

A VISITORS' AUDIT OF NINE MARKET TOWNS

Summary Report of Findings & Recommendations for Action



Presented by:

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July 2009

1 INTRODUCTION

This report is the culmination of work by Su Beswick Marketing for South Somerset Market Towns Investment Group with regards to the Visitors' Audit of the nine towns of Bruton, Castle Cary, Chard, Crewkerne, Ilminster, Langport, Martock, Somerton and South Petherton.

It builds on previous work for the Visitors' Audit project by Su Beswick which included devising the audit questionnaire for use by the volunteers in their visits to the market towns, testing its fitness for purpose, liaison with the Market Towns Vision Support Officer and delivery of a training session in March 2009 for the forty five volunteers prior to their field research.

The volunteers from different market towns represented five different types of visitor groups:

- Parents (with child) and pushchair
- Those with limited mobility or other disability
- Young persons aged 16-25 years
- Retired people
- Those of average age in employment

The visitor audits were carried out from April to June 2009 and the initial findings collated by Market Towns Vision Support Officer, Nicola Doble in an easy to complete template document configured by Su Beswick Marketing.

2 VISITORS' AUDIT: PURPOSE & REPORT

The Visitors' Audit provides an assessment of the current visitor offer in the participating, nine Market Towns and an opportunity for representatives of the different towns to work collaboratively in identifying opportunities to increase visitor stay and spend and, to share best practice. The volunteers were asked to give a "fresh eyes approach" in their town visits

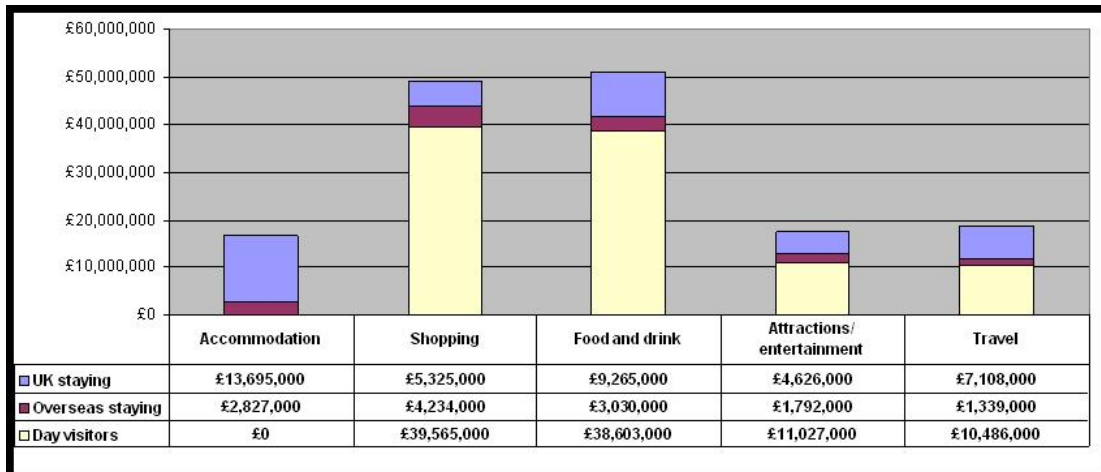
The audit questionnaire was divided into nine sections for completion: First impressions (signage, parking and general ambience); provision of visitor information, toilet facilities, shopping, accommodation, places to eat and drink, transport and accessibility, things to see and do and conclusions as to overall warmth of welcome.

This report summarises the overall findings of the Visitors' Audit and provides a plan of action for local and strategic investment in environmental enhancements and other projects to improve the current visitor offer in the nine market towns through partnership of local, county and town councils.

It should be read in conjunction with individual reports compiled by Su Beswick for each market town that summarise the volunteer findings and gives suggested improvements for that specific locality. (See separate Report: Visitors' Audit Town Action Plans)

3 OVERALL FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Visitors come to South Somerset to enjoy the countryside, its historic houses and gardens, the peace and quiet and to visit family, friends and relatives.¹ South Somerset receives 2.2 million day visits with an associated day visitor spend of £99.6m². Staying visitors account for 1.4 million visitor nights with a £53.2 million spend in the local economy. The market towns are key attractions for visitors, many of whom are retired and who come to explore, shop and dine in the area.



First impressions are therefore the key to encouraging these and other people who might just be “touring” through, to stop and stay awhile in the district’s market towns. It is appreciated that the Visitor’s Audit can only be a “snapshot” in time and improvements may have already been made since the two months of the visits. However, some 45 volunteers took time to look closely at the visitor offer from their own visitor type perspective in one of the nominated nine towns. The Visitors’ Audit has identified certain environmental improvements that could be applied to all of the towns to enhance the first impressions of visitors to South Somerset. These are to:

1. Improve the individual town name signs to make them more attractive and welcoming.

A couple of audit visitors described them as “boring” and most thought them unattractive. An effort though has been made in Chard to make the town sign more distinctive. In addition to the small yellow name sign, there is another larger sign in blue which reads, “Chard Home of Flight” referring to the town’s historic status of hosting John Stringfellow’s first steam powered aeroplane flight in 1848. However, these entrance markers to Chard were spoilt by undergrowth covering the bottom part of one of the signs. Similarly, foliage was found to be obscuring the town sign in Crewkerne.

New welcome signs to the market towns should be consistent in style to encourage subliminal recognition by visitors of the towns’ pedigree heritage based on their medieval development through the importance of the wool trade. The town signs could form an integral part of encouraging visitors to base their day visits and short break stays on a “heritage trail” tour of the market towns.

¹ South Somerset Accommodation Questionnaire 2005

² South West Tourism Value of Tourism Report/South Somerset2007

2. Enhance floral decorations in the market towns through the provision of infrastructure and collaboration of effort through partnership of the local authorities, town councils, businesses and communities. The RHS' Britain in Bloom is a great motivator in uniting councils, chambers of commerce, tourist offices and local residents and instilling a great sense of town pride. A town in bloom can create a lasting impression on visitors. It signals a warm and colourful welcome and an invitation to stop and stay awhile. Resulting benefits include a positive impact on the local economy, social cohesion, civic pride and a springboard for further environmental initiatives.

