



MAIDSTONE DMP Think Tank Record

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These are the slides and the transcripts of interactive exercises from the Think Tank held at the Cornwallis Suite, Maidstone on 25 March 2015. This is not a report with conclusions and recommendations. It is simply a record of the event for the participants. It will provide material for the Destination Management Plan and Shared Story.

The year is 2020 ...

We asked you, in groups, to imagine that the year is 2020. The new Destination Plan has been delivered, & good things are happening. There are 3 positive front-page stories about **the Maidstone area as a visitor destination** in the Kent Messenger. What are the headlines?

Events & festivals

Maidstone on the map – thanks to NEW major annual event
Maidstone becomes centre for Kent festivals – Rambling Man, Elton Maidstone fringe festival ‘record’ attendance
Maidstone wins cultural bid
Festival of x sells out within 30 mins on line
Bruno Mars headlines at Mote park
Big name act to local event (Ed Sheeran at Mote Park)
Maidstone voted top music destination
Maidstone now attracts more top quality events and festivals than anywhere in SE

Culture & heritage

New cultural centre opened by HRH
Third time lucky for city status bid
Maidstone’s monster medieval heritage recognised
New state of the art theatre opens by future king

Countryside

Food destination of Kent
Kent Downs recognised as National Park

Visitor numbers & visitor satisfaction

Record year for visitor numbers
Visitor numbers up 25% in Top 10
Tourism rockets on MBC area
Maidstone twinned with Washington DC – tourist numbers treble
Maidstone makes top 10 tourist destination in UK
Maidstone tops UK poll visitor satisfaction
Maidstone tops poll for visitor satisfaction – record numbers in Kent

Location & access

Maidstone is best place to stay if you are visiting Paramount Park
Maidstone now traffic free: new tram system a big hit!
HS1 Station comes to the county town – at last

Safety, cleanliness, quality of life

Maidstone has lowest figures for homeless in SE – more homes, jobs
Safest night time economy in Europe
Lowest crime rate in England
Maidstone comes clean – cleanest city in Europe
Redevelopment of Maidstone East

