

MAIDSTONE TOURISM DMP ACTION PLANS

Actions	Progress to date
<p>Run Workshop sessions for tourism and other businesses and organisations involved in tourism , to familiarise them with the Story and to help them think creatively about how they might use it to develop and differentiate their own offer, service or business and help to deliver the Action Plans.</p>	<p>Several events were run in 2015. A workshop for small accommodation providers is planned for early 2017.</p>
<p>Develop an Online Shared Story Toolkit for tourism stakeholders to use, comprising Story-inspired product development ideas plus downloadable marketing copy (tailored for use in different markets) and images based on the Shared Story – so that people in the place are “singing from the same song sheet”.</p>	<p>Toolkit available on line at visitmaidstone.com/dmp Image library set up. New photography and video commissioned and delivered. Will be added to image library end of 2016</p>
River Actions	Progress to date
<p>Programme of enhancements and improvements to make the river more accessible and appealing to visitors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • signing and entrance points to the river from the town centre • footpath investment – signing to include distances to key points, accessibility for cyclists • investment in moorings • parking for river visitors 	<p>Signage and entrance points to the river being identified by group, with particular emphasis on what is stopping people accessing the river.</p> <p>The new gyratory and river cycle path will include signage, it is important that signage is combined with one brand (RIVER PARK?) and that we do not have a number of different styles of signs saying the same thing all next to one another. It is also important that these signs extend into the town centre.</p> <p>Foot path investment taking place as part of the river cycle path and new gyratory system. Group to look at any gaps in town centre and further along river path.</p>

	<p>Newly adopted Public Realm Design Guide references the river and access/wayfinding from the town centre.</p> <p>Investment in moorings – group to identify issues with current moorings and additional moorings.</p> <p>Parking to be investigated.</p>
<p>Focus on strengthening visitor hubs on the river:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve access, facilities, activities and interpretation • Explore opportunities for more camping cabins/pods (luxury camping huts – alternative to camping in the open) to enable long distance walking, canoeing etc <p>Priority hubs :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church of All Saints/amphitheatre • Cobtree by Kent Life • Lockmeadow 	<p>Group to improve promotion of the river, current facilities and attractions. More people visiting and aware of the ‘River Park’ will make future events more attractive to event organisers.</p> <p>Opportunities for event organisers need to be better promoted. This could be done through the River Park Website (see below).</p> <p>Opportunities for camping, etc. will follow from this work.</p> <p>It was proposed at the DMP River meeting that a friends group is established. Ian Tucker has done a considerable amount of work on this and has produced a draft website. The group discussed at the meeting how much of the river work DMP actions would be taken on by the Friends of the river group.</p> <p>It was agreed that work would be done to help the friends group to establish. Parks & Leisure Manager agreed to pass over a model of how other friends group operate.</p> <p>Ian Tucker is currently working on the structure of the group.</p> <p>The River Medway Tow Path Scheme will run through Kent Life to Cobtree Manor Park.</p>

<p>Create river-based events & activities that will appeal to visitors, animate the river, provide a reason to come today, contribute to extending the visitor day into the early evening. Opportunities could include – dragon boat racing, rowing events, festival of lights, regattas etc</p>	<p>River Park website has been produced by Ian Tucker. This will be a single place to identify all of the attractions and events along the river to be promoted. This will be aimed at both residents and visitors. Future events will then be more attractive to event organisers.</p> <p>Potential events and organisers to be identified.</p>
<p>Build up marketing activity over time linking to countryside theme. Develop marketing collateral – maps, trails, leaflets</p>	<p>Website and promotional information produced by IT. This could be adopted as the single place for anything to do with the river.</p> <p>An audit of everything available to visitors has been completed and included in the draft website.</p> <p>Gaps and further information and trails could be produced in the future, and/or incorporated in the cycle path/ gyratory information.</p>
<p>Prioritise river management – litter, dredging, landscaping, lighting, policing, anti-social behaviour, mooring, illegal camping</p>	<p>Group currently looking at forming a ‘Friends’ type group for the river led by Ian Tucker.</p> <p>This could coordinate volunteering, act as a voice for the river, etc.</p> <p>30-40 volunteers from McDonalds took part in clearing overgrown areas.</p>
<p>Develop Riverside Walking and Cycling Path from Allington to East Farleigh with connections to the wider Maidstone area. Potential to expand this up to Aylesford Bridge</p>	<p>Project on track to be complete summer 2017.</p>
<p>Town Actions</p>	<p>Progress to date</p>
<p>Develop local markets and fairs – food (including a farmer’s market), arts & crafts etc:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review existing provision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MBC have delivered 3 successful Farmers Markets – on a monthly basis so far. • MBC hold a 12-day street trading consent for market – therefore unlikely to go fortnightly until Jun 17 at earliest