Case Study: There are regional and national campaigns from which communities are nominated for the finals of Britain in Bloom. Kingsbridge in South Devon is a town that entered the South West in Bloom first in 2008, as an initiative developed by the Town Council and Chamber of Commerce with the local authority backing of South Hams District Council. The town won a Silver Gilt Award which spurred those organisations involved on to greater displays in 2009. Membership has been open to all residents of the town who wished to contribute and relevant organisations in Kingsbridge were encouraged to be represented. In summary, the entry this year was made up of:

- Features and maintenance by the Town and District Council
- Projects undertaken by local groups, as their contribution
- The individual and collective efforts of local businesses and residents
- Works undertaken directly through the Kingsbridge in Bloom Committee

Over 53 businesses sponsored floral contributions and 13 organisations and individuals. See photos of floral exhibits in Kingsbridge this summer on Appendix 1 page 20. Visit:

<http://www.kingsbridgeinbloom.co.uk/> and www.rhs.org.uk/britaininbloom

3. Carry out improvements to signage from the main routes into the market town centres and car parks. See detailed improvements recommended in the following pages 8 to 9.

4. Improve the legibility of the names of key main street thoroughfares accessible to visitors arriving as pedestrians and in cars. Similarly, fingerpost sign lettering to enhance the street scene. See detailed improvements recommended in the following pages 8 to 9. There would appear to be little provision for arrivals by coach tours and therefore, this is considered a minor market segment for the market towns of South Somerset.

5. Provide easily accessible visitor information: The Audit focussed on visual and written information obtained prior to and during the visit, rather than that available through the Internet. It is appreciated that more and more people are travelling with small computers or other electronic hand held devices to access information on the move. However, the Audit showed that tourist information centres or manned visitor services are really important in offering that extra welcome to visitors and are keen influencers in encouraging longer stays in the towns. Indeed, the Interpretation Boards in the car parks promote "Leaflets are available from the Information Centre." Many of the Audit Visitors found local information services (LICs) closed and a lack of available

written information on the town of their visit. Where manned services were available, the service and local knowledge was greatly valued and a key source of information on the town.

6. Provide Town Trail leaflets: At closing times of the LICs therefore, it is important to have free town trail leaflets readily available outside and at other prominent outlets in the towns e.g. museums, gift shops, cafes etc. It is recommended that the myriad of leaflets available, be rationalised to a free history trail for each town, with a consistent look and feel (brand) to reflect the heritage connections of the South Somerset market towns. The existing town mini guides should be updated to encourage visitors to tour the market towns using the town heritage trails. They would complement use of the excellent Interpretation Boards and directional fingerpost signing. Some Audit Visitors used Town Guides as well. These are often expensive booklets to produce in numbers and provision could be restricted by a small charge or used as an added extra welcome benefit by accommodation providers for their staying guests who have time to explore.

7. Improve finger post signing: See recommendations in the following pages 8 to 9 to create a consistent, visible approach to easily accessible information in every town.

8. Review and improve signage to public toilets: See recommendations on page 12 to ensure public toilets are easily accessible for all.

9. Encourage use and promotion of local food and drink products and arts and crafts: The Audit Visitors found few places in general using, promoting or selling local food and drink products in spite of the Tastes of Somerset listings on www.visitsouthsomerset.com. A brand image could be developed to be used widely by those that produce, use or sell quality local food and drink.

Case study: In South Devon, the South Hams Food & Drink Association that started with local district council financial assistance in the early 1990's has grown since 2003 to become a business led not for profit organisation known as Food & Drink Devon. Visit: www.lovetheflavour.co.uk/

10. Promote excellence in customer service: Some of the visitors stated that shopkeepers were very helpful in answering questions on what to see and do etc. Over £49 million³ is spent on shopping in South Somerset by day trip and staying visitors from both the UK and overseas. Where there was a "perceived" good range of shops, the volunteers stated that their experience of the market town visit was enhanced.

Shopkeepers, especially the small independents, clearly are key ambassadors for the market towns in the district. Consideration might be given to the recognition of excellence in customer service found in local shops with a competition for visitors and residents to nominate their top three favourite shops in each market town that go out of their way to make customers feel welcome. This could be held during a month in late spring or early summer.

³ South West Tourism Value of Tourism Report/South Somerset 2007

11. Provide information on accommodation when the Local Information Centre is closed

through out of hours boards in the towns such as the one provided in Somerton. See page 10.

12. Address public transport signage and accessibility issues: In general, most of the towns were found to have easily accessible parking for those with disabilities and parents with a pushchair. However, Bruton, Somerton and Ilminster, were rated less accessible to both groups, due to narrow pavements, (Bruton and Somerton) and very limited disabled parking slots (Bruton & Ilminster). Options for public transport links to nearby towns were mostly well signed in the market towns, apart from it appears in Langport and Somerton. Taxi ranks or details were less well signed in the nine towns, especially in Castle Cary, Ilminster, Langport, Martock, Somerton and South Petherton.

It is recommended that improvements be considered in the provision of town centre access for all, and disabled parking where appropriate plus signage for public transport and taxi options in those towns where audit ratings were low.

13. Things to see and do: See earlier information on Visitor Information. Additional recommendations are:

- To consider making more of the riverside walk at Bruton
- To encourage greater promotion of the area's arts and crafts connections e.g. the renown local potter, John Leach at Mulcheney and the Somerset Guild of Craftsmen in Somerton.
- To add to the established arts and crafts connections with commissioning over time and the longer term of more street art by way of sculptures as in Chard and Castle Cary. A sculpture trail could link the nine market towns and provide another reason to visit South Somerset. Ideally, these should link into the town's historic and cultural background to give a unique sense of place and pride for each.

14 Address safety and security issues posed by narrow pavements: See "Address public transport signage and accessibility issues" on the previous page of this report.