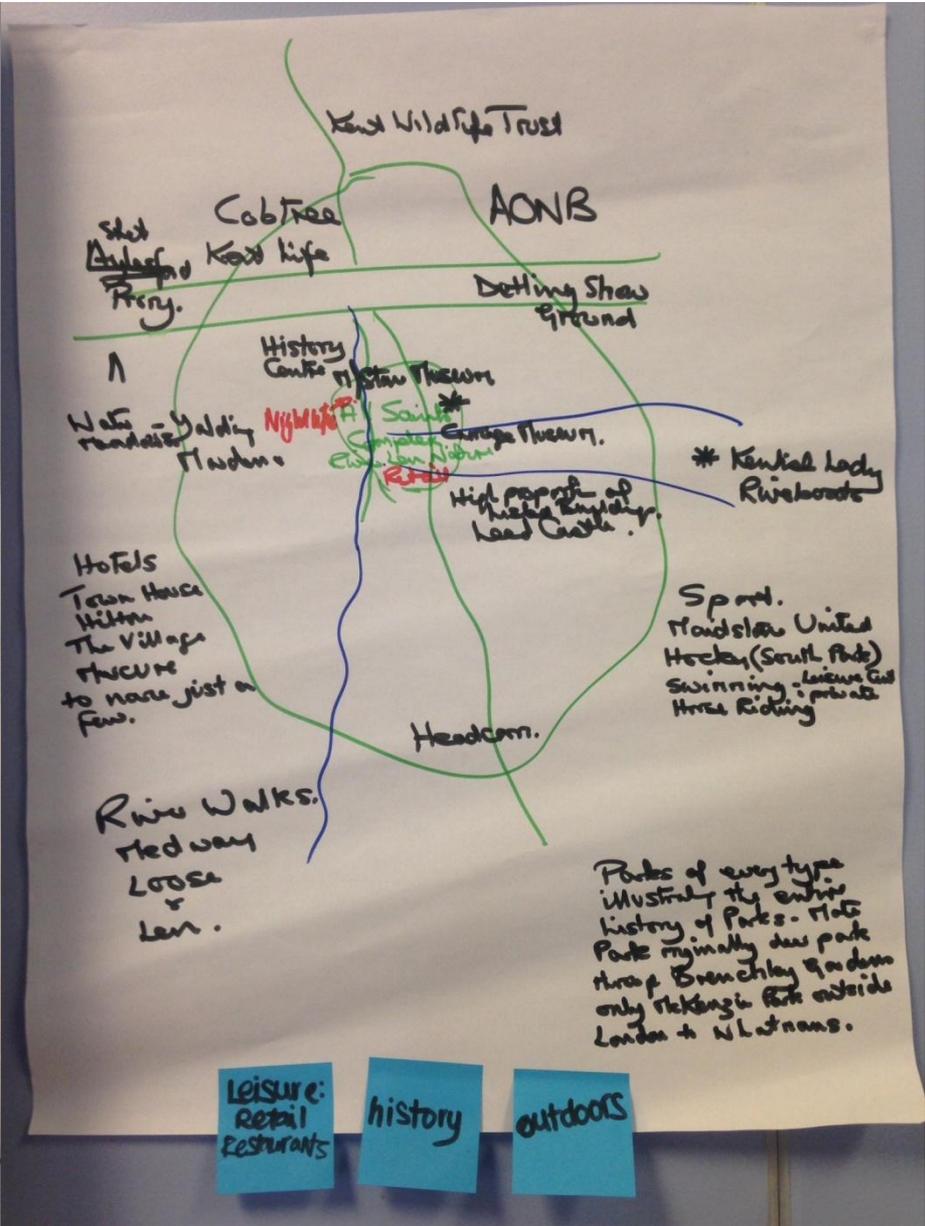
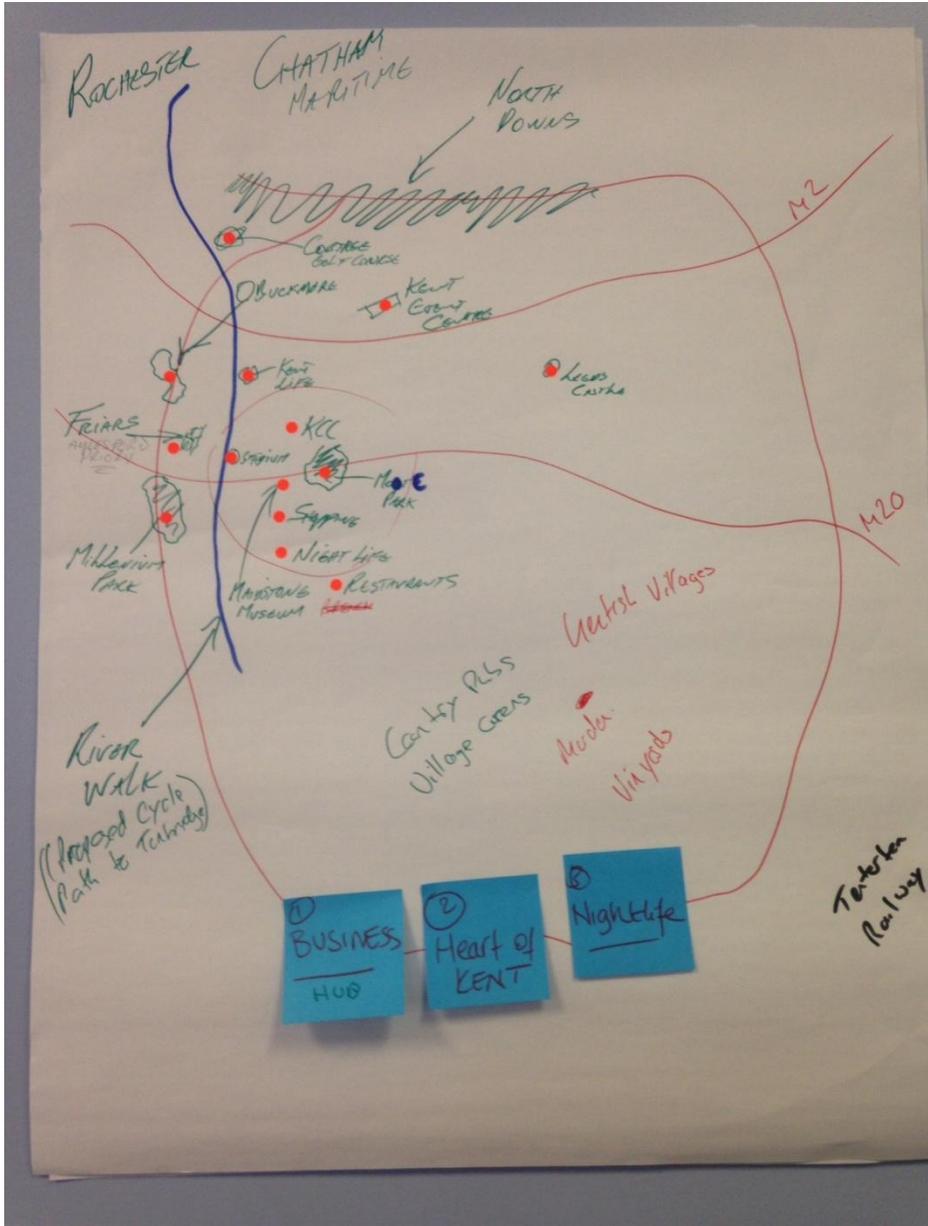
Shopping

Shoppers flock to new independent retailers & restaurants
Maidstone recognised as best high street for independent retailers!
Boost for independent traders

