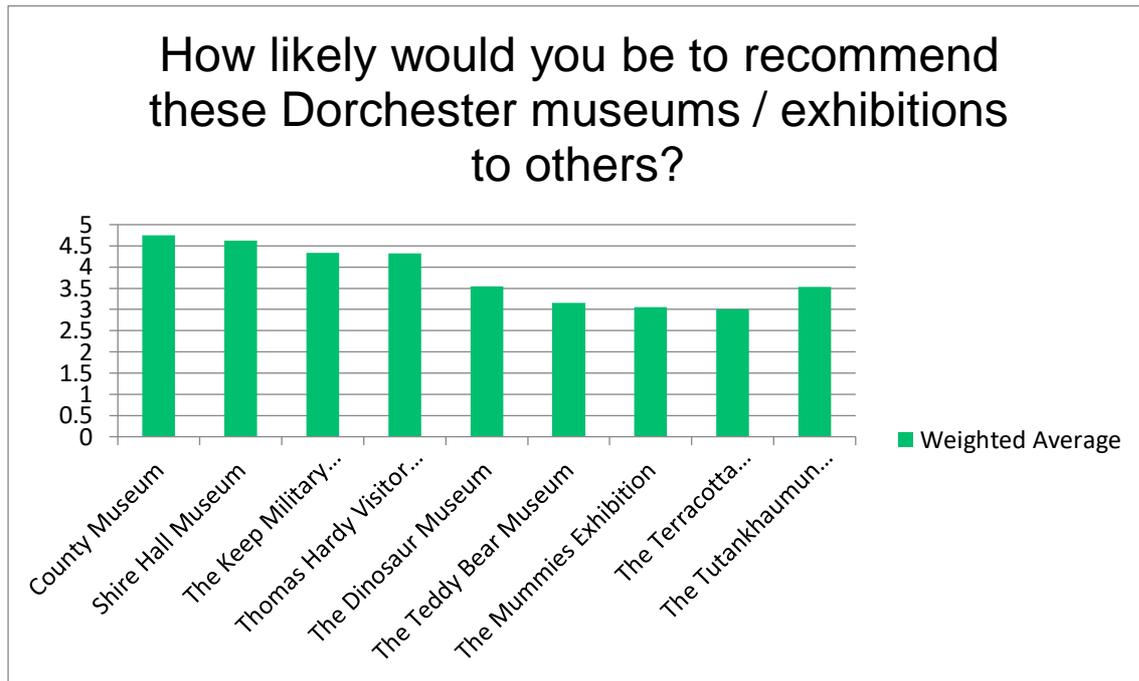


3 How likely would you recommend museums/exhibitions to others?

The County Museum is easily the museum most likely to be recommended to others by Dorchester residents (78%). Shire Hall Museum was also high on recommendations at 53%, while The Keep and the Thomas Hardy Visitor Centre were on 40% and 38%. More people were **unlikely** to recommend (19%) than to **definitely** recommend (15%) the Dinosaur Museum. The **weighted average** scores show that County Museum and Shire Hall are the most likely to be recommended, very closely followed by The Keep and the Thomas Hardy Visitor Centre.

Asked which museums or exhibitions the wider region respondents would recommend, 73% said County Museum, 59% The Keep and 44% Shire Hall. The **weighted average** scores show that Shire Hall is the most likely to be recommended, followed by The Keep.

