

# AGENDA

## HERITAGE, CULTURE AND LEISURE COMMITTEE MEETING



Date: Monday 13 July 2015  
Time: 6.30 pm  
Venue: Town Hall, High Street,  
Maidstone

Membership:

Councillors Ash (Vice-Chairman), Ells, Fissenden,  
Fort, Hemsley, Mrs Hinder, Newton  
(Chairman), Paterson and Pickett

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Page No.

1. Apologies for Absence
2. Notification of Substitute Members
3. Urgent Items
4. Notification of Visiting Members
5. Disclosures by Members and Officers
6. Disclosures of Lobbying

**Continued Over/:**

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**Issued on 3 July 2015**

The reports included in Part I of this agenda can be made available in **alternative formats**. For further information about this service, or to arrange for special facilities to be provided at the meeting, **please contact Poppy Brewer on 01622 602242**. To find out more about the work of the Committee, please visit [www.maidstone.gov.uk](http://www.maidstone.gov.uk)

**Alison Broom, Chief Executive, Maidstone Borough Council,  
Maidstone House, King Street, Maidstone Kent ME15 6JQ**

7.	To consider whether any items should be taken in private because of the possible disclosure of exempt information	
8.	Minutes of the meeting held on 26 May 2015	1
9.	Presentation of Petitions (if any)	
10.	Question and Answer Session for Members of the Public	
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## **MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee**

#### **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 26 MAY 2015**

**Present:** Councillor Newton (Chairman), and  
Councillors Ash, Ells, Fissenden, Fort, Hemsley,  
Mrs Hinder, Newton, Paterson and Pickett

**Also Present:** Councillors Black, Mrs Blackmore,  
Brice, Burton, Butler, Chittenden, Cox,  
Cuming, Daley, English, Garland,  
Mrs Gooch, Harwood, Mrs Joy, McKay,  
McLoughlin, D Mortimer, Munford,  
Naghi, Paine, Mrs Parvin, Mrs Ring,  
Mrs Robertson, Ross, Round,  
Sargeant, Springett, Mrs Stockell,  
Thick, Webb, Webster and Mrs Wilson.

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

2. **NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

There were no Substitute Members.

3. **NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS**

The following Councillors were in attendance as observers:

Councillors Black, Mrs Blackmore, Brice, Burton, Chittenden, Cox, Cuming, Daley, English, Garland, Mrs Gooch, Harwood, Mrs Joy, McKay, McLoughlin, D Mortimer, Munford, Naghi, Paine, Mrs Parvin, Mrs Ring, Mrs Robertson, Ross, Round, Sargeant, Springett, Mrs Stockell, Webb, Webster and Mrs Wilson.

4. **ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

**RESOLVED:** That Councillor Newton be elected Chairman for the Municipal Year 2015-16.

5. **ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN**

**RESOLVED:** That Councillor Ash be elected Vice-Chairman for the Municipal Year 2015/16.

6. **DURATION OF MEETING**

6.43 p.m. to 6.47 p.m.

# Agenda Item 11

## Heritage, Culture & Leisure

**13 July 2015**

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

**Yes**

## Destination Management Plan

<b>Final Decision-Maker</b>	Heritage, Culture & Leisure Committee
<b>Lead Director or Head of Service</b>	Head of Commercial and Economic Development
<b>Lead Officer and Report Author</b>	Head of Commercial and Economic Development
<b>Classification</b>	Non-exempt
<b>Wards affected</b>	All

### **This report makes the following recommendations to the final decision-maker:**

1. That the Committee approve and adopt the Destination Management Plan for the Borough of Maidstone.
2. That the Committee endorse the Action Plan accompanying the DMP.

### **This report relates to the following corporate priorities:**

- Great Place: Keeping Maidstone an attractive place for all
- Great Opportunity: Securing a successful economy for Maidstone Borough

### **Timetable**

<b><i>Meeting</i></b>	<b><i>Date</i></b>
Policy and Resources Committee	N/A
Council	N/A
Other Committee	N/A

# Destination Management Plan

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1** This report gives the background to the work which has been undertaken to develop a Destination Management Plan (DMP) for Maidstone Borough. The Final Draft Destination Management Plan is attached at Appendix I.

A DMP is a shared statement of intent to manage, develop and promote a destination over a stated period of time. It articulates both the roles of the different stakeholders, identifies clear actions that they will undertake and the resources they will allocate.

The shared statement of intent sets out the stall for the place for both visitors and those looking to invest in the area and can provide a powerful tool in attracting inward investment, resources and funding.

Following on from the success of other authorities that have used this process to develop their visitor economy we commissioned Blue Sail and Visit Kent to work with us on this project to deliver a DMP for Maidstone Borough.

