

# **Visit Portsmouth Update and Tourism Marketing Communications Plan 2021-2022, Appendix 1**

## **Visit Portsmouth Marketing and Tourism Update October 2020**

### **1. Introduction**

Visit Portsmouth's role is to lead on destination marketing for the city. This update provides an overview of activity undertaken in 2020 following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and marketing activity planned for the rest of the year.

We are clearly in an unprecedented global situation that has affected all aspects of everyday life. Tourism businesses have been especially hard hit, with the lockdown falling just before the start of the main season from Easter to September. Tourism is crucial to the city, providing around £600 million in income in a normal year and supporting around 13,000 jobs.

From the early days of full lockdown through to the opening up of the visitor economy, the Visit Portsmouth Team worked hard to offer support and advice to local tourism businesses while tentatively moving forward with marketing activity as restrictions eased. When required we have asked people not to visit - a surreal situation in which to find ourselves. To maintain interest we ensured we had a Virtual Portsmouth offer and distributed brochures to individual homes during lockdown to enable people to dream about better times and their future break in the city.

Our aim is to generate successful campaigns to promote Portsmouth that result in a steady flow of visitors in a safe manner, using learning we have achieved through our and other destinations' experiences so far.

Maximising visits is of course vital for many tourism related businesses, organisations and attractions throughout the city and wider region. Our marketing will need to be flexible and adaptable so we can turn it up or down depending on the local and national situation.

Along with the Covid-19 pandemic we also have Brexit on the horizon, which will bring forward further challenges. We know that locally Brexit is likely to have a great impact on the International Port and we will continue to work closely with our colleagues to support and share messaging.

It is essential that we continue to invest in marketing the destination over the coming months and years as we move towards recovery and help our local tourism businesses, big and small, get back on their feet.

### **2. Partner communication and support**

The Visit Portsmouth team saw continued communication with destination partners as being key during the pandemic. We were keen to make sure businesses were appraised of the opportunities and funding available to assist them and also the guidelines they needed to follow to enable them to safely reopen.

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Communications initially were challenging as so many destination colleagues were furloughed. A new communication mailing list was created to ensure we reached as many businesses as we could. Destination networking meetings were held regularly to enable us to update on activity and for everyone to share their experiences as they worked towards reopening. These meetings were held virtually of course and were much appreciated by the businesses who were able to engage. Notes were circulated after the meeting to ensure those unable to attend were kept updated.

As destination partners have returned to work we continue to engage and hold virtual meetings on a regular basis. These will continue on a bi-monthly basis, or more frequently if there is demand or specific topics to cover.

In addition, one-to-one catch up calls and virtual meetings have been held with key partners and national and regional bodies, including the National Museum of the Royal Navy, Mary Rose, Gunwharf Quays, International Port, Hampshire Tourism, Tourism South East, The National Coastal Tourism Academy, Isle of Wight Tourism, Visit England/Visit Britain and The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

We offered free promotion to all businesses who achieved the national standard for reopening: 'We're Good to Go', in the form of a free banner advert on Visit Portsmouth through to the end of September. The offer was made available by email to businesses and also by fliers delivered to selected establishments.

Given the current climate we thought it unlikely we would achieve sufficient advertising to create the Visit Portsmouth Visitor and Mini Guides for 2021 (funded entirely by the sale of advertising). In order to mitigate against this we were successful in receiving additional budget from PCC to fund 50% of the costs. In return we are able to support partners by offering returning advertisers a 75% discount and new advertisers a 50% discount on the 2020 advertising prices. Sales are now complete and the publications are being finalised ready for print. These new publications are less date-specific, pointing to the website for current information, enabling a longer shelf life if the need arises.

### **3. Marketing and promotion - the staggered re-opening of the destination offer**

The gradual re-opening of the city's attractions, as well as our fabulous open spaces and miles of waterfront, have undoubtedly helped Portsmouth have a controlled and safe re-opening to visitors. The early good weather saw large numbers descend on the seafront and Southsea Common and, on the whole, people behaved in a safe manner. Main attractions opened in a staggered way, with Gunwharf Quays on 14 June, Spinnaker Tower and Blue Reef on 4 July, The D-Day Story on 14 July, Portsmouth Museum on 13 August and The Historic Dockyard on 24 August.

Marketing activity followed the period through lockdown towards the gradual re-opening, with messaging and information to inform decisions as people started to move around more and plan visits.