Dorchester residents – weighted average scores



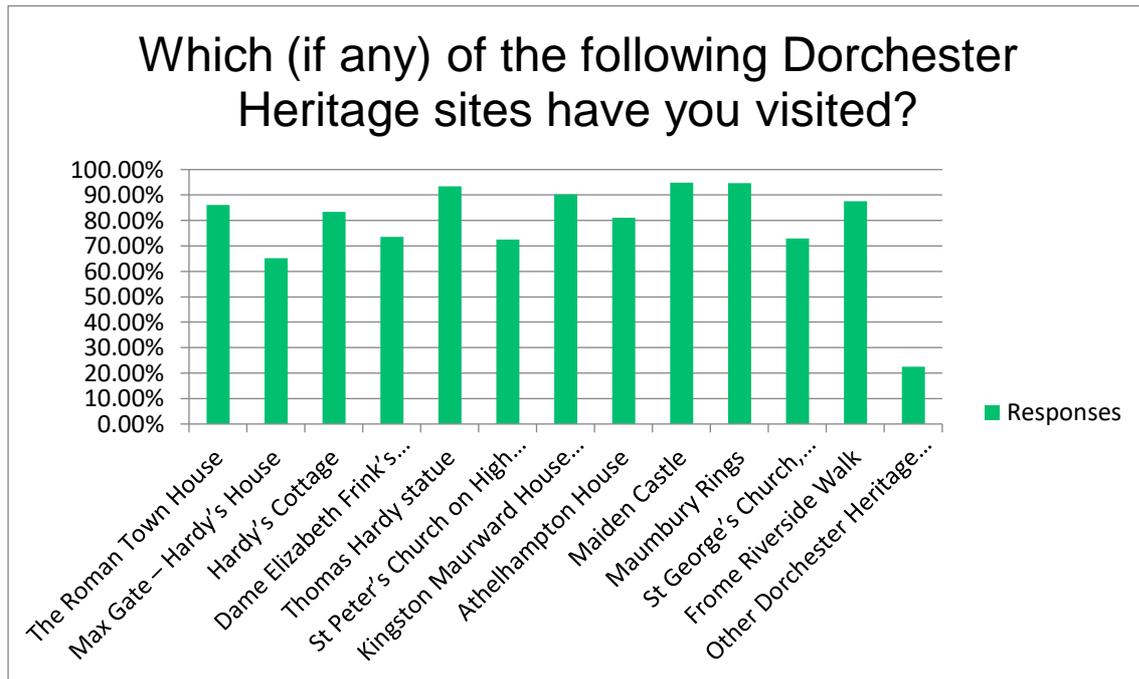
Wider region respondents – weighted average scores



4 Which Dorchester heritage sites have you visited?

A large proportion of the Dorchester resident respondents had visited heritage sites in and around Dorchester. 95% had visited Maiden Castle and Maumbury Rings, while 93% had visited the Thomas Hardy statue. The least visited site, St George’s Church, Fordington, had been visited by 73% of residents.

Dorchester residents



5 How likely would you recommend heritage sites to others?

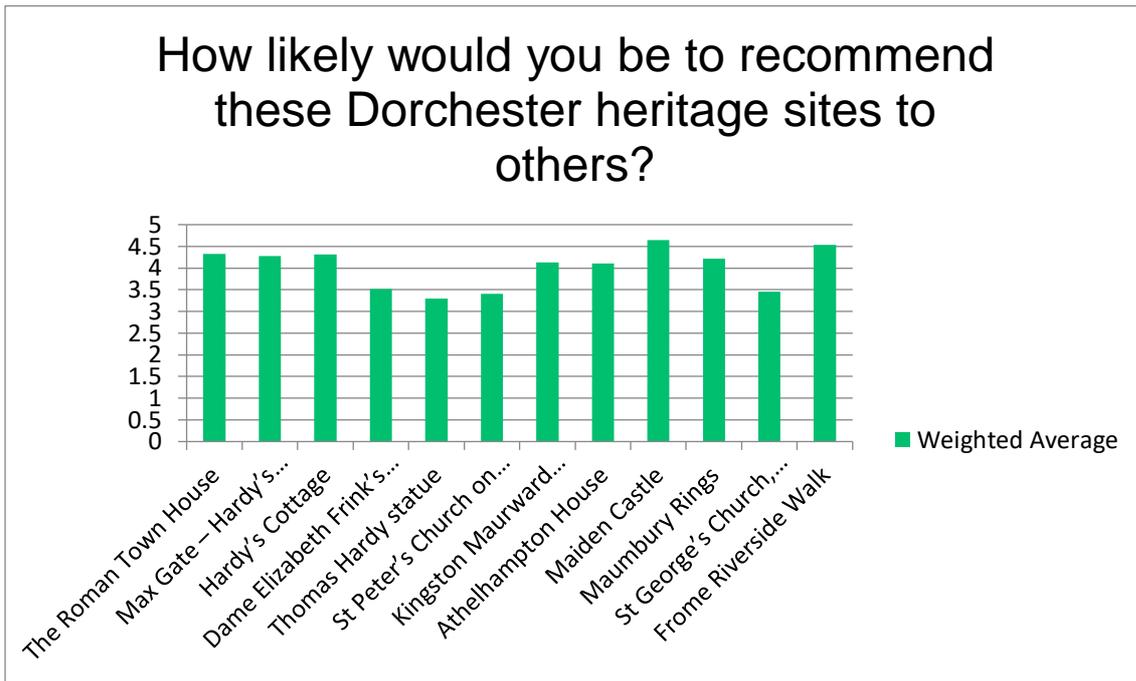
The sites most likely to be recommended by residents are Maiden Castle (77%) and Frome Riverside Walk (68%). The sites least likely to be recommended are Thomas Hardy’s statue (22% unlikely to recommend) and St Peter’s Church (16%). The **weighted average** scores also show that Maiden Castle and Frome Riverside Walk are the most likely to be recommended.

