

HERITAGE, CULTURE AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

5 September 2017

Is the final decision on the recommendations in this report to be made at this meeting?

Destination Management Plan – Action Plan Progress Update

Final Decision-Maker	Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee
Lead Head of Service	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Lead Officer and Report Author	MCL Marketing & Sales Manager, Laura Dickson
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

That the report be noted.

This report relates to the following corporate priorities:

- Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all –providing a wide range of attractions, accommodation and events for visitors through tourism development
- Securing a successful economy for Maidstone Borough –The economic impact of tourism supports jobs and businesses throughout the borough

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Heritage, Culture & Leisure Committee	5 September 2017

Destination Management Plan - Action Plan Progress

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the progress made against the three year Action Plan relating to Maidstone Borough's Tourism Destination Management Plan.
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2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Tourism Destination Management Plan (DMP) was adopted by Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee in July 2015 and the accompanying three year Action Plan was endorsed by the Committee.

Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) has always been committed to delivering a tourism development service for the borough and the DMP is the tourism strategy that focusses and supports the day to day work of the Tourism section. The Tourism section delivers the marketing of the borough as a destination for visitors, supporting and advising businesses and working in partnership with county, regional and national tourism organisations to inform and encourage visitors, to improve the attractions and to develop and increase the visitor economy of the borough.

The first update report was presented to committee in February 2016 and a second in November 2016

In 2015 four groups set up initially to deliver the Action Plan.

River - River Access Improvement & River Experience
Town – Look, Feel and Do, Access and Visitor Management
Events – The Place for Big Events
Countryside – Explore Further

These groups have now been replaced by smaller working parties or external partnership groups who actively are delivering these actions.

The DMP Board is chaired by an MBC officer and Cllr David Pickett has been appointed to the DMP Board to represent Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee. The Board consists of partners from within the tourism and visitor economy who review the progress action plan quarterly.

An update event 'Maidstone's Tourism Destination Plan – One Year On' took place on 29th November 2016. Stakeholders and partners were invited to the event which was facilitated by Visit Kent and included a presentation on the new River Cycle path. An update event for 2017 is due to take place in October or November 2017. Details have yet to be confirmed.

2.3 Key Successes to Date

A number of key activities were required in addition to the actions by the specific working groups. As detailed in previous committee reports the activities in 2016 were:

- The Shared Story toolkit created and available online.
- Creation of an Online Image Library.
- Online Event Planning Calendar created.
- New Historic Interpretation Panels in the town centre designed and installed.
- New iconic photography commissioned to support the Shared Story.
- Commissioned new promotional videos showing the attraction of visiting the borough to support the Shared Story. Themes were identified and the filming has been carried out over the summer including using drones to capture the essence of the countryside and river.
- Development of a new website, Conference Maidstone to support Business Tourism and the wedding venues. This sector was identified as a key growth market for Maidstone in the DMP.
- Development of a new Museum website. Although this was a more general action it supported the need for high quality information for visitor
- Development of accommodation, events and attractions widgets. The events group had already suggested an events widget, so it was logical to produce one for accommodation and attractions too. A widget is a piece of code that can be embedded on any website that then provides a search box. This search box draws the data from the Visit Maidstone website.

Accommodation providers can add the attractions and what's on widgets to their website. It will provide them with the latest up to date information without the need for them to add it themselves.

Event organisers can add the accommodation widget to their site.

- An application was made to the Highways Agency to change the signage on the M20 from Park and Ride at Junction 6 to tourism signage but has not yet been given permission. The sign would say Maidstone, Kent's Historic County Town. This is still ongoing but has highlighted additional costs as Highways England claim the motorway would have to be closed for the work to be carried.