4 VISITORS' AUDIT: CONCLUSIONS

The Visitors' Audit sought constructive criticism from the audit volunteer visitors as to the quality of the current visitor offer from which to plan, implement and progress suggested and feasible improvements.

The general consensus found that the nine market towns have tremendous tourism potential. The visitor offer is based on their historic charm and century's old trading character. The offer therefore is understandably popular with the older generation and active retired rather than young people. This was borne out in the Audit process. Market segmentation for the market towns is geared towards couples (active retired & walkers) visiting out of season and families, during holiday times. The needs of the different visitor types are catered for within this and individual town reports.

5 FRAMEWORK & TIMESCALES

It is recommended that the South Somerset Market Towns Investment Group prioritises and co-ordinates the initiatives, budgets and timescales of the action plan and assigns lead responsibilities according to statutory powers and mandate. Partnership collaboration and drive, both in the immediate future and the longer term, is required to take the findings and action plan forward from the Visitors' Audit in support of the principles of South Somerset Together.

6 ACTION PLAN

Summary findings and improvements required arising from the Visitor's Audit are detailed in the following pages (8 – 19). See also the Report, Recommendations and Action Plan for each town.

7 FIRST IMPRESSIONS: Improvements

Town	Findings	Recommended Action
Bruton Score: 7.5/10	Town sign unattractive	Consider a new town sign that is more welcoming
	Signing to town centre services & parking poor	Review & improve signage from main routes to town centre and town car park(s). Review pedestrian signage from train station to town centre and from car parks to town centre.
	Street scene	Review overall street cleanliness & remove graffiti when occurs. Improve legibility of street names. Investigate the opportunity to brighten the town with floral decorations.
Castle Cary Score:6.6/10	Town sign unattractive	Consider a new town sign that is more welcoming
	Signing to parking poor Signage from car parks to town centre is poor	Review signage to car parking from the A371 as a matter of urgency. Install pedestrian signage into the town from the Millbrook Gardens car park.
	Street scene	Improve the legibility of street names. Investigate the opportunity to brighten the town with floral decorations.
Chard Score: 6.6/10	Town sign clear but unattractive Congestion on arrival	Consider a new town sign that is more welcoming & remove undergrowth covering the bottom part.
	Street scene	Check finger posting signposting pointing to the Information & the Council offices Install pedestrian signs from the Minnows car park to the town centre.
	Parking	Consider designation of a mother & baby space in the Marketfield car park. Consider giving another option in terms of hours to park & the related cost.
Crewkerne Score: 6.5/10	Mixed views about the attractiveness of the town sign	Remove foliage over hangings obscuring the town sign.
	Signage from car parks to town centre is poor	Improve or install easily visible pedestrian signage from car parks to the town centre.
	Street scene	Improve legibility of fingerpost signs with brighter gold paint. Investigate the opportunity to brighten the town with floral decorations. Improve the condition of some window frames that spoil the appearance of the town. Avoid allowed use of inappropriate plastic materials for shop fascia boards.

Iminster Score: 5.4/10	Signing to parking poor Congestion at school time considered dangerous No pedestrian signage from Tesco to the town centre	Improve signs to town car parks Address in partnership with Tesco the lack of signing from the supermarket to the town centre. There is a map there but no actual signage pointing pedestrians to the town centre. It was suggested that a sign directing traffic to the CP down Ditton Street, visible as you come down East Street, would be helpful.
	Limited disabled parking slots in West Street & Tesco car parks No mother /baby parking	Review the allocation of parking spaces for the disabled to determine if there are enough to meet demand at all times of the year. Consider providing mother/baby space in West Street car park.
	Street scene	Consider the introduction of a pedestrian crossing or lollipop helper across the main road near to the Primary School. Investigate the possibility of introducing floral decoration in the town to add colour.
Langport Score: 5.4/10	Route signing into town Town sign unattractive Insufficient, old & out of date signage from A378 to car parking	Check out route signing into Langport from the A372 for improvements. Consider a new town sign that is more welcoming Improve traffic signs for car parking from the A378.
	No mother /baby parking	Consider provision of mother/baby car parking spaces in Town Square.
	Street scene Lack of finger post signing Absence of floral decorations	Improve pedestrian signposting from the car parks e.g. to the town garden, River Parrott Visitor Centre and historic places to visit. Improve the legibility of street names. Investigate the opportunity to brighten the town with floral decorations
Martock Score: 7.8/10	Route signing into town poor- one sign missing most letters. Town sign unattractive Access impeded into town with car parking on both sides of the road.	Improve the directional signs to the town centre especially from the north. Consider a new town sign that is more welcoming
	Street scene	Install attractive pedestrian signing from the car park to attractions & amenities. Investigate the opportunity to brighten the town with floral decorations
Somerton Score: 7.8/10	Route signing	Check route signing into Somerton from the B3153.
	Street scene	Install signage from the Market Place car park in the direction of the town centre. Investigate the opportunity to brighten the town with floral decorations
South Petherton Score: 7.5/10	Pedestrian signage	Improve directional signage from the car park to the town centre.