The sites most likely to be recommended by people living outside of Dorchester are Maiden Castle (80%) and Maumbury Rings (69%), followed by Thomas Hardy’s Cottage (61%) and the Roman Town House (50%). The **weighted average** scores show Max Gate, the Roman Town House and Hardy’s Cottage are the most likely to be recommended.

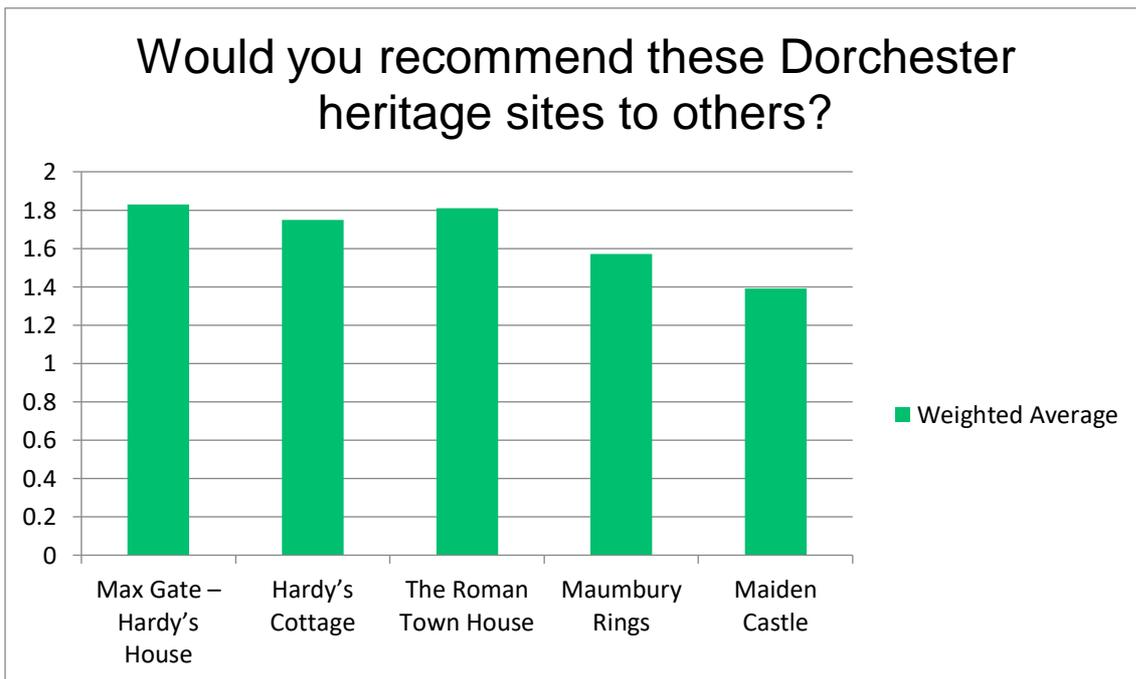
Sites mentioned in the comments include St Peter’s Church, Borough Gardens and Athelhampton.

‘The grounds at Athelhampton are stunning and there is a nice cafe and shop there...’