In addition to the above actions, the MCL (Tourism) section also carried out:

- Destination marketing--directly promoting the Borough as an attractive destination for our visitors, for example through the website www.visitmaidstone.com, production of printed material, pr and promotional campaigns, and social media campaigns.
 - Developing the Visit Maidstone website to introduce a new polling tool to allow integration of online travel agents accommodation availability and online booking. There were over 365,000 visits to the website in 2016-17, up 11%

- Re-designed the Visit Maidstone guide and extensive distribution campaign. Supported by advertising. Printed and distributed 30,000 copies.
- Participation at trade shows to increase awareness of Maidstone as a visitor destination. Over 4000 group travel trade visitors attended Excursions.
- Partnership Marketing ensuring that Maidstone is well-represented in marketing campaigns organised by our partners, for example Tourism South East's new Meet Beyond London aimed at Business Tourism, Kent's Big Weekend.
- Events Development such as Proms in the Park and Shemonmejamo to attract visitors and to contribute to the quality of life for the local community. Broadening awareness of local history to build a sense of civic pride, for example through Heritage Open Days. Working with external event organisers such as the Big Day Out and Ramblin Man. Organisation of a number of successful events with the participation of local groups including Battle of the Somme Commemoration Event, Open Air Cinema and 'Street' Mela Consultation.
- Local events marketing—help with publicising local events and through the website and through the What's On leaflet and posters.
 - Production of 3 What's On Leaflets during year supported by increased sales through advertising. Distribution of 24,000 copies.
 - Borough wide What's On poster campaigns.
- Visitor services-providing information to our 3 million day visitors.
 - For example pockets guides, maps, historic interpretation panels, as well as personal advice
 - Commissioned and developed new Museum website
- Economic development--encouraging inward investment and supporting small business start-ups such as new accommodation businesses, and rural diversification.
- Business tourism marketing- promoting Maidstone to UK and European businesses as a destination for meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions through the Conference Maidstone website and trade shows.
- Group and Travel Trade marketing--representing Maidstone at travel trade exhibitions, organising familiarisation visits, publishing a targeted Group Visits Guide.
- Infrastructure--maintaining tourism signage and enhancing the street scene through Christmas lights.
- Development control - providing authoritative advice to support the Council in assessing planning applications and defending appeals.
- Customer care - offering advice and training to the Museum Visitor Information Service. Creating a new dedicated visitor information point in the Museum to best serve the needs of those requiring tourist information.
- Support for other Council services.
 - Providing promotional support to the Council's cultural attractions and its communications team, for example through photography, familiarisation visits, development of the Museum website, and publications such as the Carriage Museum and River Park leaflets.

2.4 The full Action Plan updates can be found in Appendix 1.

A summary of actions in 2017 so far are:

River:

- Completion of the Medway Towpath between Aylesford and Barming, which included a sustainable all-weather surface along the river bank, as well as ecological restoration.
- Maidstone River Park signage along the route of the Medway Towpath.
- Refurbishment of Fairmeadow towpath, between High Level Bridge and St Peters Bridge, which had been badly damaged by tree roots over many years. This project included new lighting, rubbish bins and seating.
- Major refurbishment of East Farleigh Lock.
- Additional parking for river in town centre at new Sandling Road pay & display.
- Restoration of Elemental lights on Maidstone Bridge and St Peters Bridge.
- Cobtree Management Estate Trust has agreed to finance a new Toucan crossing for £30,000k to enable the cycle path to be extended across Forstall Field to Cobtree Manor Estate Park
- Fairmeadow 'mushrooms' removed and 16 permanent mooring rings installed.
- Signage to and from town centre to be audited following public realm improvement scheme for Week Street and Gabriel's Hill.
- Volunteer-led committee progressing plans to set up a Community Interest Company and preparing a five to ten year action plan.
- New Barge café between Maidstone Bridge and St. Peters Bridge given planning permission. To open on a mooring at Fairmeadow for 2018 season. Owners will open and maintain Fairmeadow toilets for season.
- Opening of the Lodge Coffee kiosk at Teston Country Park.
- Open day at Maidstone Crown.
- Refurbishment of Lockmeadow Centre and opening of Gourmet Burger Kitchen.
- New River Event for August Bank holiday 2018 in development.
- Maidstone Community Mela at Whatman Park in 2017.
- Proms in Whatman Park 2017/2018.
- Teddy Bears Picnic staged at Whatman Park.
- Explore Kent has produced Cycle path map and leaflet
- *Love Where You Live* riverside clean-up with McDonald's Maidstone and MBC. Team of 24 from McDonalds spent 6 hours clearing from Lockmeadow to Maidstone Bridge
- New dedicated Visitor Information Point in Maidstone Museum.