GOOD IMPRESSIONS



Good welcome interpretation boards



Chard: Informative Blue Plaque



Somerton: Historical plaque



Crewkerne: Good signage for the disabled



Langport: Good toilet facilities



Somerton: Café in gift shop & local food



Crewkerne: Attractive floral display



Somerton: TIC's useful out of hours board



Martock: Star rated hotel



Ilminster: Good TIC signing

8 VISITOR INFORMATION

Bruton Score: 5.4/10	Accessibility of visitor information an issue when LIC is closed	Ensure Town Trail leaflet is available throughout the town in the museum, shops, cafes & accommodation for when the LIC is closed in the afternoons. Also in the rack outside the LIC.
Castle Cary Score: 5.2/10	Accessibility to manned information services limited by LIC opening hours.	Strengthen volunteer availability to provide regular & consistent opening times five days a week. Ensure provision of a town leaflet available elsewhere & visitors signposted there in closing times.
Chard Score: 4.6/10	Visitor information not easily found or accessible on arrival in town.	Review the opening times of the visitor information services at the Guildhall in the town. On the web, there are no opening times- you have to phone first!
Crewkerne Score: 6.5/10	Visitor information was described as easy to find on arrival. However, accessibility to manned information services limited by LIC opening hours.	The opening hours of the Information Centre should be reviewed to meet customer needs e.g. afternoons & Saturday mornings.
Iminster Score: 5.4/10	Visitor information was described as easy to find on arrival & used by everyone to explore the town. The LIC in Arts Centre was accessed by 4/5 audit visitors during morning times but access overall is limited by pm closures.	Investigate the feasibility of the service being extended by volunteers to mid to late afternoon on weekdays to cater for visitor demand. Install a further town map in the Market Square.
Langport Score: 5.6/10	Everyone found visitor information easy to find on arrival in town. Accessibility to manned information services in the Library limited by its opening times. The River Parrott Visitor Centre is an attraction in its own right with good information & service provision.	More signposting/ information boards at the points of interest were thought to be useful. More could be done to promote the historic nature of Langport. The LIC should display more information on what to do & see in the town during closing hours. Avoid visitor information on the town being overshadowed by the cycle hire aspect of the Visitor Centre.
Martock Score: 6.6/10	Accessibility to manned information services limited by LIC opening hours of the Library.	A free town leaflet needs to be readily available from the LIC and elsewhere in the town e.g. cafes, hotel, Town Council offices for when LIC is closed.
Somerton Score: 8.2/10	Manned visitor services were found in the town by 5/5 people. All found the LIC accessible & were made to feel welcome. All found written information good or excellent.	Erect a sign at the Antique Centre to indicate the LIC location. The brown Information Board shows Tourist Information available in the Library. Add the Antiques Centre.
South Petherton Score: 7/10	Most visitors used the information board to explore the town. LIC in Library found to be poorly signposted.	Signpost visitor information available at the Library from the centre and car park.

9 TOILET FACILITIES

Bruton Score: 7.25/10	Everyone found the toilets easily. The cleanliness of the toilets caused a disparity in views as being either rated poor (2/5) or good (3/5).	The disparity could be down to the time of visit or circumstances on the day. A review of cleansing regime might be required.
Castle Cary Score: 5.6/10	Signs to the toilets confusing for the parent with pushchair & there were no baby changing facilities so needs not met. Cleanliness rated by 3/5 as average. The disabled toilet in Millbrook Gardens car park was very run down with a "menacing look."	Could baby changing facilities be introduced? If not, could a sign indicate where the nearest facilities are e.g. café etc? This would help promote a business too and a longer stay! Improve facilities for the disabled at Millbrook Gardens car park.
Chard Score: 4.6/10	Most people found these easy to find. No public toilet located with baby changing facilities. The disabled toilet at Boden Car park was out of order.	Could baby changing facilities be introduced? If not, could a sign indicate where the nearest facilities are e.g. café etc? This would help promote a business too and a longer stay!
Crewkerne Score: 6.3/10	Only the person with limited mobility thought the toilets were easy to find & accessible. Signage an issue.	More signage required to the public toilets. Paint the fingerpost sign directions in a brighter gold paint colour for easier visibility.
Iminster Score: 7.8/10	Signage appears to be an issue. Two visitors were unable to find one that was open. Those at Tesco found as poor and those at the Meeting House, very good. Score raised by use of non public toilets.	Investigate adequate signing to toilets in the town. Ensure all are open for visitor use.
Langport Score: 8.5/10	All thought the toilet facilities easy to find & easily accessible & scored good or excellent in cleanliness.	Maintain excellent levels of cleanliness
Martock Score: 6.4/10	There appeared to be no obvious street signing of toilet facilities.	Improve signing to public toilet facilities from the car park to the location(s).
Somerton 7.8/10	All thought the toilet facilities easy to find, there was a query as to there being only 2 ladies toilets, suggesting queues at peak times. The parent with pushchair scored 10/10 for good baby changing in public toilets.	Maintain good levels of cleanliness
South Petherton Score: 5/10	Signage issues here. Difficult access for parent with pushchair & no baby changing facilities. Average rating for cleanliness.	Improve signage to the public toilets Consider provision for baby changing. Improve cleansing regime

BAD IMPRESSIONS



Castle Cary: Car parking sign – no others after you turn left!