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### Digital marketing via the Visit Portsmouth channels

- Visit Portsmouth website:  
New Covid-19-specific sections were created on the website and promoted on social media. Initially this offered information during the earliest parts of lockdown, then later focused on planning future trips. As the situation evolved and restrictions were lifted, we moved towards 'Enjoy your visit - plan ahead' as a more encouraging message, before a full marketing push to maximise the benefits of the staycation market once we were able to do so. To date, these specific coronavirus information pages have generated over 16,500 views.  
Feedback has been positive, including:  
*"Hopefully we'll be able to travel later this year or 2021. We fell in love with this nice town with its friendly residents"*  
*"One of the first places I intend to visit in the future. Not yet!"*  
*"Will go there when all is OK. Love Portsmouth"*
- E-newsletters were sent to our database, including the 'Plan Your Visit' message and promoting places that are opening, but also explaining restrictions and the staggered opening of the visitor economy. Later, the newsletter was used to push visit campaigns, detailed further in Section 5 below.
- #VirtualPortsmouth:  
The largest campaign during the main lockdown was #VirtualPortsmouth, offering people the chance to get a sample of the things they could enjoy on a trip to Portsmouth, but from the safety of their own homes. It pulled together guided tours, craft activities and behind-the-scenes videos from some of the city's biggest attractions. Not only did this resource enable virtual 'visits' to the city, it also helped with home schooling resources, proving very useful for many site visitors. To date, the Virtual Portsmouth pages have generated almost 19,000 page views. Between 23 March and 15 June, this section represented 14.7% of all site traffic. The average time on page within the Virtual Portsmouth section is 1:48 - a 16.2% increase on the site average and a good metric of quality content that engages with the audience. 3.7% of people who came into the site during the whole period came in through the Virtual Portsmouth pages, a figure that rises to 11.9% during the main lockdown. Comments on social media were positive, with one saying it was a "Fab idea" and numerous others tagging friends and recommending it as a good home schooling tool.
- Other, older pages also did well during lockdown, most notably those for outdoor attractions and things to do. Among them were Canoe Lake, Portsdown Hill, Hilsea Lines and our page on seafront attractions - all of which showed year-on-year increases, despite the site being down on the whole. What's more, the quality metrics (average time on page, bounce rate) also improved, as people took increased interest in the content.
- Don't Visit Portsmouth... Yet  
We promoted a 'Don't Visit Portsmouth... Yet' message during the late May bank holiday, to stop local areas from becoming overwhelmed (and fostering negativity among the local population towards tourism). Links were included to the Virtual Portsmouth resource on the Visit Portsmouth website, so people could still plan for their next break. The posts reached 131,080 people on Facebook alone, driving 1,048

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likes, comments and shares, plus 1,711 clicks through to the Visit Portsmouth website.

- Social Media:

Messaging was maintained on social media, to ensure Portsmouth remained in people's minds during lockdown, but also to share essential messages for locals and visitors alike. During the period from 23 March to 8 September, the Visit Portsmouth Facebook page enjoyed a total reach of over 1 million (1,062,087). On Twitter we've generated 366,300 impressions and amassed 444 new followers. The message content and tone shifted in line with that on the website, detailed above. Initially there was information on lockdowns in the local area, followed by a large push on #VirtualPortsmouth, then Don't Visit... Yet and, eventually, Plan Ahead. Finally, the push moved to messages of support for local businesses getting the We're Good to Go or receiving positive visitor feedback for their safety measures.

- Video content:

We created and published a video showing Portsmouth looking different during lockdown and highlighting the changes to peoples' lives. It also showcased the work being done behind the scenes by the Culture, Leisure and Regulatory Services Directorate. It reached more than 52,000 people on social media alone.

A second video that was created, edited and published entirely by the Visit Portsmouth team showed Portsmouth's typically busy streets, roads and areas looking eerily quiet during lockdown. It reached more than 57,800 people.

These two videos alone generated a reach of well over 100,000, with no ad spend behind them.

The Visit Portsmouth Team also assisted others across the directorate with video content, including the Facebook Live events by the museum service and for Heritage Open Days.

- Events that could go ahead, albeit virtually, were promoted during and after lockdown. These included VE Day commemorations, Heritage Open Days and Journeys Festival International, with all their component events listed on the site and the festivals as a whole pushed on e-shots and social media.
- Work continues on a total refresh of the Visit Portsmouth website, to not just create a beautiful and informative resource, but also one that will be at the forefront of the very latest Accessibility guidelines so that it works well for everyone. It will also be built to more modern SEO standards, giving us a greater chance of growing organic traffic to the site, which remains our largest traffic driver.