Dorchester residents – weighted average



Wider region respondents – weighted average



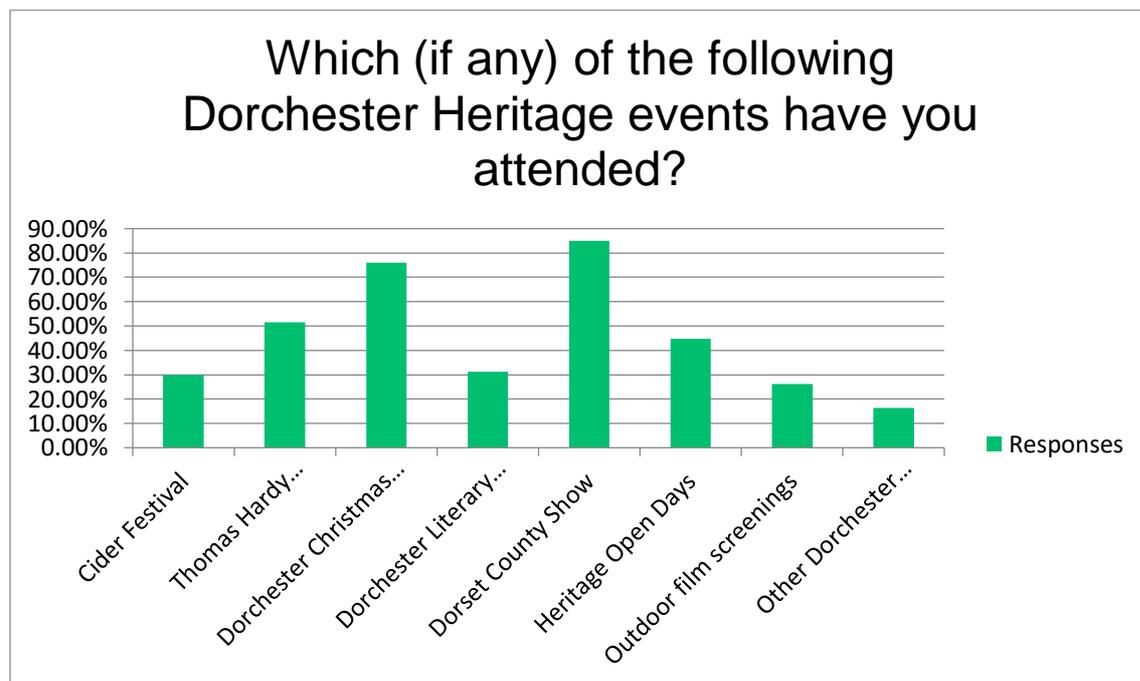
6 Which events have you attended?

The most popular events for Dorchester residents are the Dorset County Show (85%) and the Dorchester Christmas Cracker (76%). The Thomas Hardy Victorian Fair scored 52% while the Heritage Open Days had 44%.

Other events mentioned in the comments include theatre and music in Maumbury Rings, events in Borough Gardens, food festivals and farmers' market.

'Outdoor performances by the Thomas Hardy Players and Community Play performances.'

Dorchester residents



7 Which events would you recommend to others?

The heritage events most likely to be recommended by Dorchester residents are the Dorset County Show (62% would definitely recommend) and the Heritage Open Days (42%). The **weighted average** scores are more even, with Dorset County Show, Heritage Open Days and the Thomas Hardy Victorian Fair scoring slightly higher than the others.

Events most likely to be recommended by those living outside Dorchester are the Thomas Hardy Victorian Fair (41%) and the cider festival (41%), followed by the heritage open days (40%). However, the **weighted average** scores put the Dorchester Literary Festival as the most likely to be recommended, followed by the Dorchester Christmas Cracker, Heritage Open Days and Thomas Hardy Victorian Fair.

