

*This topic paper focuses on visitor management on the Dorset Coast and summarises tourism in Dorset and outlines some possible future trends and their implications;*

The Dorset coast and its maritime waters are arguably Dorset's most important single tourism asset and one of the principal attractions for visitors to Dorset with the top visitor motivations for visiting the area were 'seaside, beaches and coast' (<http://www.visitdorset.com/xsdbimngs/State%20of%20Tourism%20Report%202010.pdf>). Tourism, however, is also a source of many of the pressures on the coastal environment and communities. An increase in visitors at any location along the Dorset Coast (whether one already under pressure from high visitor numbers or a perceived 'tranquil' zone) can potentially impact negatively on local landscape and infrastructure. How to build the tourism economy, whilst sustaining the coastal environment, represents a huge and continuing challenge.



The Dorset coast is approximately 285 Km (including Poole harbour) in length and has two larger conurbation areas, numerous towns and some smaller more rural communities. There are many publicly accessible beaches with multiple owners and a National Trail running its length.

The marine environment, with its diverse underwater wildlife, clean waters and underwater archaeology attracts many to the area for diving and other recreational pursuits such as diving, kite surfing and sailing.

World Heritage Site designation was given to a large part of the Dorset coast in 2001. The Jurassic Coast is now a well known brand and is a visitor attractor in its own right. Anecdotal evidence suggests an increase in overseas visitors since World Heritage Site designation in 2001.

Ports and harbours are important to visitors with Poole Harbour bringing visitors from abroad into the county as well as providing an attractive centre for yachting, watersports and boat trips. Local harbours such as Christchurch, Weymouth and West Bay harbour are places where a huge range of activities take place and attract a great deal of visitors.

The 2012 Olympic and Paralympics Sailing events is attracting and will continue to attract a large number of visitors to the Dorset area, particularly to Weymouth and Portland. Transport, safety and infrastructure measures have all been taken into account to deal with

this influx of visitors to ensure that the management of visitors is done effectively.

The coastal landscapes and small towns and villages represent a series of visitor attractions. Lyme Regis, in the west of the county, is famous for its connection with Jane Austen, Mary Anning and the Cobb and, together with Charmouth, is the main centre for fossil collecting along the Jurassic Coast. Chesil Beach attracts visitors for recreational purposes, in particular angling and at 17 miles long, is one of the world's finest barrier beaches. The Isle of Portland and Portland Bill are also popular visitor attractions. Hengistbury Head in the far east of the county attracts in the region of 780,000 people annually. A new visitor centre at Durlston Country Park, Durlston Castle is now a world class 'Gateway Centre' for the park and for the Jurassic Coast World Heritage.

Over 1 million people walk some of the South West Coast Path National Trail between Poole and Lyme Regis each year, with the most walked section of the entire 630 mile route being the

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one mile between Durdle Door and Lulworth Cove. The Countryside and Public Rights of Way Act (2000) and the new Marine and Coastal Access Act (2009) provide a legislative basis for further improvements to coastal access

Several private estates in the area contain nationally recognised geomorphological features formed as a result of natural processes acting on the geology. These include the Encombe estate at Kimmeridge and the Weld Estate at Lulworth, famous for Durdle Door and Lulworth Cove - it is estimated that over 500,000 people visit Lulworth Cove annually.

The National Trust own and manage over 17 kilometres of the Dorset coastline, including Golden Cap Estate, Ringstead Beach, West Bexington, Studland Bay and Corfe Castle & village and deal with many thousands of visitors to these areas per year.

The county has over 120 built visitor attractions covering a range of interests including historical properties, wildlife attractions, museums and exhibitions, gardens and country parks. These attractions have a particular value in providing wet weather alternatives to outdoor activities. They also include local amenities such as retail centres, leisure complexes such as Tower Park (Poole) and local sports facilities.

There are many Visitor Centres as well as Tourism Information Centres along the coast

## Coastal Visitor Accommodation

There is a variety of accommodation available within the county, ranging from holiday parks, 1-5 star hotels, self catering cottages to farm stays.

Over the past 30 years there has been a marked change in the requirement for the different accommodation types. In the early 1960s approximately 20% of visitors stayed in self catering accommodation, whilst the remaining 80% stayed in serviced accommodation (hotels, B & Bs and guest houses).

In 2010 self catering accommodation represents some 70% of tourist accommodation. The accommodation range, however, is not divided evenly throughout the county and some areas are much more dependent on one form of accommodation than another. Holiday parks represent a large proportion of the accommodation in rural Dorset. For example, in West Dorset, 80% of the accommodation is within holiday parks.

The trends in the market have led to many of these sites investing in ancillary leisure facilities, in order to meet increasing expectations of quality within the family holiday market. As a result standards have probably increased at a greater rate than hotels with on many sites hire caravans are replaced every three to four years. And more care is taken with the environment within the park such as an increase in tree planting or caravans chosen that merge better into the countryside.