### Visit Portsmouth Publications

We arranged a lead generation campaign at the beginning of lockdown and mailed over 5,000 brochures to individual addresses, enabling potential visitors to dream about a future break by the sea. As lockdown has eased our distribution company are continuing the distribution of our brochures across the country and are finding more places open and receptive to receiving print.

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### Press and PR

Visit Portsmouth were interviewed on BBC Radio Solent to encourage people from across the region to enjoy a short break/daytrip to Portsmouth. The seafront attractions, Hotwalls and Portsmouth Museum were given special mention as part of the 'family friendly and free' section.

The move of LCT7074 generated great interest in the city, including features on BBC and ITV channels. The opening later this autumn will be a key marketing opportunity for the destination.

### National promotion and funding achievements

Visit Portsmouth was part of a bid led by Visit Hampshire for government funding as part of the 'Enjoy Summer Safely' campaign. We received the great news that the bid was successful and were awarded £300,000 towards marketing Hampshire (including Portsmouth of course) as a destination to both local people and visitors in August and September. There were more than 30 bids and only 10 were successful. In addition to being included in the digital campaign (with social media and PPC ads), and out of home posters, Portsmouth was also included in the newspaper ad campaign. Only two were chosen for this - Hampshire as a whole and then Portsmouth as the only destination. The placement saw half-page adverts in the Sunday Times and Observer for three weeks, reaching a combined circulation of 3.1 million.

The Visit Hampshire landing page saw 117,437 page views during the campaign, an 876% increase on the previous period. Across the entire Visit Hampshire website (for a better indication of traffic from billboard and poster sites) traffic increased by 232% during the campaign period, to 740,636. Links through to Portsmouth's destination page on Visit Hampshire increased by 170%.

Visit Hampshire's report on the campaign said: "Digital marketing was a vital component for success of this campaign... The combined impressions for all digital media was 22.6 million impressions served to the target audience."

#### **4. Knowledge and research**

The Visit Portsmouth Team has kept up to date with regional, national and international trends by attending a range of webinars and joining national coastal group and national Visit Britain destination meetings. We have also fed information into the DCMS Select Inquiry about Tourism and joined the Solent Covid-19 Tourism, Hospitality and Leisure Recovery Meeting hosted by the Solent LEP - and will join the marketing group for this going forward. We have also had regular catch up calls with Xanthe Dennis in DCMS.

Visit England report that, in January, 21.2 million were planning a UK summer holiday. In effect only 10.6 million took one. They estimate domestic tourism value will have a long path to recovery, looking at 2024 before figures are around those pre-Covid-19.

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The Visit Britain Sentiment Tracker provides an insight into how people are feeling about the current situation and their plans for tourism activity in the future - full details are available at: <https://www.visitbritain.org/covid-19-consumer-sentiment-tracker>

A survey of tourism businesses in South East England had the following results:  
36% estimated losing more than £100,000 revenue this year  
57% had furloughed staff and 5% made staff redundant  
15% were under threat of closure and 44% were unsure if they could continue

Headline statistics from the city's main attractions show that, against a forecast of 20-30% of visitors compared with last year, August especially was a good month, with visitor numbers of around 50%+ of the previous year. Numbers for many attractions have now started to decline as we head towards the winter period.

During the early weeks and months of the public health crisis we learned much from our own response and adaptations. This experience can be used going forward, but we also are anticipating to have to be continually evolving our campaigns and strategies. Portsmouth has managed to develop one of the strongest responses to the public health crisis in comparison to cities of a similar size and structure. This has assisted the city to undertake and experience a relatively strong visitor recovery during the summer months, with opening attractions achieving above their predicted visitor numbers, for example.

It is likely, however, that some tourism-related businesses will find survival a real challenge. As the furlough scheme comes to an end and many of the businesses are left to try and survive through the quieter months, without the usual bolster of high visitor spend in the summer months. It is inevitable that some will fail and this will have an impact on the overall destination offer.

The Visit Portsmouth Team are keen to help where we can and will be increasing our engagement with local businesses, big and small, all of which are crucial to the overall offer of the city.

### **5. Ongoing and Planned Activity through to March 2021**

#### Escape the Everyday campaign - Visit England/Visit Britain

Visit England and Visit Britain launched their Escape the Everyday campaign in September, with the objective of promoting domestic getaways to Brits growing ever more frustrated with their Covid-era routine. Its aim was to reassure consumers, build their confidence to book travel across the nations and tap into their pent-up desire to escape and for freedom following months of lockdown.