Riverside

New riverside development at last
Riverside destination regeneration





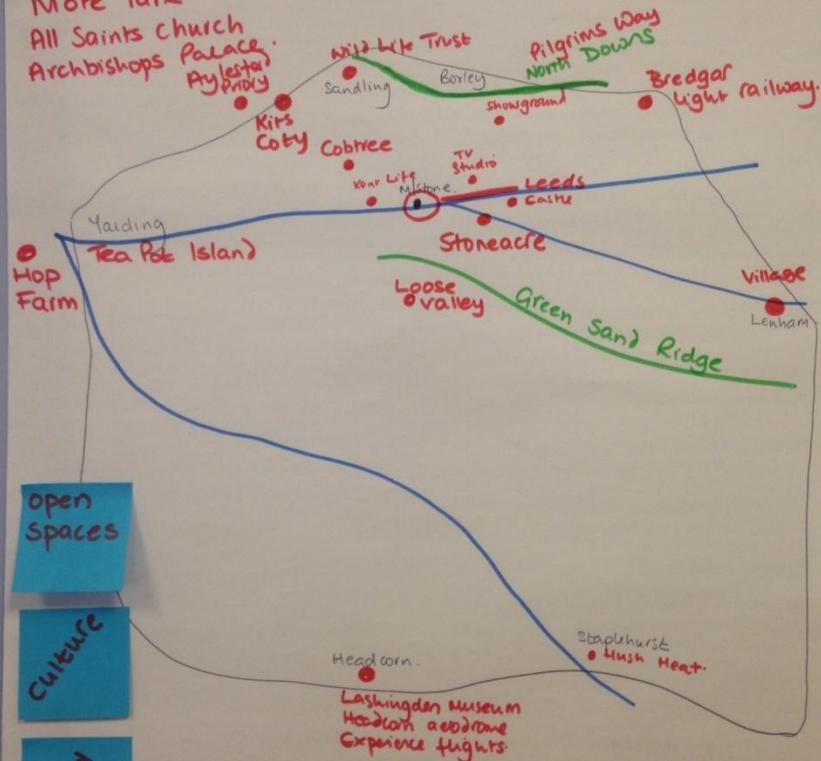
- 27 History & Library Centre
- 28 Pilgrims Way
- 29 Len Valley
- 30 Maidstone Studios
- 31 Vinters Valley
- 32 Penenden Heath
- 33 Boxley Warren
- 34 Maidstone Leisure Centre.



- | | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1 Leeds Castle | 9 Whatman Park * | 17 Town centre * |
| 2 Kent Showground | 10 Kentish Lady * | shops |
| 3 Archbishops' Palace * | 11 Cobtree Manor | 18 Lockmeadow * |
| 4 Carriage Museum * | 12 Tyland Barn | 19 Market * |
| 5 Gallagher Stadium * | 13 Town Hall * | 20 All Saints Church |
| 6 Kent Life | 14 Flagitt Theatre * | 21 The Mote * |
| 7 River Medway * | 15 Museum * | 22 Hollingbourne |
| 8 Mote Park * | 16 Branchley Gardens * | 23 Lenham |
| | | 24 Teston Country Park |
| | | 25 Headcorn |
| | | 26 Headcorn |

Maidstone Town

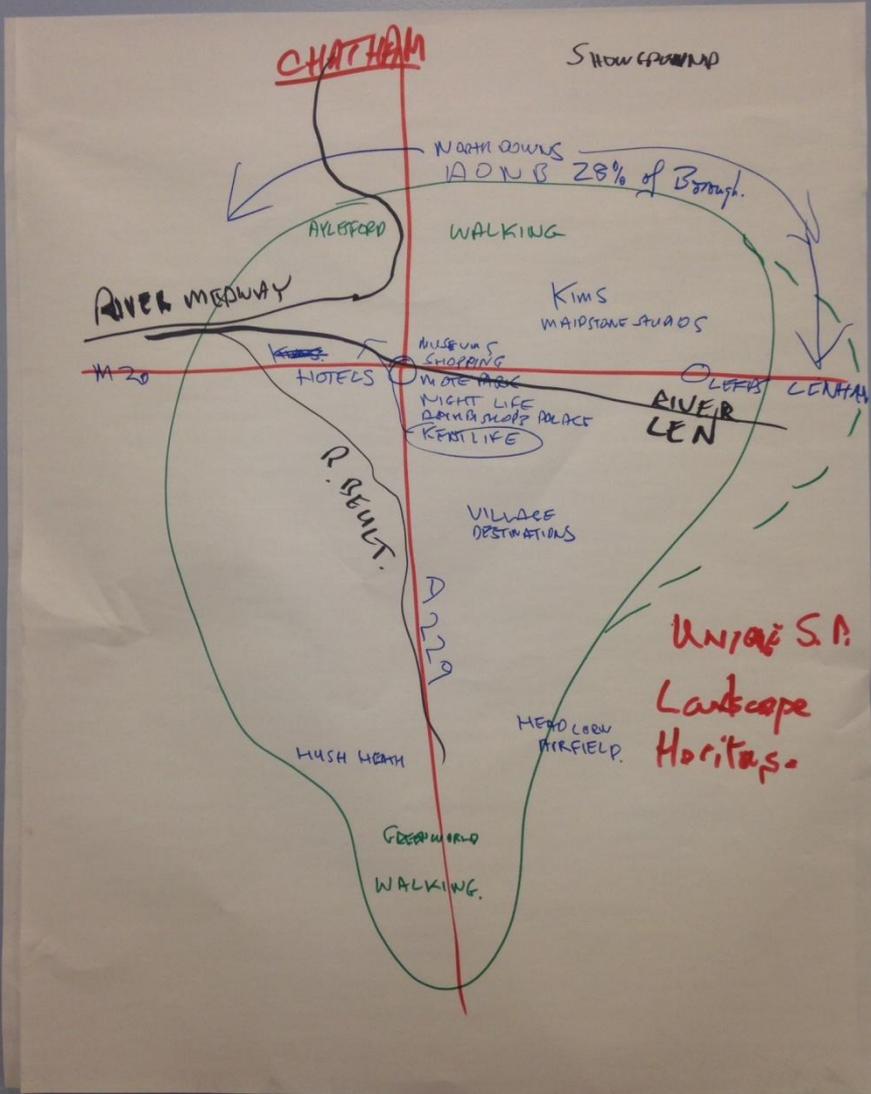
- Museum
- Carriage Museum
- River Trips
- Mote Park
- All Saints Church
- Archbishops Palace
- Pyreston Priory
- Wild Life Trust
- Sandling
- Borley
- showground
- Pilgrims Way
- North Downs
- Bredgar Light railway.