Blue Sail is a specialist destination consultancy which has worked with over 100 destinations in the UK and Ireland. The company's mission is to breathe life into places and spaces - from cities and regions to areas and attractions. They work with the people who shape them, invest in them, manage and market them, seeking to secure the benefits for local people, organisations and businesses.

Visit Kent is the Counties Destination Management Organisation.

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## 2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

### 2.1 Introduction

Destinations that have a full understanding of the power of place-making and the need for well managed places that really “work” for both residents and visitors will be more likely to generate ‘wise growth’ in their visitor economy. These sustainable places are more likely to maximise the benefits of that growth in long term, additional income and jobs. The best managed destinations are also likely to excel in attracting new investment, in keeping value-added jobs, in bringing in new talent and in stimulating innovation. Great destinations are great places to live and work as well as to visit. There are national and international examples that show that strong public sector leadership, in both initiating and maintaining the discussion about quality place-making, amongst the myriad of stakeholders that are needed in creating great places, is one of the key differentiators for the most successful places.

The Visit England DMP Guidelines are very clear that their model is about total place – looking at development, marketing and management together. That

means we need to be clear about target markets, identify the transformational place development interventions and place marketing which will get you where you want to be and then look at the visitor journey to ensure that the welcome, presentation and management of the place supports that.

There is no quick fix to place-making and regeneration. We had to agree what the end goal looks like and then prioritise the actions for the next three years that will set us on the road to reaching the vision set out in Borough's Economic Development Strategy.

## **2.2 Our approach**

We used a five stage process, reflecting an approach developed and planned between Blue Sail and Visit Kent, to develop our DMP so that it is robust because it is evidence-based, taps into what is distinctive about Maidstone, prioritises inclusive and engaging consultation and delivers a short focused DMP.

### **Stage 1: Inception**

As part of the preparation for developing the DMP, we liaised with Visit Kent to create a Project Group who we work closely with to develop the DMP.

Output: A note of key points and a revised timetable including key meeting dates.

### **Stage 2: Research and review**

We gathered market intelligence about current and potential visitors and begin to think about target market segments for Maidstone.

Output: Reported on our research and audit to the Project Group as part of Stage 4.

### **Stage 3: Shared Story**

We planned and facilitated a Shared Story Workshop as a creative event for stakeholders. We had an audience that embraced a wide set of interests including economic, transport, attractions, accommodation, retail, activities, events, specialist interest e.g. local historical groups, local community, arts and culture.

Output: We developed a Shared Story for Maidstone Borough which created a framework against which helped to evaluate projects and develop marketing approach and content.

### **Stage 4: Scoping & Analysis**

We used the findings of Stage 2 to work up more detailed analysis on the product gaps, destination experiences, visitor management and marketing needs. We focused on those areas that were identified as important, namely – retail, river, rural, heritage and the night time economy

Output: We captured the emerging findings in a PowerPoint interim report and presented this to the Project Group. We set out emerging priorities and long-term

goals for the DMP. At this meeting we also worked to identify headline actions and their fit with the economic development strategy.

### **Stage 5: Developing the DMP Framework**

This final stage was bringing together all the work done to date to create the framework for a DMP for Maidstone District. The final document:

- Sets out the Shared Story for Maidstone Borough
- Identifies target market segments
- Captures key issues and opportunities
- Sets out a list of agreed actions against clear headings for the Project Group to use subsequently as the basis for developing prioritised and costed Action Plans

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## **3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS**

- 3.1** The Committee can decide to adopt the DMP and endorse the accompanying Action Plan.
- 3.2** The Committee can decide to reject the DMP.

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## **4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1** It is recommended that the Committee adopt the DMP and endorse the accompanying Action Plan for the reasons described at parts 1 and 2 above.

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## **5. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK**

- 5.1** Around 70 people – from private, public and third sectors – have contributed their views and been involved in helping to shape this Plan. As well as the Project Group, there have been interviews with industry representatives, including leading visitor attractions and hotels, and with other public agencies, a workshop and three Action Planning sessions – to tap into a wide range of knowledge and expertise, and to make sure there is buy-in to the process and the recommendations. Visit Kent gathered together existing research and carried out new primary research about the Borough of Maidstone as a visitor destination, to make sure that the DMP is market focused.

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## **6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION**

- 6.1** The DMP will be published and shared with all stakeholders connected to the visitor economy.

- 6.2** The Project Group which has managed the development of the DMP will evolve into the DMP Group, responsible for overseeing the delivery of this Plan. The DMP Group will meet quarterly to review progress. It may want to meet more frequently in the first 6 months, as it moves forward with early tasks.
- 6.3** The Group will also set up a number of themed task and finish groups over the period of the plan.