Town Actions	Progress to date
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and deliver new markets in different town centre locations and develop a calendar of markets throughout the year • Use County Town Market Charter and history as part of the positioning for street markets • Introduce street food • Develop local market management plan – litter/cleaning, selection of stall traders, access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considering moving Sat general market to Jubilee Square • New market manager will be considering how guest markets can fit in with MBC's own markets • Once Farmers' market established, can build up reputation for food fair.
<p>Use themed trails and quarters to help make the town more legible for visitors and encourage exploration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify trail themes and quarters • Develop a programme of animation and interpretation including: • Making use of green spaces • Pavement trails/digital trails using app • Distinctive lighting • Mark the quarters e.g. with sculpture, distinctive street sign branding, lighting etc. 	<p>A Heritage Lottery Town Scape Initiative bid has been submitted for Gabriel's Hill which if successful will include themed trails. A Public Realm Design Guide has been adopted which sets out the council's intention to create a cohesive town centre with an integrated approach to achieving high quality public realm. It complements and builds on the improvements to date, such as Jubilee Square and the High Street, as well as the forthcoming programme of improvements and redevelopments of major sites due to be delivered between now and 2031. It recognises that Maidstone town centre has many urban characteristics and works as a set of interconnecting zones. The guide focuses on connectivity and upgrading the environment and takes a common sense approach to materials as well as advocating that embedded public art is a key strategy in highlighting local distinctiveness. Four zones are included: Shopping, River and Green Spaces, Leisure and Culture and Historic and Heritage.</p> <p>A Public Art Policy has been adopted for the borough which will become a material consideration for developer contributions. It looks at the commissioning of public art as part of a development or regeneration scheme</p>

Town Actions	Progress to date
	<p>and sets out the Council's aspirations for the borough and its people and recognises that public are can contribute to, emphasise and enhance Maidstone's unique heritage, cultural and natural assets.</p> <p>A new document setting out Street Furniture Guidelines has been adopted which aims to ensure a consistent, coordinated and high quality approach to street furniture in Maidstone town centre. The SFG is designed for everyone who specifies and/or installs street furniture in the town centre. This includes Council officers, developers and contractors.</p>
<p>Shopfront improvements including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shop front design and window displays (produce toolkit) • Maintenance to frontages e.g. redecoration, brand signs 	<p>One Maidstone volunteers have carried out an audit of shop fronts in North end of Week Street. Need to discuss next steps, and funding.</p> <p>Restoration of shop fronts are incorporated for <i>some</i> of the properties on Gabriels' Hill in the HLF bid.</p> <p>Unlikely to be funding available for other streets including Week St. Public Realm is being improved so this could raise profile of area and incentivise owners to improve their buildings.</p>
<p>Strengthen town's association with the countryside through celebrating and promoting local food</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage local restaurants to source local produce and promote it • Explore potential for a new local produce centre 	<p>MBC could liaise with Produced in Kent and One Maidstone to promote local produce.</p> <p>Could be scope to use Granada House for local produce.</p>