open spaces

Culture

Food



Shepherd Neame @ Faversham

24. Headcorn aerodrome

25. Back All Saints Church

22. River (under used)

21. Night time economy

1. Archbishop's palace
All Saints church
Carnegie museum

2. Cobtree + Kent Rural life

3. Millennium Park

4. Golf. ★ (spot)

5. ~~Kent Rural life~~ Business hub Maiden

6. Aylesford Priory

7. Buckstead Park

8. Delling Showground

9. Chilston Park

10. Museum

11. Jubilee Sq (under-used)

12. County Archives

13. Wilypie cafe (short sutton)

14. Ode crafts (ode st)

15. Moko Park leisure centre
golf mini train

16. handgliding Thurham

17. MUFc

18. country park

19. shop + eat + garden centres

20. theatre

historic bldgs + history

open space

shop (night time economy)

Mapping themes

We asked each mapping group to identify the three top themes that emerged from their mapping – one per post-it.

These strong groupings emerged:

- HISTORY & HERITAGE, including historic buildings, pre-history
- COUNTRYSIDE & OUTDOORS, including landscape, rural, open space, parks
- SHOPPING, EATING OUT, FOOD & DRINK
- ARTS & CULTURE, including music
- NIGHTLIFE

Other themes mentioned were:

- Sport & Leisure
- Heart of Kent
- Business hub
- Central location

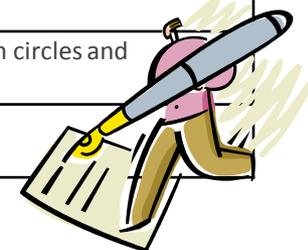


We asked you, solo, to write us a postcard. On one side of your postcard complete the phrase:
"If you ask me, what this place needs is ..."
 And on the other side of your postcard:
"And if we did that then ..."
 ("That's what I reckon any way")



<i>"If you ask me, what this place needs is ..."</i>	<i>"And if we did that then ..."</i>
A cultural centre point e.g. food fest on Kings St to bring trade down from bottom end, music fest, arts infrastructure	There would be a clear identity for the centre & a boost to the economy
A series of cultural events/community – river fest in July, Hop fest in Sept (based on Kent Life, Maidstone TC. Traditional Xmas advent market – Dec in Jubilee Sq with high quality stalls	If this could be achieved visitor numbers could increase to more than a million
A sense of identity and place with ambition to drive the town and Borough forward. We are the County town. We have lost our leadership. Politicians are the failing	We could aspire to be a tourist destination on the back of economic prosperity and financial wellbeing
An effective and funded organisation that brings all interested parties together to develop and implement the vision	We would unlock latent resources and use them effectively, creating a strong sense of identity and common purpose
The town has so many lovely opportunities – river frontage, medieval architecture, museum but no one comes as it is just another boring shopping town. We should redesign the road system to increase pedestrianised area to include archbishops palace, riverside and tram system to hop on and off at key locations and encourage independent cafes and shops in town	It would be like Canterbury, a place of choice
A joined up approach to every aspect of tourism promotion, visitor economy development etc realising the threats and our own unique opportunities/selling points	We would have the chance to put Maidstone on the map and not allow competitors the chance to draw attractions, opportunities from us
A stronger and clearer identity linked to County Town of Kent	Local people would take more pride in the town visitors would have more reason to visit
Preserve the landscape and heritage unique selling points of Maidstone as a tourist destination	A balance between jobs and having to cut commuter suburbs feeding London
An increase in letting people know what is available within the Borough. Publicity make people aware	More tourism to area. people don't come because they don't know what's here

<i>"If you ask me, what this place needs is ..."</i>	<i>"And if we did that then ..."</i>
A local authority that recognises that its future is built on its past	There would be better care and value of the assets that are here
A sense of unified identity (even if that means an identity of diversity)	Enable a strong sense of passion and pride
More structured activities on the North Downs	More tourists young and old
A university	Would being a huge economic stimulus to the Borough, additional skills and training, research opportunities, investment, raise Maidstone's profile arts & culture benefits e.g. student performing groups
A cleaner more attractive town with more independent shops	I may visit more and recommend
An integrated message as a destination for all ages and interests	Draw more visitors by mutual employment by al attraction, generating multiple night stays
More of people, groups, organisations, companies working together to provide solutions	We'd find innovative solutions to make Maidstone a better place
A major movie or movie drama filmed in Maidstone or Leeds Castle	Tourists will flock to Maidstone if it's popular!
A shared vision for the future development with achievable outcomes	Improved facilities, top clas customer services and new innovative attractions and events
Investment	The town could become a more interesting place to visit and visitor numbers would increase as a result
More identity as a destination through development of the river, independent shops etc	Economy would improve visitor numbers would improve
Investment, imagination and commitment	Then we can move forward
Pride of place Alternative need is money	Others would want to find out what Maidstone is about
High rise office buildings (largely empty) redeveloped Leeds Langley bypass built HS1 direct access to London 87 mins	Attractiveness of town centre improved Congestion reduced General attractiveness to invest, live, worth visit improved
A masterplan (vision!), that everyone signs up to and more importantly sticks to	Might actually move forward instead of going round and round in circles and moreover stop compromising what we already have of value
Regular large scale events/concerts/fairs in our many large open spaces	Maidstone would become known as a destination