Chard: Wonderful sculptures spoilt by a muddy, unkempt space



Crewkerne: Tired pedestrian signs



Dusty leaflets at Bruton TIC, none on town



Bruton: Vandalised sign



Castle Cary: Illegible car parking signs



Castle Cary: Broken signs



Castle Cary: Uninviting toilets



Chard: Rubbish bag in floral container



Langport: Narrow pavements

10 SHOPPING

<p>Bruton Score: 5.4/10</p>	<p>The town has a limited range of shops to explore, although there are antique & arts/craft shops. Its linear nature makes accessibility to the shops difficult with narrow pavements. Accessibility was an issue for the person with limited mobility, parent/ pushchair & retired person. Shops close Thursday afternoons. Few appear to sell local products. There seems to be enough only to keep the majority of people there a couple of hours or so.</p>
<p>Castle Cary Score: 6.2/10</p>	<p>Castle Cary offers a good range of shops for visitors to the town to stroll along and browse, which are likely to encourage longer visitor stays in the town for the benefit of other business types e.g. cafes, pubs, restaurants etc. The town has a wide visitor appeal to prime target audiences such as retired people. Local products were on sale. The person with limited mobility & the retired visitor scored an overall rating of 9/10 in the shopping category. However, the person with limited mobility did not find the shops in general that easily accessible. Low scores were given by the young person and person of working age.</p>
<p>Chard Score: 8.2/10</p>	<p>A good range of shops were found to include antiques, arts & crafts, baker, butcher, chemist, men & women's clothes, delicatessen, electrical, greengrocer, hardware & gifts, hairdressers/barbers, book, pet, cook, wine & florist shops, estate agent & dentist. Local products were found by all but one visitor. Service in the shops was deemed excellent or good by all the visitors with 3 stating the shops had enhanced their visit to the town. No-one encountered accessibility problems.</p>
<p>Crewkerne Score: 7.4/10</p>	<p>Crewkerne was found to have a good range of mostly, accessible shops and appears to serve as popular, shopping centre for the surrounding area. Local products are available. Although the person with limited mobility found the shops easily accessible, the parent with pushchair found some shops "a little hard" with some steps". All but the young person rated the service encountered as good or very good and felt that the shops enhanced the visit to the town.</p>
<p>Ilminster Score: 7/10</p>	<p>Everyone thought there was a good range of shops in the town & found local products available in the shops & at the market. The person with limited mobility found 50% of shop entrances unsuitable. All bar the person of working age thought the shops enhanced their visit. The young person noted that there is nothing for teenagers.</p>
<p>Langport Score: 7/10</p>	<p>Everyone thought there was a good range of shops in the town & found local products available in the shops. The parent with pushchair noticed the gaps of a baby and accessories shops. The working person thought there isn't much choice for a weekly shop but if looking for something a bit different, then there is loads! Shops along the main road were not easily accessible for the parent with pushchair owing to the narrow pavements & the fear of being run over. Langport is aiming to be a Transition Town.</p>
<p>Martock Score: 5.6/10</p>	<p>Only 2/5 people thought there was a good range of shops in the town. There was not much local food found or promoted except from the Bower Hinton Farm Shop. The butcher's shop which has a good reputation & promotes local food produce was located a long way from the other shops. A lot of shops were found to close on a Saturday afternoon. The linear nature of Martock makes shopping "hard work" but the basics are quite convenient & centrally located apart from the butchers (which has an excellent reputation).</p>
<p>Somerton Score: 8.2/10</p>	<p>Everyone thought there was a good range of shops in the town & found local products available in the shops & at the Farmers Market on a Tuesday. The shops were accessible to everyone, had normal opening hours with the service encountered being rated as good or excellent by 4/5 people. All thought the shops enhanced their visit.</p>
<p>South Petherton Score: 6.4/10</p>	<p>The town was found to have a limited range of shops but local products were found. Accessibility was fine and 4/5 thought the shops enhanced their visit. The general consensus was that you could just about achieve a small weekend shop here.</p>

11 ACCOMMODATION

<p>Bruton Score: 5.25/10</p>	<p>The visitors found little choice of accommodation in the town itself. This implies that visitors to the town are mostly going to be day visitors or those staying in and around the area. There would appear from my own web search however, that there are at least 4 accommodation providers, one hotel and three guesthouses.</p>	<p>Details of accommodation available in the town need to be clearly shown on an after hours board at the Tourist Information Office.</p> <p>Ensure Town Trail leaflets are available on Bruton at the Mill on the Brue.</p>
<p>Castle Cary Score: 6.2/10</p>	<p>Hotel, B & B, self catering and pub/inn with rooms were found collectively but not individually. There appears to be no camping sites from the audit in Castle Cary's immediate environment. For staying visitors, evening dining is available in the town.</p>	<p>An out of hours accommodation board should be provided outside the Local Information Centre with name, location, phone number & website address. Liaison with accommodation providers in the town could lead to improvement of display notices & details in town centre establishments. Accommodation providers could set up an informal network for availability with referrals to others if fully booked.</p>
<p>Chard Score: 6.6/10</p>	<p>Types of accommodation found were: hotel, B & B & pub and inn. Evening dining is available.</p>	
<p>Crewkerne Score: 6.2/10</p>	<p>Types of accommodation found were: hotel, B & B & pub/inn. Evening dining is available.</p>	<p>Could accommodation providers be encouraged to do more to promote their own facilities through the use of appropriate external notice boards/signs etc?</p>
<p>Ilminster Score: 6.6/10</p>	<p>Types of accommodation found were: 5 hotels & several B & B, all well appointed &, pubs/inns. Evening dining is available.</p>	<p>Could accommodation providers be encouraged to do more to promote their own facilities through the use of appropriate external notice boards/signs etc?</p>
<p>Langport Score: 4.75/10</p>	<p>Sign boards for accommodation were not obvious. Hotels & pubs/inns found & evening dining. Signs for camping on the way out of town. No information available in the window of the LIC after opening hours.</p>	<p>Out of hours information on accommodation in Langport & area should be posted to encourage longer stays in the vicinity.</p>
<p>Martock Score: 6.6/10</p>	<p>Types of accommodation found a hotel, a B & B & a pub. Evening dining available.</p>	
<p>Somerton Score: 8/10</p>	<p>Signboards were found by everyone showing places to stay & the notice board featuring local accommodation providers was appreciated. Somerton was found to have a good range of accommodation for visitors to the town.</p>	
<p>South Petherton Score: 6/10</p>	<p>The visitors found no quality rated accommodation but provision included: a hotel, B & Bs & inn/pubs. Evening dining available.</p>	

12 PLACES TO EAT & DRINK

Bruton Score: 7.25/10	The majority thought there was little variety of food and drink on offer. . Local food and drink products are only promoted by a few establishments. The retired person ate in the Chapel Restaurant and rated the experience as excellent with a 9/10 score. The Claire de Lune Restaurant has won an AA Rosette.	
Castle Cary Score: 6.2/10	Generally, the visitors found a good variety of places to eat & drink. Only a few establishments promote local food & drink.	Encourage greater use of local/regional food & drink products by food & drink establishments. Encourage those that do, to show their use in their publicity material and on their own websites. Encourage the Local Information Centre to differentiate those businesses that do in any leaflet or online publicity material.
Chard Score: 6.4/10	As for Castle Cary	Ditto
Crewkerne Score: 7/10	All found a good variety of places in which to eat and drink. Few establishments promote local food & drink.	Ditto
Iminster Score: 7.2/10	The audit visitors found a good range of places to do eat & drink but with only a few promoting local food & drink products. Own experiences rated as good or excellent.	Ditto
Langport Score: 6.8/10	All found a good variety of places in which to eat and drink. Few establishments promote local food & drink. Own dining experience rated as good or excellent.	Ditto
Martock Score: 6.4/10	Only 3/5 found a good range of places to eat & drink & scored their own experience as either good or excellent.	Ditto
Somerton Score: 8.4/10	There appears to be a good range of places to eat & drink in Somerton but with only a few promoting local food & drink products.	Ditto
South Petherton Score: 6.6/10	Generally, the visitors found a good variety of places to eat & drink. Only a few establishments promote local food & drink. The majority enjoyed their dining experience.	Ditto