Serviced accommodation represents the mainstay of accommodation in the conurbations (Bournemouth, Poole and Weymouth). The lack of growth in the residential market has restricted investment, and a proportion of serviced accommodation in some of the county's smaller resorts is in need of improvement. The increased expectations of tourists means a large majority consider en-suite accommodation as standard and not as a luxury.

There is a growing awareness of issues of sustainability and the concept of 'green' tourism has become much more mainstream since 2000. Visitors, particularly the European market have high levels of environmental awareness and expect the same of their destination. 25 holiday parks in Dorset have achieved the David Bellamy conservation standards and 44 other accommodation providers hold the Green Tourism Business Scheme award. In addition businesses can become a Jurassic Coast Quality Partner who support the conservation of the Jurassic Coast World Heritage.

## Visitor categories

Two main categories of visitors can be identified – these can then be divided into four types of trip:

- **Day Visitors** - those who visit Dorset and return to their home, on the same day. Many visit on the spur of the moment as a result of good weather, or to undertake a

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recreational activity or visit a built or natural attraction. Statistics show that although many day visitors are local residents others are happy to travel from as far away as London, the Midlands and other parts of the South West.

- **Overnight Visitors** - spend at least one night in paid accommodation within the county. They include educational and business trips as well as holidays in the region. On average 20% of all visitors to the Dorset coast stay overnight and their average level of spending is over twice that of day visitors.

- **Business Trips** (Day or overnight visitors) Business trips are mainly confined to the eastern conurbation as Bournemouth has a wide range of conference facilities, including the Bournemouth International Centre (BIC) which is the venue for some of the UK's major conferences.

- **Educational Visits** (Day or overnight visitors) Outdoor education on the Dorset coast attracts in the region of 250,000 student visits each year. In addition many foreign students attend language schools in Bournemouth.

- **Special Interest** (Day or overnight visitors) - Includes both recreational users who travel to the coast to undertake a specific sport as well as those who visit the area for its geological, historical, literary or wildlife interest.
- **Local Resident-Visitors** (Day visitors) Dorset residents do not often consider themselves as 'tourists' whilst in Dorset, although many utilise the coast and its facilities in a similar way to those visiting from out of the county.

## Trends of Tourism in Dorset:

Coastal tourism in Dorset has developed in the same way as many other coastal regions; resorts developed in the wake of the Georgian and Victorian fashion for sea bathing. There was steady growth through the 50s, 60s and early 70s partly as a result of the increasing use of rail and road travel, resulting in more British families taking an annual holiday by the sea. In the late 70s and early 80s, competition from foreign package holidays led the decline of the British seaside holiday. The advent of the recession in the late 80s and early 90s affected UK tourism further.

The latest economic recession has had a dramatic impact on UK tourism. In 2008, the UK

had the first decline in visitor numbers to the UK from abroad since 2001 and a decline of 2.7% from 2007<sup>1</sup>.

Domestic trip taking in 2008 also declined by almost 5% since 2007<sup>1</sup>.

In 2009 the UK still was in recession, causing a rise in demand for domestic holiday trips during the year as people took holidays closer to home. The UK took 42.3 million domestic holidays in 2009; this was greater than the number of holidays abroad for the first time in five years<sup>2</sup>.

New tourism trends emerging since the recession include:

- Increased competition from foreign holidays and a decline in long UK family holidays;
- An increase in second, or third, short UK trips;
- An increase in day trips, which does not use local accommodation;
- A growth in interest in niche markets for special interest holidays, including an industry focus on how to generate business outside the main season;
- Increase in overseas visitors;
- Growth in business tourism.

Dorset's tourism industry is a highly diverse range of small and medium sized businesses, supported by many co-ordinating initiatives. Tourism has to adapt continually to changes in the visitor market, and improve its product and marketing.

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### Tourism Spend

The total visitor related spend for 2009 for Dorset was £1,573,106,573

With the number of recorded trips were 19,356,816, number of nights 15,423,000 and amount spent £814,221,000<sup>2</sup>

### Employment in the tourism industry

Throughout the county there are vast differences in the type and volume of tourism. The coastal resorts and smaller coastal towns and villages are heavily dependent on tourism, in terms of both economic revenue and employment opportunities. The tourism industry supports 38,700 jobs in Dorset (including Bournemouth and Poole) and the annual tourism spend brings £1.5 Billion into Dorset<sup>2</sup>. These figures include employees in: Tourist Information and Visitor Centres, restaurants, snack bars, cafes, public houses, bars, night clubs, licensed clubs, hotel trade, holiday parks, other tourist/short stay accommodation, museums, art galleries, attractions, sport and recreation providers, travel agencies and tour operators.