Town Actions	Progress to date
<p>Agree a strategy for improved access by car and coach into the town centre and support with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear uncluttered road signing • Signing to car parks/coach park • Visitor orientation in the car/coach parks • Pedestrian signing from car parks to the town centre and main attractions. 	<p>No progress to date</p> <p>How can signage into town be improved?</p> <p>Need an audit of pedestrian signing from car parks into town – is it logical to visitors who are unfamiliar with town?</p> <p>Integrated transport strategy will address some of these issues.</p>
<p>Review coach parking provision – volume, location and facilities – to reflect needs of international coach parties for shopping, and take account of potential growth</p>	<p>Coach park currently at Sittingbourne Road – not ideal location. Maidstone East possible alternative.</p> <p>If Maidstone has good facilities for drivers, more coaches will visit.</p> <p>Liaison required with Planning.</p>
<p>Improve welcome and visitor facilities at the rail stations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome sign and town map on board • Clear signing to drop-off/pick-up points <p>Longer term, a need to deliver new development at Maidstone East station to improve first impressions and provide additional welcome & visitor facilities.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Network Rail investing in Maidstone East with a new station and forecourt in 2017. MBC officers are working with them on design, including public realm link, public art and signage. North end of Week Street due to have public realm improvements which will link into the Maidstone East redevelopment and create a sense of arrival in the town centre.</p>
Event Actions	Progress to date
<p>Create an Events Experts Group that brings together senior decision makers from the main venues & MBC to “join the dots” when it comes to planning & infrastructure, programming & marketing</p>	<p>The DMP Working group will now continue in the future as the Maidstone Events Group with members from all the main event venues and local events organisers. Additional venues have been identified and will be asked to join. Group will meet 2-3 times per year. Next meeting February 2017. Group has identified a joint</p>

Event Actions	Progress to date
	marketing opportunities based around the music them of events in Maidstone from April until October. A marketing campaign will be developed to maximise this opportunity. It will include branding, digital communications and a printed leaflet that will last the campaign length. Funding for the campaign will be through paid advertising or sponsorship. Project to start in January and progress reviewed at next meeting.
<p>Carry out an Audit & Gap Analysis – looking at infrastructure & resources (physical & people), including venue capacities, transport links, traffic management, parking, signing, policing & crowd management. Must take into account potential negative impact on local communities & environment. Should include analysis of processes (licensing, highways, planning etc) too. Gap Analysis will then identify if new infrastructure/processes needed - & specific actions should then be developed.</p>	<p>Survey results have been compiled. Group decided the best location for this information would be on the Conference Maidstone website where specific pages can be created specifically for events. Officers to look at module and development required to achieve this by next meeting. Many of the venues already on the website. As there are synergies between events and conferences this makes sense rather than build new platform. Group to supply list of suppliers that they recommend to assist event organisers.</p>
<p>Develop an Event Organisers’ Toolkit – to make it easier to hold an event in the borough. (We understand this is already under way – but it will need to be updated once the above Audit & Gap Analysis is completed)</p>	<p>This will be added to the website as above.</p>
<p>Set up a “No Clash Diary” – for venues to enter information on provisional as well as firm bookings. This is an “internal” tool for venues, organisers, accommodation providers and public agencies within the Borough (and neighbouring areas) to use – to help them avoid clashes, to spread events across the year, and also facilitate identification of potential “clusters” for joint development & marketing (see next action).</p>	<p>This has been set up using google calendar It sits on DMP pages on visitmaidstone.com/dmp. It will move to the Conference Maidstone website along with the new events pages and required to fill in as part of the events notification.</p> <p>Regular reminder to be sent to event planners. Safety Advisory Group administration to be informed so this becomes part of the</p>

Event Actions	Progress to date
	process.
<p>Develop themed seasons/festivals, inspired by the Shared Story and by major events. May need a DMP Group sub-group – an “Events Development Taskforce”. Members of the Taskforce to be selected for their specific skills (marketing, events management, programming, fundraising).</p>	<p>One Maidstone leading for the town centre.</p> <p>Group looking at themes from 2017 onwards i.e. sporting, comedy and come with idea for next meeting.</p> <p>Apparent from 2016 that there is a strong music theme from Spring to Autumn. Group to develop a brand for season and produce leaflets, editorial pages to promote. Production to start Feb 2017.</p>
<p>Develop a consumer-facing “Events for Visitors Calendar” – comprising an online real time database of confirmed events for consumer marketing (website content, emarketing, social media & traditional media relations work), linked to the Culture Kent data pool. Evolution of current online events calendar on Visit Maidstone. Related to “No Clash Diary” – but serves different purpose. Drives events information on Visit Maidstone & Visit Kent websites, but also for tourism industry’s own marketing (could incorporate a “widget” for tourism providers to use on their own websites, providing a live feed). Will need to be promoted to visitor-facing businesses as well as consumers. Needs tight criteria & market focus so only features events with clear visitor-appeal, and presents them in a way that motivates visits (e.g. clustering them, using Shared Story themes etc).</p>	<p>Complete.</p> <p>Consumer events calendar available on visit Maidstone.com/whats-on. List and images can be enhanced and linked to social media.</p> <p>Event organiser can add their events on directly.</p> <p>Widget has been created and information circulated to accommodation providers, attractions and event organisers. Three widgets created what’s on, accommodation and Things to Do.</p>
Countryside Actions	Progress to date
<p>Product audit – map & gap current provision of trails, walks and</p>	<p>Survey went out to Parish Council at the beginning of January 16 with 6 weeks for</p>