13 TRANSPORT & ACCESSIBILITY

Bruton Score: 5.8/10	Travel by train was well signed. The person with the limited mobility did not find easily accessible parking	Investigate further provision in the town of easily accessible parking for those with limited mobility and parents with children.
Castle Cary Score: 3.6/10	Options for public transport links to nearby towns well signed. Most found easily accessible parking for those with disabilities & parents. No signposting for taxis found.	It is assumed that there is a taxi rank in the town. If so, its location needs to be better signposted
Chard Score: 6.2/10	Public transport links well signposted. Everyone found easily accessible parking for those with disabilities & parents.	
Crewkerne Score: 5.8/10	In the main, public transport links & taxis well signposted. Everyone found easily accessible parking for those with disabilities and parents.	
Iminster Score: 7.2/10	Public transport links well signposted, taxis less so. Only 3/5 people found easily accessible parking for disabled visitors and/ parents. A low score by the person with limited mobility.	Investigate further provision in the town of easily accessible parking for those with limited mobility and parents with children.
Langport Score: 6/10	Public transport links & taxi services are not well signposted. The River Parrott cycle trail & hire facilities are. People were impressed by the cycle hire facilities and the amount of information on local events & walks.	At the Visitor Centre, ensure cycle hire/cycles do not obscure general tourist information displays on the area
Martock Score: 5.6/10	3/5 found transport links well signposted. Everyone found easily accessible parking for those with disabilities & parents. There was no signing apparent for taxis.	
Somerton Score: 6.4/10	Taxis were not well signed & taxi rank found by default (retired person). Public transport links were well signposted. The parent with pushchair found few places suitable for pushchairs. Also, pavements are very narrow, although there dropped kerbs in some places. The person with limited mobility found the distance between the car park and the shops "not good."	Should public transport links be better signposted? Encourage cafes with seating outside to take orders outside from those with limited ability or parents with pushchairs who are unable to easily access the inside facilities. Consider widening the narrow spots on pavements to allow for a parent with pushchair.
South Petherton Score: 6.6/10	Public transport links were fairly well signposted to nearby towns. All rated parking for the disabled and parents as easily accessible.	

14 THINGS TO SEE & DO

<p>Bruton Score: 6.6/10</p>	<p>4/5 scored highly for things to see and do. The average score was significantly reduced by the rating of the person with limited mobility. The majority did not find information easily accessible about arts/ crafts locally. Museum staff informative & helpful when LIC closed.</p>	<p>Ensure Town Trail leaflets or Town Guide are available outside the Library's Information Centre. Could more be made of the riverside walk? Details of the art gallery and crafts shop(s) should be promoted through the LIC. Businesses such as the Bruton Restaurant, The Mill on the Brue and the gallery/ crafts shop(s) could help promote each other to town visitors.</p>
<p>Castle Cary Score: 4.4/10</p>	<p>4/5 used either a town leaflet or town guide to explore the town. No-one used Interpretation Boards. Criticism of no leaflets or proper signs to any historic attractions.</p>	<p>Review signage to historic attractions in the town.</p>
<p>Chard Score: 7.4/10</p>	<p>A variety of means used to find out about things to see & do in Chard. Only one person found information on arts/ crafts. Most found information on walking & cycling. The person with limited mobility found it hard to access information as the Information Centre was closed.</p>	<p>See earlier Visitor Information comments.</p>
<p>Crewkerne Score: 5/10</p>	<p>Information on heritage attractions was mostly easily found through a variety of sources.</p>	<p>The local information centre window appears to be a good source of information on things to do and see at all times including events.</p>
<p>Ilminster Score: 7/10</p>	<p>The Information Centre & town guide were used by everyone to find details of things to see & do.</p>	<p>The Arts Centre which houses the LIC plays an important role in welcoming visitors to the town and in promoting local arts & culture.</p>
<p>Langport Score:7.4/10</p>	<p>Interpretative boards were used by the majority of people but interestingly, only two people found information easy to find on what attractions the town offers or on arts/crafts. Everyone found information on walking & cycling.</p>	<p>Install brown or finger post signs to direct people towards attractions Ensure town trail leaflets are available at other outlets for when the LIC is closed. Similarly, encourage greater promotion of the re-known local potter, John Leach and local arts & crafts in the town shops, cafes, pubs etc.</p>
<p>Martock Score: 6/10</p>	<p>Information on heritage attractions was hard to come by & found mostly through interpretative boards & blue plaques. Walking, cycling & events information not easy to find.</p>	<p>A free town leaflet needs to be readily available from elsewhere in the town e.g. cafes, hotel, Town Council offices when LIC is closed. Install attractive pedestrian signing from the car park to attractions & amenities.</p>
<p>Somerton Score: 7.6/10</p>	<p>Information on heritage attractions was found through a variety of sources- town guide, leaflet, LIC, interpretative boards. Information on arts/crafts, other attractions and forthcoming events quite easily found.</p>	<p>Consider promoting directions to the town's viewpoint. Encourage issue of free leaflet rather than a paid guide to encourage a warm welcome & longer stay.</p>
<p>South Petherton Score: 6.6/10</p>	<p>The majority found information on what to see, other attractions in the area & events easy to find. Less so on walking/cycling & arts/crafts.</p>	<p>Signpost visitor information available at the Library from the centre and car park.</p>