Expenditure varies markedly between staying and day visitors, with an estimated breakdown of average spend per visitor as follows:

- Total staying spend: £814,221,000
- Total day trip spend: £701,469,573

### Visitor Movement along the Coast

Despite a marked improvement in sustainable transport options in recent years, almost 80% of

visitors still access the Dorset Coast by the private car. This can lead to congestion, especially during the main holiday season. Traffic on coastal roads in August can be between 6,500 – 8,100 vehicles per day.

In some areas (rural) road capacity and car parking spaces could deteriorate in the next 20 years mainly due to loss of roads due to coastal erosion. The National Trust has recently estimated a loss of 400 car parking spaces in 30 – 35 years at Studland due to coastal erosion.

The tourism industry has a huge challenge to better market alternative transport options, in an effort to encourage visitors to travel sustainably to and from and along the coast.

### Dorset's Sustainable Transport Initiatives



#### • CoastlinX53

In 2003, the X53 bus service (Poole to Exeter) received a Rural Bus Challenge grant and became re-branded as CoastlinX53 (known locally as the Jurassic Coast bus). In 2012 there were five double-decker buses displaying scenes from

the Jurassic Coast running every two hours. Since the start it has been immensely successful with a 150% increase in passenger usage and is frequently cited in the national press as one of the best ways of accessing the coast.

#### • Trains

The main line London Waterloo to Weymouth service was increased to half hourly in 2009. There is some limited capacity for bikes on the trains. There is also a service from Bristol to Weymouth. There is no trainline from Weymouth to Exeter.

#### • Cycle ways

Sustrans National Cycle Route 2 has been developed (with sections still in development) between Exeter and Christchurch, although most of the route is slightly inland from the coast. Purbeck Cycle Way comprises a variety of paths along quiet country lanes throughout Purbeck, which can be mixed and matched to suit individual requirements.

#### • Waterborne Transport

Boat trips do operate along the coast, in particular from the larger resorts. An exciting initiative is underway to develop waterborne transport into a more mainstream form of transport. Recognising the constraints is critical to this work but there is undoubtedly a huge potential to make this an economically and environmentally sustainable form of transport. In April 2012 a bid was put in to the Coastal Community Fund by Dorset County Council to pilot this in Dorset.

#### • Park & Ride Schemes

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The Swanage Railway is utilised as part of a park and ride scheme run by Purbeck District Council. The route runs from Norden, through Corfe Castle to Swanage. Weymouth and Dorchester have park and ride schemes that have been put in for the 2012 Olympic Sailing events. Both Poole and Bournemouth run regular park and ride schemes to help ease congestion.

- **Joint Ticket Initiatives**

Some local attractions, such as the Sea Life Park, have formed local partnerships with bus operators to provide free or reduced admission on production of a voucher obtained from participating bus operators on bus journeys into the town centre, in an attempt to reduce unnecessary car use. In the Devon section of the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site, Stuart Line Cruises have developed a one ticket scheme with First Group which covers the user for travel by boat and bus

- **Hopper Buses**

Throughout the main tourist season, Weymouth has several dedicated buses which travel along the seafront from the Pavilion to Bowleaze Cove. The busses which run on a continuous loop (approx. every 10 minutes) offer inexpensive short distance travel, in order to encourage visitors to leave their cars at their accommodation. In addition, there is a Countryside/ Jurassic Coast branded shuttle bus which runs between Swanage and Durlston Country Park in the summer months, alleviating traffic pressure through Swanage.

- **Land Train**

Throughout the summer the Bournemouth, Poole and Weymouth run a land-train runs along the promenade.

## Visitor management related issues

- **External factors**

Tourism is a volatile industry, greatly affected by external factors. Examples include:

- Climate change - warmer Easters and October Half Terms have seen a marked increase in occupancy levels for Dorset accommodation providers in recent years. Conversely, recent summers in the UK have been disappointing in terms of weather, resulting in a continuation of overseas foreign holidays. Increased storminess can also affect the industry.
- Water quality for Dorset's sea – poor water quality in the sea could have a detrimental effect to coastal regions
- The economy
- International instability such as terrorism
- Unprecedented events such the outbreak of Foot and Mouth disease in 2001 and the Icelandic volcanic ash affecting flights in 2010.

- **Holidays abroad**

The trends in the domestic tourism market in the last twenty years have been dominated by the growth in cheap holidays abroad, and Dorset has suffered its effects. The greater availability and price reductions in long haul travel destinations could continue to affect UK visitor

numbers. The impact has been to limit the previous growth of the accommodation sector, and create a situation where competition has led to pressures to both reduce holiday prices and increase quality

- **Short breaks**

Shorter second or third holidays, and weekend trips. This provides a market that is less stable than the traditional longer holiday, with decisions likely to be taken at shorter notice and a greater threat of cancellation.