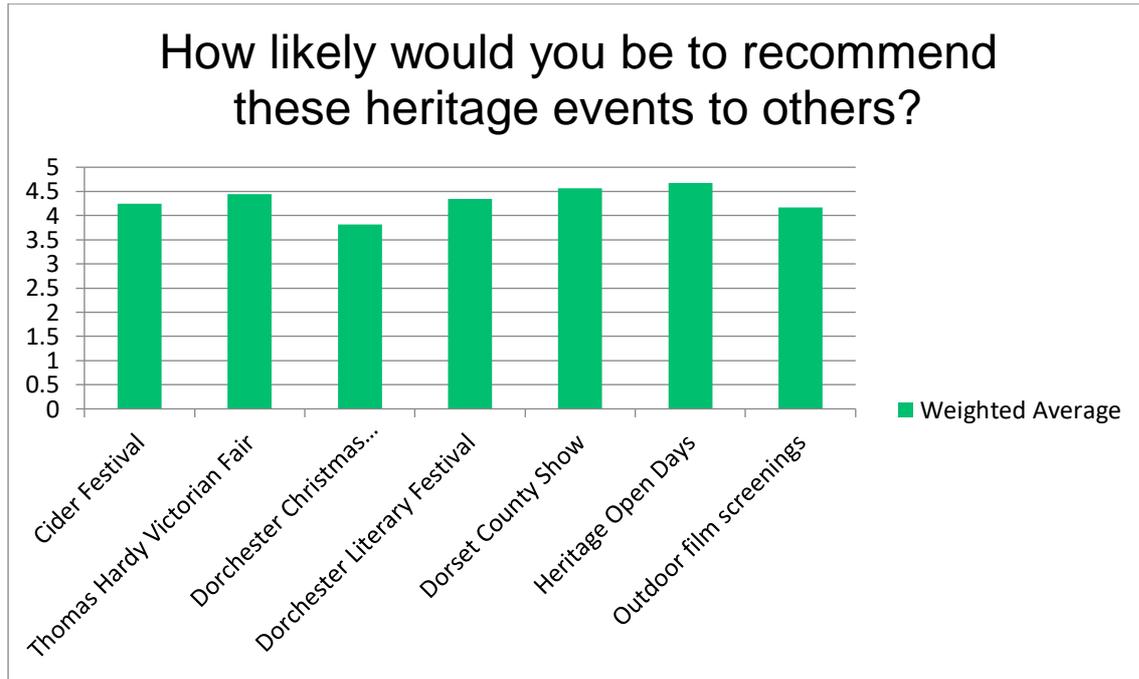
Comments include:

'Victorian fair would be even better if there were more stalls...'

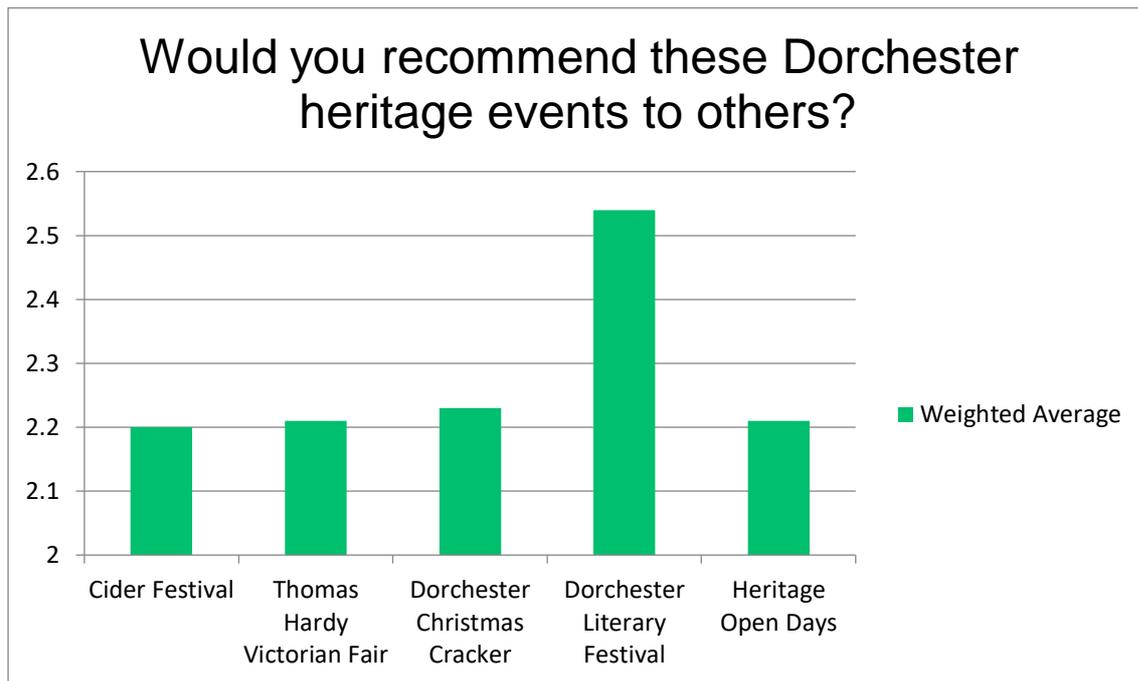
‘Heritage Open Day was great but the amount of people visiting had not been thought about. The queue for the prison tour was huge and we were disappointed to queue and then be told we couldn’t go in.’