<i>"If you ask me, what this place needs is ..."</i>	<i>"And if we did that then ..."</i>
For the town to be linked along themes	Visitors would find things and places more accessible and the town more attractive
All strive to make Maidstone the town it deserves to be	A united vision
Better planning and decisions	The town would look better than it currently does
Direction	Would know what we wanted to be and where we wanted to go
More funded activities for young people	Young people would have other options than hanging about the town centre being offered drugs.
More events around the river	Attracts the family market and visiting friends and family too
Better communications systems between venues both central and infrastructural	More visitors will enjoy more venues and experience a better visit
Less pound shops and more independent shops	Improved visitors/shopping experience
More major events ,,,, think big	More visitors would be encouraged to return
Cheaper and longer stay car parks	Family and friends would visit more
Better joined up thinking between the outskirts of the town centre and borough in general	Greater dispersal and share of locals, national and international visitors
Good planning service	Businesses would then flood to Maidstone (jobs and retail)
A change to human attitude towards each other and the environment we live	Take pride in their town and be part of a community again
Beautiful riverside redevelopment with new theatre and event venue good hotels with terraces facing the river. Plenty of associated parking and river buses	A unique all in one experience that would appeal to all ages
Making more of the river	An attractive town at the moment its mostly ugly
Better shops and restaurants	Both tourists and visitors will come
High profile music festivals	Busier hotels at the weekend
A compelling reason to visit	I would visit more often
To tell Americans that Lawrence Washington lived here and his family crest can be seen in All Saints Church	Then we'd get more American tourists



Market research findings

KENT GARDEN *of* ENGLAND visitkent.co.uk



These are extracts from market research available for this project – including new primary research Visit Kent are carrying out specifically for the DMP. A fuller research report will be made available for Maidstone stakeholders at the end of this project.

Maidstone: Value of Tourism 2013

Key Facts	
367,000	Staying visitor trips
£65,728,000	Staying visitor spend
3,700,000	Day visits
£121,072,000	Day visitor spend
£251,608,000	TOTAL VALUE OF TOURISM
5,190	Estimated actual employment
8%	Proportion of all employment

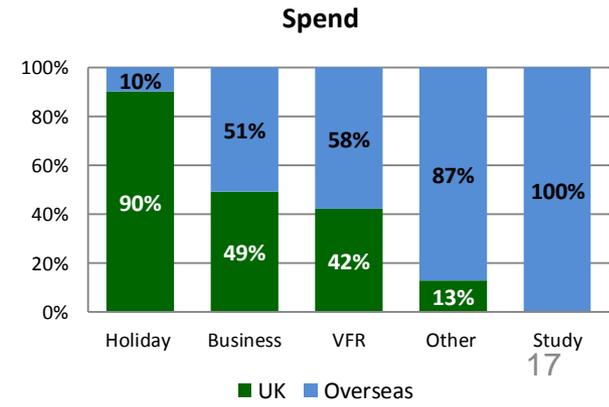
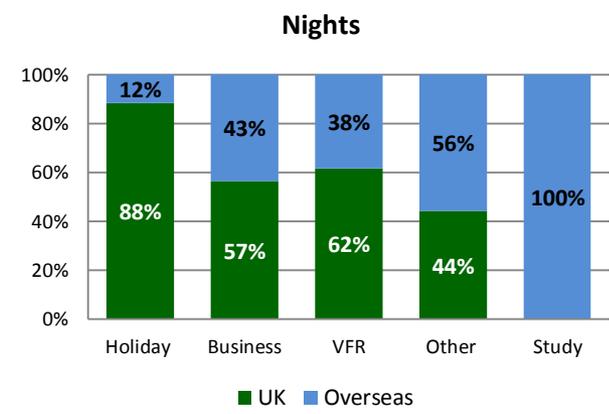
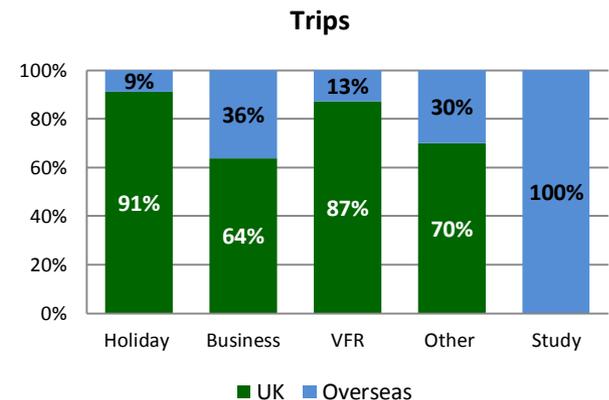
- 91% Day Trips
- 7% UK Staying Visits
- 2% Overseas Staying Visits

* It is assumed that 40% of travel spend will take place at the origin of the trip rather than at the destination.