- **Seasonality**

The main school holidays, and a preference for summer holidays, ensure that the tourism pattern in Dorset shows a marked seasonality. The majority of visits take place within a relatively small amount of time - between June and August. In the winter, a proportion of the visitor infrastructure, including some small shops and attractions close, due to less demand as visitor numbers decline. Large car parks and accommodation are also under-utilised at these times. In the summer months the sudden boom in visitor numbers often results in an overloading of the visitor infrastructure and congestion on the county's roads. This is not a new issue. There has been anecdotal evidence to suggest that visitor numbers have increased out of season, especially in the 'shoulder' months of April – June and September – October.

## The Impacts relating to Tourism

Tourism has the potential to create impacts on the environment and communities that it relies

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on to accommodate visitors. Communities have adapted to tourism activity, and the management measures therefore limiting some areas of environmental damage. Nevertheless, some impacts do occur and can range from:

- **Inappropriate Development**

An increase in visitors can lead to pressure for new developments to serve and capitalise on their needs: e.g. holiday parks, visitor centres, cafes, signs, car parks and additional accommodation. Problems can arise if these facilities are out of keeping with the setting or when local residents feel that they are an unnecessary addition to the area.

- **Overcrowding**

Overcrowding can occur when the number of people at a particular site or location exceeds the capacity of the place to handle them. However, capacity is notoriously difficult to measure and what to one person may seem like overcrowding, may not be an issue to another. Clearly there are 'honey pot' sites along the Dorset coast (Studland, Lulworth Cove, Charmouth) and problems can arise for local residents who feel visitor numbers are too high for the area. Interestingly, however, it is often the quieter, more tranquil areas which cause concern when visitor numbers increase – again hinting at the perception of capacity rather than the reality. This issue was explored in a carrying capacity study undertaken in Purbeck in 2006 by Bournemouth University  
[http://eprints.bournemouth.ac.uk/15167/1/Purbeck\\_Carrying\\_Capacity\\_140607.pdf](http://eprints.bournemouth.ac.uk/15167/1/Purbeck_Carrying_Capacity_140607.pdf)

- **Wear & Tear**

Visitors can cause physical damage to the coast, much being unintentional, such as at Lulworth where the path between the Cove and Durdle Door is eroding due to the volume of visitors using it through the summer months. A challenge is the expense associated with the ongoing erosion of the coast path. It is not always clear who should shoulder the burden of repair and maintenance costs.

- **Transport and Traffic Congestion**

Traffic growth is undoubtedly part of a national trend.

- **Management of the coast**

The management of the coast is directed by the Shoreline Management Plans which encourage a policy of 'no active intervention' along the majority of the Jurassic Coast. Since erosion is a key process that maintains the natural beauty and integrity of the World Heritage Site, there is a conflict with maintaining and safely promoting the coastal footpaths.

- **Car Parking**

Many car parks in the county are geared towards visitor parking in the peak months, therefore a high proportion remain virtually unused outside of the main season. In certain areas car parks can be visually intrusive and may reduce the enjoyment of the site. In 2009, West Dorset District Council, together with the Dorset AONB, developed car parking guidelines encouraging consideration of the environment in any landscaping of car parks.

- **Marine litter**

Litter is an ongoing problem on Dorset's beaches. Beach cleans play an important role

but it is necessary to tackle the sources of litter to really make progress in overcoming the problem. More work is needed on liaising with the shipping and commercial fishing industries, leisure vessels and marinas, water companies and the general public to vastly increase the awareness of the effects of marine litter on the environment, bird and wild life and the public's enjoyment of the coast.

### Structure of tourism and transport in Dorset

Visit Dorset: Since 2007, tourism in Dorset has operated under a Destination Management Organisation (DMO) with the aim of improving integration between all those with a stake in the tourism industry in the county, including local authorities, the private sector and key agencies. The DMO has a joint website, visit Dorset ([www.visitdorset.co.uk](http://www.visitdorset.co.uk)) which provides a one stop shop for information and bookings.

Organisations such as the Dorset Coast Forum, Dorset AONB, Jurassic Coast World Heritage Team, Natural England, County Council Countryside services, Districts and Borough Councils, National Trust, the South West Coast Path team and other partners all work to subtly manage visitors at strategic level and on the ground to ensure that roads are not congested, footpaths are not eroded, communities and landscapes are respected and that everyone can enjoy the Dorset coast in a safe and sustainable way. Visitor management and tourism feature in: The Dorset Coast Strategy (2011 - 2021) The Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site Management Plan

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The Dorset AONB Management Plan  
The Dorset and East Devon Coastal Corridor  
Action Plan.  
Local Plans  
Local Beach Management Plans

References:

1 – <http://www.visit-dorset.com/xsdbimgs/State%20of%20Tourism%20Report%202010.pdf>  
2 -  
<http://www.westdorset.com/xsdbimgs/Dorset%20&%20districts%2009.pdf>

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