The campaign highlighted England's unique tourism offer by focusing on three key themes – Discovery, Freedom to Explore, and Treat Yourself. Content showcased both our vibrant cities and breath-taking countryside, and the coastal locations that make the UK a brilliant place to explore this autumn and winter.

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To support the campaign, we created a new Escape the Everyday page on Visit Portsmouth, tying in city attractions with the campaign's three key themes. Social content was also created and we were sure to tag Visit Britain and Visit England within it, to encourage shares. Surely enough, Visit England retweeted our post to their 215,700 Twitter followers.

We also covered the campaign in meetings with destination partners and gave them advice based on what we'd learned from attending Visit England webinars on the Escape the Everyday campaign, so they could use it to its full potential too.

### Visit Portsmouth autumn/winter campaign

Our autumn/half term campaign, Portsmouth is Open, is ongoing at the time of writing.

This campaign is to promote the city being on low-level restrictions (so open to tourists) but also more open geographically than many people realise. As such, the content and imagery was specifically chosen to show open and spacious outdoor areas, to promote the city effectively during this period of social distancing.

The campaign imagery comprises photographs of the beach, commons, parks and seascape - all looking spacious and uncrowded. The content revolves around four main themes: Open Spaces, Open Water, Open for Business and Open Door. The first covers our parks, commons and gardens; the second our beaches and seascapes; the third is our attractions; and the fourth our pubs, bars and restaurants.

The campaign has been promoted on social media with a recut of our 2019 Destination Film, featuring only outdoor shots. It ends with the Portsmouth is Open call to action and the Visit Portsmouth web address. There has also been an e-newsletter sent exclusively to people outside of Portsmouth.

Partners have supported the campaign, including Tourism South East and the marketing agency working for Southern Rail.

The decision was made to keep this campaign entirely digital, so the messaging could be turned up or down depending on the local lockdown situation, to avoid budget wastage. People were targeted from within a two-hour drive time, as well as select other areas that also show up well on our web analytics results, like Bath and Bristol.

Whilst the primary objective is to drive visits to the city, we are aware the current situation is different to any other so will also use this as a brand awareness exercise - so people within a two hour drive time visit us in the immediate term, or at least keep Portsmouth in their minds for when restrictions ease further. Results will be measured on the basis of ad impression volume, projected recall, web traffic and qualitative feedback.

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### Visit Portsmouth Christmas campaign

Given Christmas this year is likely to be very different, with many major events and entertainment reduced or cancelled completely and further restrictions to travel possible, we are looking to develop some virtual content to share online. Alongside this we will promote the seasonal markets, retail, food and drink and attractions etc.

Following the success of #VirtualPortsmouth we are also in the process of gathering festive activities from destination partners, to do a Christmas virtual visit. This will also future-proof the website and generate steady traffic even if we end up in a national lockdown or similar during the Christmas period.

### Visit Portsmouth website - new look

Work is underway to refresh the site and we hope to launch this around the time of the Visit Portsmouth Christmas campaign. As noted above, this will be built to modern Accessibility and SEO guidelines, to ensure it can be viewed by everyone and shows up well in search results.

### International Marketing

We will continue to market Portsmouth internationally on a regional basis working with our partners. As part of England's Coast and working with Tourism South East we will keep our offer warm with the European market that we have worked hard to grow in recent years and for whom Brexit may be a further barrier. We will attend a virtual World Travel Market in November and aim to engage here with the longer haul markets. In addition we will be working with a marketing company based in Normandy to encourage visits to Portsmouth from the north of France once it is safe to do so and quarantine is lifted. This may be for pre-Christmas shopping with a bigger emphasis on the New Year when Brexit will become more relevant in communications.

### Group and Travel Trade

The groups market is suffering greatly at present. We will continue engagement through Tourism South East and our own mailing lists, ensuring businesses have the information they require and are inspired to add Portsmouth to itineraries once they start offering group visits and holidays in significant numbers again. We also plan a series of virtual familiarisation visits including one to include The D-Day Story and LCT7074.

### 2021 - Put the Wind in Your Sails

As a destination we had decided on a creative for the 2020 campaign that we are now looking to hold to run with in 2021, waiting to see how the current situation develops before deciding on a launch date. The messaging will be even more relevant as people look to get back to some sort of normal. Discussions have already begun with destination partners to devise this campaign, keeping on top of trends and research to make sure we have the most up-to-date data to inform marketing decisions going forward.