Maidstone - Staying visits by purpose

Domestic tourists	Trips	Nights	Spend
Holiday	84,000	282,000	£22,057,000
Business	76,000	238,000	£11,860,000
Visits to friends and relatives	124,000	240,000	£5,284,000
Other	7,000	19,000	£296,000
Study	0	0	£0
Total	291,000	780,000	£39,497,000

Overseas tourists	Trips	Nights	Spend
Holiday	8,000	37,000	£2,392,000
Business	43,000	183,000	£12,213,000
Visits to friends and relatives	18,000	150,000	£7,208,000
Other	3,000	24,000	£2,010,000
Study	4,000	52,000	£2,409,000
Total	76,000	446,000	£26,231,000



Maidstone: Visitor Profile, Motivation and Behaviour

Top 5 factors influencing a visit to Maidstone and area

1. Heritage
2. Countryside
3. Shopping
4. Value for Money
5. Attractions

Ages

- 7% - 25-34
- 19% - 35-44
- 22% - 45-54
- 23% - 55-64
- 25% - 65+

Top 5 attractions

1. Leeds Castle
2. Fremlin Walk
3. Mote Park
4. Kent Life
5. Maidstone Museum

Other attractions visited as part of a stay in Maidstone - 37% visit Bluewater, 31% Canterbury Cathedral and 29% Dockyard

- 70% visit without children (Couples and Empty Nesters)
- 30% are families

What do potential visitors think about Maidstone?

Maidstone	
Q13 product offer	2011/2 overall
A range of quality shopping options	19%
A range of quality accommodation	18%
Gardens to visit	21%
Watersport opportunities	10%
Wildlife and natural scenery	18%
Interesting architecture	21%
Cultural/ artistic attractions	19%
Stunning scenery	21%
Historical/ heritage attractions	26%
Quality / range of eating out	20%
Walking opportunities	20%
Cycling opportunities	15%
Eateries selling local produce	19%
Family attractions	20%
Golf	11%

Q14 emotional characteristics	
Active	15%
Tacky	7%
Exciting	10%
Inspiring	14%
Fun	15%
Tranquil	17%
Natural	18%
Relaxing	17%
Authentic	21%
Nostalgic	17%
Old fashioned	12%
Friendly	20%
Traditional	22%

Q15 rational factors	
Offers good value for money	12%
Is expensive	10%
Has a quality feel	13%
Is somewhere I know and am happy with	13%
Is aimed at tourists	13%
Is a place to go to rejuvenate	13%
Offers something for the whole family	14%
Is a place for couples	15%
Is a year round destination	17%
Is safe	19%
Is somewhere old people go	15%
Is a place to explore the surrounding area	28%
Is easy to get to	27%

Five senses

We asked you, in 10 different groups, to describe the Maidstone area using only one sense:



TASTES (1)

Summery tastes!
Fresh fruit – *soft fruit*
Apples – Hops - Grapes
Wine – Juices – Cider – Beer
International cuisine in town/events
Fresh local produce in
restaurants/Farmers Markets
Farm shops
Picnics / Barbecue

TASTES (2)

Hamburgers – Fish & chips
Italian – Gurkha – Kebabs
Multicultural food
Kent produce – Kentish fare
Pub food: village pubs, gastro pubs
Farmers Markets
Orchards: Apples, Cherries, Pears,
Strawberries
East Malling Research Station – fruit
Beer, Hops, Wine, Cider
Vineyards – Hush Heath – Gin
Distillery – Goachers Brewery
Coffee houses
Restaurants: Bearsted,
Embankments, Fortify (veg)

TEXTURES (1)

Historic photographs
Animals
Ecology
Buildings – stonework
Tiles
Hedges, leaves, grass
Landscape
Woodland
Statues
River/Water
Costumes & clothing eg Museum
Japanese Porcelain

TEXTURES (2)

Fur & feathers
Rivers & mist
Stone – ragstone
Trees & woods
Earth & flowers
Electric
Sweaty nightlife
Food & wine
Sparkling wine
Wool
Soft fruit & top fruit

COLOURS (1)

Green – open spaces, nature
Pink – blossom, orchards
Grey – motorways, river
Black & white – Tudor buildings
Dark orange – buildings, peg tiles
Yellow – rapeseed

COLOURS (2)

Spring green
Autumn red
Flower blossom
Ragstone - Granite
Tudor Black & white
Soldier red
Lush green – blue sky
Vibrant, colourful
Silver – Water reflection (river)
Fruit & flowers – apple,
strawberry, bluebell, daffodil,
cherry

Five senses

SOUNDS (1)

Full of music
Motorway, traffic, railway – but
no aircraft
Birds in countryside
Shopping bustle, Coffee culture
Drunken revelry
Football crowds
Church bells
Silence of river
Diversity of language
Construction
Children at play
Buskers
Bus station
Sirens
Market
Boats on river
Festivals & parades
Street selling
Street cleaning
Shooting
Rustle of leaves
Ducks & swans

SOUNDS (2)

Peace & tranquility – parks/river
Wildlife
Children playing – Mote Park
Traffic noise – motorways, Op.Stack
Night economy (noise re residents)
Buskers ... Beggars & chuggers
Church bells ... General chatter
HS1

SMELLS (1)

Town centre
Pollution, traffic, exhaust fumes, tar
from roadworks, food, bread,
smoking, River
Open spaces
Flowers, fresh, country beer gardens
grass, hayfever, strawberries, wine,
hops, manure, muck spreading,
animals, River
Leisure
Pool, popcorn, gym, pubs
Retail
Fruit & veg, fish & chips, Lush
Historic buildings
Old smell