Town:

- The Work underway to extend planning permission and obtain an annual street trading licence for MBC to facilitate new markets and street food.
- Looking to increase frequency of Farmers market.
- Christmas market in discussion to run for 12 days prior to Christmas 2017.

- History trail updated and leaflet completed.
- Public Realm Phase 3 improvements to Week Street and Gabriels Hill will include a history timeline; public art; signing to key attractions and themed squares.
- One Maidstone is campaigning to reduce A Board clutter.
- Local produce and markets section on Visit Maidstone website.
- Monthly Farmers market continuing with local producers in Jubilee Square.
- New 3-day Food Festival - Shemomedjamo in Mote Park in September 2017.
- Work being undertaken on car parking, P&R and buses. All Member workshop to consider early options November (mid). SPST Committee to consider report January 2018
- Station improvement programme at Maidstone East to link to Phase 3 public realm improvements, create a sense of arrival on new concourse with signage.
- New Thameslink service to run from Maidstone East for 2018.

Events:

- Event venues information now added to new events section on ConferenceMaidstone.
- Push for organisers to populate no clash diary for 2018 and beyond as number of events is increasing. Will link with events notification in future.
- One Maidstone delivering a Harvest Festival, Live Nativity and Easter Egg Hunt.
- What's On Widget for websites to be demonstrated at 2017 investor/stakeholder event.
- Looking at branding for Maidstone Summer of Music 2018. This will highlight all the great music events in the borough from May/June until September
- Along with River Partnership early discussion on River based event taking place during August Bank Holiday weekend 2018
- New events in 2017 – Oktoberfest, Madness at the Kent Event Centre, International Arts Festival, Community Mela, Shemomedjamo

Countryside:

- Cycle routes and walking routes produced by Explore Kent And National Cycle Trail (River).
- Will be available online on VisitMaidstone and Explore Kent shortly. Leaflets in production.
- UK electric bikes have developed 4 new cycle rides around the Marden, Staplehurst and Headcorn area taking in attractions and Produced in Kent sites. Will be available this autumn as downloadable pdf on Visit Maidstone.
- North Downs Trail Officer and Explore Kent are checking and developing trails from train stations onto the North Downs around the Hollingbourne area. However currently not progressing due to South Eastern contract for the service due to end soon, and they are not willing to develop this until new contract in place.
- A driving tour for the North of the Borough has been researched. And will be developed over the winter ready for 2018

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- 15 old walking route leaflets found for Staplehurst are to be investigated and reproduced in a downloadable format

2.5 DMP Budget

There is no additional budget for the DMP 2017-18. The annual tourism service marketing budget will be used to support the DMP work. The marketing budget is £31,000 and is dependent on a £15,000 income target for advertising revenue on the website and publications.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

3.1 This report is an information update only.

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 None

5. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

5.1 None

6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

6.1 None

7. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	This work contributes to the priority 'Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all'.	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Risk Management	N/A	

Financial	The action plan is delivered through a combination of existing related budgets, funding from the Kent Business Rates Pool, collaboration with the sector and bids for funding to appropriate sources.	S 151 Officer and Finance Team
Staffing	None. This project is being delivered by the MCL Marketing and Sales Team.	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Legal	N/A	
Equality Impact Needs Assessment	N/A	
Environmental/Sustainable Development	N/A	
Community Safety	N/A	
Human Rights Act	N/A	
Procurement	N/A	
Asset Management	N/A	

8. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix I: DMP Action Plan Progress

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Destination Management Plan