



Dorchester

Project Case Study



## Hidden Britain Project Case Studies



From November 2006 the England Rural Development Programme has been implemented by SEEDA. Hidden Britain is a programme managed under the existing scheme and supported by Defra, Tourism South East, and SERCC. The project works to ensure social and economic growth in rural communities across the South East through small tourism initiatives. [www.seeda.co.uk](http://www.seeda.co.uk)



SERCC is the regional umbrella organisation of the eight Rural Community Councils across the South East. RCCs are independent, county-based, rural community development charities, providing support and advice to rural community organisations and individuals. They are the major rural VCS stakeholder in a range of local, regional and national funding and support initiatives in the delivery of public services. They also provide infrastructure support to rural voluntary and community groups in both generic and specialist arenas. [www.sercc.org.uk](http://www.sercc.org.uk)

## TOURISM SOUTH EAST

Tourism South East is the regional body dedicated to fostering tourism growth and innovation in the region; a partnership of industry with regional and local government.

[www.industry.visitsoutheastengland.com](http://www.industry.visitsoutheastengland.com)



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Project Report	4	This report is intended to describe the process used and results delivered by an individual Hidden Britain project. It covers all the major elements of the project so it can be used as a case-study for other communities. In order to make this as useful as possible it is presented in an objective light with attention paid to the failings as well as the successes.
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### Overview of project

This project is about making the most of what already exists within Dorchester, providing better facilities and information, and adding value to existing attractions. However the project also intended to benefit Dorchester in other ways, by improving the physical rural heritage, improving access to this heritage, and capacity building for the future.



### Need for the project

Dorchester-on-Thames is a small Oxfordshire village rich in history and heritage, and with a very active community. It is a major tourist destination in South Oxfordshire (mainly due to the presence of the Abbey), but most visitors are either local or repeat visitors, stay for a short time and are unaware of what else the village and area offer.

Over the years the village has seen many facilities close and disappear. Several

pubs, a café, shops, galleries and antique dealers have closed in recent years, leaving only one small supermarket, and now the Post Office is regarded as under threat.

Dorchester undertook a Parish Plan in 2003/4. This process of consultation highlighted the usual suspects such as crime, car parking, affordable housing and public transport but also highlighted the need to develop a tourism management plan.

A Destination visitor benchmarking survey was conducted in Summer 2005 by Tourism South East, which highlighted the following key issues affecting Dorchester:

- ◆ A lack of new first-time visitors
- ◆ Too many visitors coming by car
- ◆ Low-spending visitors
- ◆ Poor visitor information and orientation
- ◆ Public Toilets need improving





### Planning of the project

In order to take the project forward a local partnership was formed. The partnership was supported by Hidden Britain and South Oxfordshire District Council.

Taking its lead from the Parish Plan and survey and put together in consultation with local people and organisations the Dorchester-on-Thames Hidden Britain Project aimed to:

- ◆ Enhance the visitor experience in and around Dorchester.
- ◆ Improve access to both information and interpretation
- ◆ Encourage low-key and sustainable numbers of visitors.

Research was gathered using community workshops and tourism stakeholder meetings to augment the Parish Plan and survey data. From this base data the

Dorchester Hidden Britain group developed an action plan of tourism projects.

### Who was involved?

The project group comprised representatives from; Dorchester Parish Council, Dorchester Parochial Church Council, Dorchester Museum Trust, local businesses and local residents.

With the advice and support of Hidden Britain and South Oxfordshire District Council, the partnership was able to turn this action plan into achievable objectives by securing funding.

### Status of funding

£32,244 grant obtained from England Rural Development Programme, Rural Enterprise Scheme in February 2006. This was matched by an estimated £9,400 of in-kind time and £900 contribution from the local community.





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both local residents and visitors.

## Project Implementation

Once funding had been achieved, the group got together to divide up the elements of the project between them. Each element was then developed by a group of volunteers working under direction from the project group.

Many technical elements of the project were being worked on by Brian Oliver, who sadly passed away in October 2006. Whilst this caused a delay to the project, many more volunteers have come on board to the project in order to assist in getting it to completion.

Local volunteers walked and wrote up the routes for the walks, which were then designed and laid out by volunteers. The Mapboard content was all developed, sourced & proof read by volunteers. The boards were then designed by a local freelance designer.

## What was included?

- ◆ Improve marketing for Dorchester by renovating and expanding the village website.
- ◆ Improve signage within the village by introducing mapboards and a fingerpost.
- ◆ Add value to the museum by introducing a touch-screen information point.
- ◆ Introducing further visitor information by way of an interactive kiosk in Dorchester Abbey.
- ◆ Scan and digitise the Millennium Album, providing a historical archive of the village.
- ◆ Create further interpretation of the area through a series of circular self guided walks.
- ◆ An event was also planned to launch the project to the general public.
- ◆ There will be accompanying publicity to promote the project to





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All work on the website was undertaken by volunteers, as was the development of the application and content for the touch screen and kiosk. The Millennium Album was professionally scanned, and has been indexed, and the multimedia content developed by volunteers.

The map boards were installed at key points around the village; the main car park, at the village entrances and at the main bus top, a finger post was also installed in the main car park providing directional information to visitors once already arrived.

The leaflets are available in museum at present, but will soon be available at various outlets throughout the village and surrounding area.

A launch event is planned for March 2008 to open the new tourist season.

### Who Benefits?

The project worked hard to deliver real benefits to the village without also bringing negative impacts. As such the



project aimed for a low key, and concentrated on improving the visitor experience, rather than attracting unsustainable numbers of visitors. Visitors to Dorchester now will find better provision of information and better interpretation. This should lead to longer stays and higher visitor spend, which will directly benefit the front-line businesses and also the village economy in general.

The project has brought many groups together within the villager and engaged many individuals to give up their time for the benefit of Dorchester as a whole. Many of those involved in the project have gained new skills in IT and project management, as well as uncovering many individuals with new skills within the village. This has put the village in a strong position to be able to undertake similar projects in the future.

The delivery and management of the project has been almost completely run locally by volunteers thereby ensure a real community owned and led project



that is tailored to the needs and desires of Dorchester itself.

### Hidden Britain input

The Hidden Britain Development Officer, James Turner (JT) worked with the project group every step of the way to deliver the project. He helped to plan the initial action plan, facilitated at meetings, co-wrote the funding bid and wrote the delivery plan.

Once the project commenced JT provided financial and project management support to the group through monthly meetings, but the group were able to undertake the meat of the project with little direct input.

### Achievements

- ◆ The high quality of work and input by volunteers.
- ◆ The amount of technical input delivered by volunteers



- ◆ Successful completion and overcoming large hurdles
- ◆ Delivery well under budget
- ◆ The high level of community involvement and ownership

### Lessons learned

- ◆ Groups particularly need financial and management support
- ◆ Communities have ability to generate huge numbers of volunteers
- ◆ Even big obstacles can be overcome with dedication

### Future Plans

The project is not quite complete at present; however there has been discussion about where to go next and what else could be achieved. Hidden Britain will continue to work with Dorchester to encourage evaluation and provide guidance and support for the future.