SMELLS (2)

lush (rural) green
Lush (the shop)!
Smells that entice & tempt you in
(food, coffee)
Rich sweetness (Hotel Choc,
Thorntons)
Warm & comfortable
River ... at peace ... summer's day
Spring ... hope
Some smells overwhelm the more
pleasant ones & make us feel:
Nauseous (river by bridge)
Desire to retreat (traffic)
Choked, rancid (bus station diesel
fumes)
These have become “the norm” –
making us forget about lovely
country smells
Need for sensory planting and
good food smells to be better
projected

SLIDES SHOWN AT THE WORKSHOP

People look to their leisure trips to deliver experiences, rather than sights. They may be looking for self-discovery, togetherness, spiritual fulfilment. They may want to get active, learn a skill, engage with locals, experience live events, volunteer. The best destination marketing addresses these motivations ...

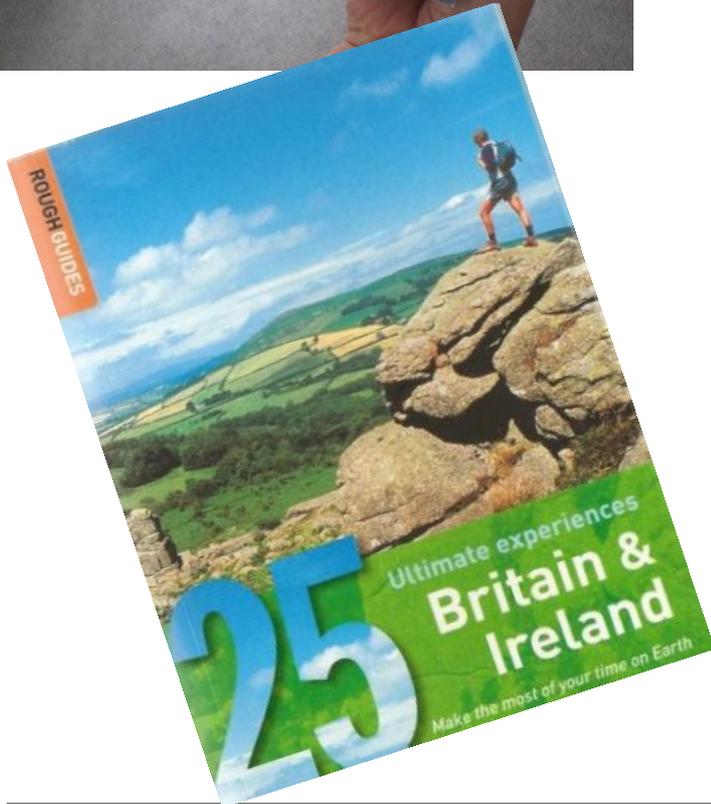


SLIDES SHOWN AT THE WORKSHOP



Short, true stories are motivating for people looking for authentic experiences. Folkestone Triennial produced this People's Guidebook – a series of short personal stories.

Rough Guides published a series of Ultimate Experiences – short narratives that focus in on specific experiences. We used this example to inspire you to write your own stories about experiences in the area:



On the old stone fishing pier in Tobermory on the Island of Mull, a very affordable indulgence is available: queue at the fish 'n' chip van and order a scallop supper.

It'll be served in brown paper, just like the classic (but more mundane) takeaway fish 'n' chips, and you'll probably have to perch on the harbour wall to eat them,

but you get a meal of steaming chips and sweet, tender scallops gathered from the surrounding waters a few hours previously, as well as free views across the prettiest port on the west coast of Scotland

Only here...

Working solo and in pairs and 3s, you wrote your own short narratives (“Tobermory-style”) set in the Maidstone area ... Here are some extracts:



... on a late summer’s evening after a long hike on the North Downs on my mountain bike, there’s nothing better than to dismount, remove one’s helmet for a well-earned drink, and take in the incredible sunset and far-reaching views.

... Maidstone Rowing Regatta on a sunny day ... the wonderful riverbanks ... the smells of the woods surrounding us, the footbridges allowing the crowds to chase the best spot ...

... the wind whistles past your face – the flying helmet & goggles make you feel like an explorer, or Biggles. The countryside looks amazing during the flight, but as you land the name “Tiger Moth” comes into its own. The softness and glide of the landing, and coming back to earth between the bi-plane wings, is like nothing else you will ever experience.

... a sunny day in June and head out to PYO strawberries, warm from the sunshine ... the search for the big fat juicy strawberries is fun, and the taste of those strawberries from the great outdoors is divine.

... an authentic taste of the Battle of Britain ... Headcorn Aerodrome ... see inside the iconic Spitfires. Or fly them ...

... the magic of the Medway ... explore the Medway River walks, and stroll along the river path to Allington. Or hire a boat for the day and travel from Allington to East Farleigh, navigating the locks, where new friends can be made for novice lock keepers.

... “Proms in the Park” ... a wonderful, informal and free musical experience ... brings family and friends together for an evening of great music, the chance to eat and drink together on a balmy summer’s evening in an idyllic parkland setting ... ends with a firework display ... the buzz as people leave is an unmistakable indication of a great shared experience.