15 SAFE & SECURE

Bruton	<p>3/5 people did not feel safe & secure in looking around Bruton due to: pavements making walking difficult ((the parent with pushchair had to walk in the road most of the time). There were five places where a pushchair has to come off the pavement because it is narrow or non-existent.</p> <p>The retired person found the speed of the traffic through the one way system alarming and the pavements extremely narrow in places.</p>	<p>It is recognised that the issue of the narrow pavements and roads is difficult to address in this historic town.</p> <p>This is a key issue to address if more visitors are to be encouraged to stop and have a look around awhile.</p> <p>Focus on the five pinch points.</p>
Crewkerne	<p>The young person commented that they might not feel so safe at night-time, implying there might be issues that could be off putting for staying visitors.</p>	
Ilminster	<p>Everyone felt safe & secure in Ilminster. The person with limited mobility commented that “traffic congestion including variable slopes on pave ways & roads, made it extremely difficult to comfortably negotiate along the main streets”.</p>	<p>Future consideration in traffic & highways schemes should give consideration to the needs of those with limited mobility visiting the town.</p>
Langport	<p>Only the parent with child in the pushchair felt unsafe & insecure, owing to the very narrow pavements making it really difficult to get both safely up the High Street, not helped by other people pushing past them.</p>	
Castle Cary, Chard, Martock, Somerton & South Petherton	<p>Everyone felt safe & secure during their visit to these five towns.</p>	

16 OVERALL WARMTH OF WELCOME SCORES

Bruton	6/10	Langport	7/10
Castle Cary	6.8/10	Martock	8/10
Chard	7.4/10	Somerton	8.4/10
Crewkerne	8.4/10	South Petherton	7.8/10
Ilminster	7.2/10		

APPENDIX 1: EXAMPLES OF FLORAL DISPLAYS – KINGSBRIDGE IN BLOOM



APPENDIX 2: TOWN VISITS BY SU BESWICK TRAVELLING BY CAR

1. CHARD

Arrived in town via A30. The town sign – yellow – small unimpressive. A blue sign further along reads Chard Home of Flight. Brown signs to Wildlife Farm attraction on the approach.

Suggest finger signposting by Craft Shop and Somerfield into town centre.

No apparent signing down Holyrood Street which seems to be a main street with lots of shops off the main road- no pedestrian signing here at all.

Issue in the town – there are signposts to other parts of the world but I couldn't find a sign to the museum. TIC poorly signposted - helpful service but not easy to see signs as you are driving along.

Toilets don't appear to be signposted clearly once out of the car.

2. CREWKERNE

Good signing on A30 from Critchard to Crewkerne re nearby attractions.

I got lost on my way – I'd have been on my way out. Confusing signing - to turn right. Parking shown with swimming pool, I was looking for a plain parking sign. I missed the right lane so I had to turn round.

Then I approached from the Yeovil direction. There was severe traffic congestion at the roundabout. It was mostly directional signing that you see, as you come into the town centre. Followed parking sign by turning into main street- sunlight in my face and I couldn't see and received a second beep since my arrival in Crewkerne as I tried to turn right following a sign towards car parking. Arrived but felt that I would have probably preferred to carry on out of town by now.

In the car park it could do with another pay & display machine at the top end.

Scheme for shopping at Somerfield gets car parking refunded.

It could do with signs from the car park into town centre. In the Market Square there is finger post signing.

Observations – pretty little place; liked it, lovely old stonework in buildings.

I think it is confusing for visitors on arrival and a bit difficult re parking. Traffic signing is not clear. If like me you wanted to stay away from the supermarket you end up missing the best car parking site. Signs could say, town visitor parking below supermarket sign.

TIC manager helpful and I waited in a queue whilst a non tourism enquiry was dealt with. I asked for a mini guide/leaflet around the town and he printed off all sorts of sheets that I didn't need. Not very environmentally friendly! Also instructions to Brinchcombe Gardens confused. Still unsure about them and I didn't have time to visit.

3. CASTLE CARY

I was confused at the Clanville junction a very busy one. There a blue sign to Castle Cary and Ansford. I approached from the A359 and the B3152.

Castle Cary is bigger than I expected. Lovely golden stone buildings throughout the town centre. On arrival, I followed a car parking to turn left opposite the George Hotel and drove up the main street which was very pretty. Rather tight with cars parked on one side leaving only a little room to travel with cars coming down one after another. I was still looking for another car parking sign and then found myself driving away out of town and up a steep hill which I realised couldn't be right. I stopped at the busy main road junction and had to cross over busy traffic to be able to turn back and retrace my drive back into town.

Later I checked out the signs and at the main town centre junction the parking sign pointing left is not backed up buy another just up the hill after you turn towards Ansford. This caused me a lot of confusion so that I ended up going up a narrow street, causing chaos even though two way. Eventually I found Mill Street in which to park.

I found local people very friendly and I liked the town a lot once I got over the confusion of my arrival. Parking was free with toilets close by and clean.

The White Hart menu outside boasted all home made. Horse Pond Inn offered a credit crunch lunch for 1 course £6, 2 course £9 and 3 course £12 with West country menu items. I found a good range of shops and pubs and thought that you could probably get everything you need here without going to the supermarket.

Castle Cary is the kind of town you'd want to stop off in, not too big to walk through.

Signing also poor as you come out of town re directions to Bruton. I went wrong and ended up at Castle Cary station where I had to turn round.

4. BRUTON

Signing is poor from Castle Cary – all Wincanton directional. Local signing is unclear.

On the outskirts of Bruton arriving by the A359, there was a big mill sign –blue on white looked welcoming. A linear town seemingly very untouched; muddy houses line the main road.

I parked in Higher Backway after following good signing to the car park. I was unsure whether parking was free though.

Bruton is an interesting, historic town with a good, local museum. I came across a chapel conversion & felt a real sense of discovery as you don't know what you're going into. I was unable to stop by the river as there was no parking available owing to severe congestion due to a large funeral.