Countryside Actions	Progress to date
<p>countryside & river experiences</p>	<p>return. Information has been assessed and whilst it was originally perceived that we would link walks and cycle routes to Parish Council websites, this would have been only partially possible and therefore would have created confusion for users . <i>The standard for most of the websites and ability to upkeep them was insufficient.</i> Brown sign audit from Parish Councils returned a very poor result. Tourism undertook this survey in the Spring of 2016, generated a list of redundant signage and got it removed.</p>
<p>Marketing audit – understand who currently markets the countryside experiences, where and how. Find best digital solution to make sure that online information for visitors from various sources is easily found. Consider how best to use/work with existing brands and sub-brands e.g. Garden of England, Heart of Kent, Our Land</p>	<p>We have had an excellent result from this and have found potential new partners to develop and market with. Explore Kent with its expertise has kindly offered to help us to develop our maps for the south and west of the Borough. The Medway Valley Countryside Group has also generated lots of walks and maps along the route of the River Medway. Lots of walks are linked to the train stations along the route making this very sustainable. These have already been added to the visit Maidstone Website. They also work in conjunction with Explore Kent. The North Downs Way Trail Manager has also been very busy working on walking routes from rail stations from Bearsted to Lenham (and beyond), making both and excellent contact with sustainable routes.</p>
<p>Develop themed experiences and trails that use Shared Story for inspiration, include key attractions, pubs etc along trail to drive more spend</p> <p>Develop marketing collateral – digital and offline. Rich online</p>	<p>Developing marketing collateral and themed experiences has been started with the video of the Maidstone area. Video will be used to promote the Borough on social media and at Bluewater. Filming has taken place and will be used in future campaigns</p>

Countryside Actions	Progress to date
<p>content.</p> <p>Audit walks and trails selected for promotion to visitors to ensure they are easy to use and attractive – safe and easy to find car parks at start points, good facilities along the way, e.g. picnic sites, interpretation, benches, viewpoints etc. Ensure the routes are consistently signed and that refreshment stops and attractions along the route provide appropriate facilities for walkers and cyclists, e.g. cycle lock ups . Develop a plan for investment to plug gaps in provision.</p>	<p>Still in assessment process and awaiting returns.</p> <p>Some very useful information was returned to us in relation to North Downs walks and River Medway walks, with maps and info. This will prevent us doubling up on work.</p> <p>The meeting in September generated two working groups one for the west of the Borough for cycle routes and one for the Headcorn, Staplehurst and Marden. Meetings are currently being arranged to collate the information and get them into a suitable format with the help of Explore Kent.</p> <p>Staplehurst Parish Council very kindly sent all their walking routes to us and we are in the process of getting these into a digital format. Produced in Kent have kindly marked up maps for us, so that routes can take in as many of their members as possible.</p> <p>A driving tour is also in the initial stages.</p>
<p>Develop rural Visitor Information Points – “i” branded.</p>	<p>Work has started on Leader funding bid and potentially there will be new electronic visitor activity data as well, possibly using Scout.</p> <p>Three sites have now been identified to be developed but there was a question over whether the funding would be available for the scope of this project. A question mark remains over this but a submission of the outline plan with costs will now go forward before February and once we have a response from this then we will have to review the situation and drive it forward or review how this can be achieved.</p>
<p>Work towards becoming Kent’s first “Walker Friendly” destination using the Cyclist Welcome and Walkers Welcome</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify key towns/villages and support Walkers 	<p>Going to have be the 4th Walker Friendly destination but it would seem that this could be a great place for walking without the car. North Downs Way and Stations are working together and have potential to join in.</p>

Countryside Actions	Progress to date
<p>Welcome accreditation (prioritise villages with direct train links into Maidstone)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="300 395 591 424">• Promotional activity	