... a fantastic opportunity to meet friends, socialise and enjoy great contemporary music ... the Maidstone Fringe Festival ... over 200 local bands play original music in all the town centre pubs ... all within a stone’s throw of each other and all for free.

... “life is a bowl of cherries”: a sense of identify for this place, and a personal passion ... the abundance of summer fruits – large, dewey bowls of ripe soft cherries straight from the farm in season. Accessible, local, fantastic, welcoming and nostalgic.

Only here...



... Maidstone Museum ... the strong sense of history ... the eyes of the subject in a painting followed me as I walked through the Tudor gallery and I felt as if I had stepped back in time and was at one with the Tudor tableau around the table ...

... on the historical Pilgrim's Way ... for 5,000 years many feet have trod – at the area known as the Cross ... tranquility reigns ... local cider and food ... the Medieval moat in Lenham's historic square ... the breathtaking views, the bees in clover, the soaring kestrel ... when Chaucer's pilgrims walked this way from London to Canterbury. Freedom of space ... excitable chatter of children running up and down the Cross and hill ... In winter, teasels ... frost crystals ... sunshine on the valley below ... solitude ...

... park the car in the village and walk across the lower Downs half a mile, through cereal crops filled with the sound of skylarks and the distant hum of the receding village below. Follow the high bank, formed by the action of ploughing over millennia, and you'll find a smooth grassy mound, littered with huge stones encircling it, and with a megalithic entrance. Here lie the Neolithic dead, in a burial monument built over 6000 years ago, where the views across the valley to Kits Coty (a much less spectacular site) are glorious. This is the Coldrum – probably the oldest burial mound in Britain, and older, much older, than the pyramids.

... walking past layers of history ... stop and admire the beauty of Leeds Castle. Nestled among the green fields of the Garden of England, you will find a wide variety of flowers, plants, trees and English wildlife ...

... a beautiful day walking the lush green Loose Valley. Breathtaking scenery and fresh scents of the blooming bluebells. Final destination: an olde worlde pub called Chequers ... a Kentish pint and a locally sourced meat pie, followed by a juicy apple crumble.

... set in an area of outstanding natural beauty, at the top of the North Downs ... This Art of Mine ... herbs aplenty and surrounded by peonies and roses in bloom ... pick your own perfect, fragrant, country-style bouquet and then learn how to hand-tie your flowers.

... it's September at Kent Life and the hops are ready. Pick them by hand, filling the bushel bin – take care, the hops may turn your fingers green! Pass them to the Tally Man then come inside the Oast House and see it working ... thought to be the last working Ragstone Oast in Britain. The aroma of hops is a 'love it or hate it' sensation – you decide! Then relax: the fruits of your labour are available to sample, with up to 60 Kentish beers. Enjoy the live and local music as the sun goes down.

Only here...



... Open Air Classical Concert at Leeds Castle: The sound of the famous music, the loud cannons and the fantastic fireworks. The beautiful sight of the historic castle, glorious gardens, countryside and surroundings. The smell and taste of the food and drink from a thousand picnics. The patriotic feel of the crowd.

... Maidstone Toy Fair at Lockmeadow ... Re-living childhood memories – the smells, colours and personalities ... Takes me back to a time of no worries.

... in Staplehurst Parish ... a memorial to the American airmen who served at our Advanced Landing Grounds at Chickenden Lane. 19 pilots died flying missions from here ...

... the treasures to be found in the County Archive collections – now known as the Kent History Centre. Here you can read a Jane Austen letter, see the signature of Christopher Marlowe, look at Indian Chiefs' signatures from Canada, and so much more.

... a gentle outing with dad, who has dementia: the Lilypie Café in Chart Sutton – which is on the crossroads. He said it was the best sponge cake and hot chocolate – steaming, very chocolatey and sweet. The chairs are different and quirky, the decoration vintage, and there are paintings, jewellery and clothes to buy. The staff are so patient and kind.

... to Mote Park with the grandchildren, one sunny afternoon ... feeding the ducks ... the mini train ... the swings and climbing frames ... Then a well-earned cuppa in the teahouse not too far from the swings.

One word?

We asked if, solo, you could describe part of Maidstone in just One Word – inspired by a passage in Elizabeth Gilbert’s *Eat Pray Love*



Maidstone Borough	Unexpected Innovative
Maidstone	Potential Opportunity Maid-in-Stone Opportunity Memories Variety Varied
Maidstone Town	Fragments Moving Changing Potential Challenging
Fremlin Walk	Indulgent
Hazlitt Theatre	Laughter/Tears
Mote Park	Refresh Family Relax x Fun Memories Life Activity Heart Vibrancy Space Nature

Whatman Park	Family
Kent Showground	Experience
Bearsted	English Village
Aylesford	Calming
Staplehurst	Friendship
Chainhurst	Home
North Downs North Downs – Pilgrim’s Way Top of the North Downs	Freedom Connect Breathtaking
Leeds Leeds Castle Leeds Castle	Peaceful Romance Loveliest
Larkfield	Comfort
Hollingbourne	Authentic
Lenham	Peaceful
Oak on the Green	Indulgence
East Sutton	Tranquility
Buckmore Park Kart Circuit	Exhilarating
River Len Nature Reserve	Secret

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BLUE SAIL ▶

VISITORS PLACES DESTINATIONS

*Many thanks to everyone who took part, for
your thoughtful and positive input*

- Michele & Amanda