‘Great events but often lacking in exhibitors/stalls. Plenty of effort in advertising but more effort needed in providing sufficient stalls so customers stay long enough.’

Dorchester residents – weighted average



Wider region respondents – weighted average



8 How would you describe Dorchester as a tourist destination?

This question attracted a large number of detailed comments alongside the scores for suggested descriptions. The most supported statement is that ‘Dorchester is perfect for history lovers’ (68% strongly agreed, with only 1.3% strongly disagreeing). The next highest is that ‘Dorchester has a great range of nature walks, trails and green spaces’ (51% strongly agreeing, 1% strongly disagreeing). Third place went to ‘Dorchester is a great place to take children’ with 33% strongly agreeing and 1.3% strongly disagreeing.

Comments include a recognition of the importance of local produce, the quality of small independent shops and the potential to provide a quality market that could be the ‘beating heart of the town’.

‘The excellent standard of food and drink produced in the county could be more clearly highlighted generally and made available here, bringing out its regional quality.’

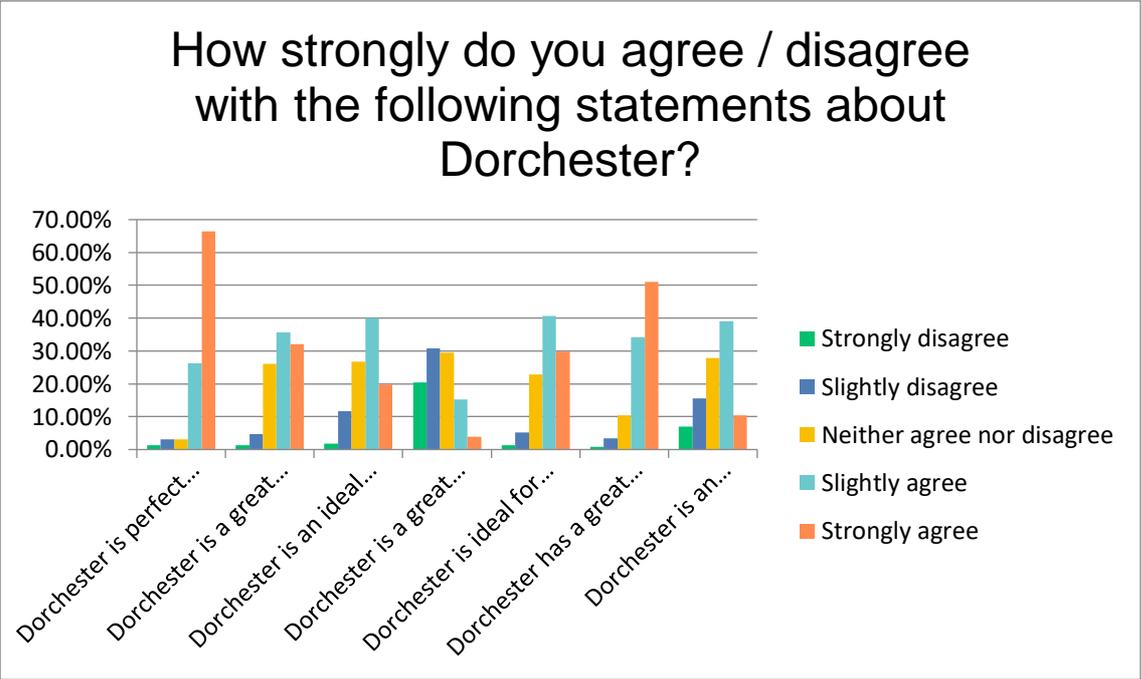
‘South Street could be a fabulous place to visit - follow the example of a town like Frome or Glastonbury.’

There were comments too about the need to make more of the history, arts and nature of the town.

‘There is so much potential to make more of the history of Dorch, and the natural history too.’

‘Dorchester could be artistic and vibrant if it is worked on. I believe the will is there.’

Dorchester residents



Prepared for Dorchester Town Council by

Red Kite

We would like to offer our thanks to everyone who provided the information and insights that enabled this work to be carried out. Any errors and misinterpretations in the report are in good faith and remain our responsibility.

Red Kite Environment

November 2020