Real issue: Coming out of Bruton no immediate sign for Castle Cary - only main routes- more local signing between the market towns required. Only as you come right out of town are there signs for Castle Cary at a big main road (A359) and a very busy and rather dangerous junction which looks as if it needs a roundabout.

5. SOMERTON

Scenery is stunning in coming into town from the B3153. Chalky, low hills, nice hedgerows, town perched on hill, church visible. I was travelling in going home from work traffic.

Give way junction with the B3151 there is no sign way to go so I had to guess left which was right! My route is probably the way most tourists would come from the direction I had to avoid the main roads so signing here at this junction needs to be improved for town arrivals.

Town sign was dirty as you come in this way but told me Somerton is a 17th century market town. It read Welcome to Somerton- Royal Capital of Ancient Wessex. There were brown signs good for the Somerset Guild of Craftsmen and sign for free parking. I did note that there were almost too many signs at this junction to take in!

Certainly with the Royal capital of Ancient Wessex sign and the aqueduct close by, you had a sense of this was going to be a special place to visit. I had never heard of it before.

Parking signs unclear and I had the feeling that I might have gone wrong. The town as you drive through is very pretty with parking on the main street. I wanted to stop in the market place but couldn't as there were no spaces. I saw finger post signing for toilets. I carried on through & followed the clear sign for free parking behind the Union Hotel. A relatively painless arrival and I found that I didn't have to walk to far into the centre.

The Precinct here I thought very attractive indeed. Local Williams supermarket promotes local products. The Globe uses local menus but doesn't say it's local. There is an Antiques Centre next to the Guild of Craftsmen. The TIC is in the library but was closed on my arrival in the afternoon. Signing to toilets was good. I went into the Natural Gift Company & Emma B's café within which was very inviting for visitors to the town. I thought this a good business relationship there. Also went in the delicatessen shop and felt very warmly welcomed – nice service. Somerset Jewel of South West boards everywhere.

My impression of Somerton is really good. Really pretty and out of all the towns, I liked it probably best of every account and especially for the ease of arrival. I liked the sense of space, the new buildings done in the old style; really friendly people, parking good, Unicorn 4**** board outside says they promote local produce.

6. ILMINSTER

I arrived from the A303 and B3168. A nice, colourful town sign with a church on it. An industrial approach to the outskirts e.g. Powrmatic and it has just a typical town approach. I followed directional signage to the town centre. Spar Express on the right, passed the Great Western Shrubbery hotel & restaurant. Sign straight on OK passed buildings in golden stone, up the hill. Busy approach road with quite a bit of traffic. The directional sign pointing right to the town centre was overshadowed by a tree and in heavy traffic I missed it completely and found myself on the way out without having stopped!

I had to travel two miles out of town to turn back and if I was just a casual tourer would I have bothered to turn back- probably not!

Returning now from the opposite direction from Dillingto House way, I saw a nice town sign and daffodils which was welcoming. Pretty, little cottages as you bear left into town. I saw on street parking but no signs for parking along the one way system so I carried on. I retraced my steps to see how I had missed it and found the sign was quite small on a pillar that was quite low down.

I was unimpressed with parking signage though. I ended up at a park far too out of town, having turned right by library. I had to turned round and eventually ended in the Tesco car park. I asked a builder if it was OK to park here and I was told, Ilminster is a one horse town? I parked behind Walnut Place and followed a pedestrian cut through into town by the Arts Centre, but again the signing was unclear. I just followed other people. Finger

post signing out from the market square outwards would be helpful e.g. to the church. Signs for parking are to superstore with parking underneath. My problem was that I had tried to avoid Tesco as this implies a town shoppers car park. I suggest that there should be a Visitor Parking sign there too. I had a coffee in the George in the Market Square which was very friendly.

7. LANGPORT

Arrived from the B3168 and saw brown signs for the River Parrot Visitor Centre. The Old Wharf and the river bridge gave a sense of arrival in this pretty little town.

Good signing through the town to show the main car park on the right. Clearly shows it is free parking & the sign also points to the local information centre & riverside walks. A little row of shops, very pleasant, can walk across the park towards the Visitor Heritage Centre. I tried the toilet in the car park, but no lock on the door. Pretty little place so I had a good look round. The Visitor Centre was closed the day of my visit when it should have normally been open but this was down to a family funeral.

I ate at the Old Wharf, probably a natural magnet for visitors because of the open riverside setting but there is no parking there. I parked in the Visitor Centre car park as it was closed for the day but was unsure where I would have parked otherwise or whether I would have walked to it.

8. SOUTH PETHERTON

I approached by a back route into town via Mulcheney. Lovely hamstone village with butchers, antique shops, florist, antique shop and a pub that's just won the Best Pub in Somerset Award 2009. I liked South Petherton which I found very pretty. Street parking.

9. MARTOCK

I approached the town from the north on the B3165. Hamstone buildings.

All Saints Church is really impressive, more so on the outside than in. Martock is an elongated village string along a very busy road. I saw two pubs, the George Inn and the Nags Head Inn. For me, there was no real sense of a town centre.

Traffic parked along the left of the road as you come in outside the shops. I found Moorlands Car Park through the signed entrance on the turning. I thought an arrow pointing into the road to the car park would have been more helpful as I was looking for sign town centre parking. Also wording on the car park sign to say it is free car parking.

The hotel looked inviting but I was travelling late afternoon. The visitor offer in Martock is less pronounced than in the other towns. The Church would be the key I think to encourage visitors to stop and explore so it was good to find this open.

Please note: These were my observations as a visitor to the market towns who had never visited before. The observations therefore may contain slight inaccuracies. Good town centre signing and visible car parking directions from every route is the key to encourage visitors to stop and stay awhile.

I encountered problems with town centre and car parking signs on my arrival in the towns of Crewkerne, Castle Cary and Ilminster that left a negative impression before I even had got out of the car and I was making a concerted effort to find these!