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## 7. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
<b>Impact on Corporate Priorities</b>		Head of Commercial and Economic Development
<b>Risk Management</b>	None	
<b>Financial</b>	None. The action plan will be delivered through a combination of exiting related budgets, collaboration with the sector and bids for funding to appropriate sources.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
<b>Staffing</b>	None. This project will be delivered by the MCL Marketing and Sales Team.	
<b>Legal</b>	None	
<b>Equality Impact Needs Assessment</b>	None – the DMP is an inclusive document.	
<b>Environmental/Sustainable Development</b>	None	
<b>Community Safety</b>	None	
<b>Human Rights Act</b>	None	
<b>Procurement</b>	None	
<b>Asset Management</b>	None	

## 8. REPORT APPENDICES

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

- **Appendix I: Draft Destination Management Plan**
- **Appendix II: DMP Maidstone Shared Story Report 12 May 2015**



- **Appendix III: DMP Think Tank March 2015 Report**

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## **9. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

**None.**



# MAIDSTONE DESTINATION MANAGEMENT PLAN

REPORT FOR MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

BLUE SAIL WORKING WITH

JULY 2015



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# 1 ABOUT THIS PLAN

This is a 3-year Destination Management Plan (DMP) for the Borough of Maidstone – town and countryside – developed over a 6-month period in 2015 (see diagram) and steered by a Project Group comprising senior officers and councillors from Maidstone Borough Council, Visit Kent, and representatives from tourism businesses. It follows a destination planning template originated by VisitEngland and further developed by Blue Sail working with Visit Kent. It is a process that brings together the people in a place to agree a practical programme of actions.

Around 70 people – from private, public and third sectors – have contributed their views and been involved in helping to shape this Plan. As well as the Project Group, there have been interviews with industry representatives, including leading visitor attractions and hotels, and with other public agencies, a workshop and three Action Planning sessions – to tap into a wide range of knowledge and expertise, and to make sure there is support for the process and the recommendations. Visit Kent gathered together existing research and carried out new primary research about the Borough of Maidstone as a visitor destination, to make sure that the DMP is market focused.

At the heart of this DMP is Maidstone's Shared Story™<sup>1</sup>, developed with the stakeholders. The Shared Story is the foundation for the destination brand. It sets the scene for the DMP, as it captures what is special and different about Maidstone as a destination. The aim is for everyone involved in tourism and the visitor economy to use it when they are planning how to invest in improvements and new experiences – so that Maidstone's unique selling points (USPs) become stronger, and the image of the place becomes clearer.



The Maidstone DMP Process

<sup>1</sup> "Shared Story" is a process created and designed by Blue Sail

## 2 MAIDSTONE'S VISITOR ECONOMY

### Definitions

**The visitor economy** encompasses everything to do with attracting and welcoming visitors, providing for their needs, and the experiences they have during their stay.

The visitor economy touches on nearly every aspect of the day-to-day life of a place. Visitors contribute to the local economy by using local transport, shops, eating places, cultural and entertainment venues and car parks. They contribute to the vitality of the town centre during the day and in the evenings. Visitors want to enjoy the public spaces in towns and the scenery of the countryside. Many of the services and facilities are the responsibility of local authorities and public sector agencies which need to take account of visitors' needs in their policy, planning and service delivery. All the elements that make up the visitor economy need to work together to create an excellent experience for visitors and to realise the economic and social benefits.



**“Visitors”** means everyone travelling to the Borough of Maidstone for leisure and business, including people visiting friends and relatives (VFR). It excludes people on regular journeys – for example travelling to work, for regular shopping, or for a trip to the dentist. As the County Town, Maidstone is a centre for business visits, and a popular year-round day-trip destination for people living elsewhere in Kent. The Borough has good road links to the Channel Tunnel and ports, which makes it attractive for business meetings and for leisure stopovers.

In this Plan, **“Maidstone”** or **“the Borough”** mean the whole geographic area – town and countryside. Where we are talking about just the town or just the Borough Council, we make that clear.

### The Maidstone economy and where the visitor economy fits in

Maidstone's Economic Strategy 2014-2031 identifies the visitor economy as one sector that will contribute to raising the economic outputs (GVA) of the Borough and creating over 14,000 new jobs. The Economic Strategy identifies a Destination Management Plan as the delivery mechanism to enable the tourism sector to achieve its potential.

The Economic Strategy sets out the Borough's ambition to create *“a distinctive place, known for its blend of sustainable rural and urban living, vibrant service sector-based economy ...”*. It goes on to say: *“Our rural communities are important community and commercial centres in their own right. They are*

*a major part of our tourism offer, which also includes Leeds Castle and the riverside in Maidstone town centre*". This DMP identifies practical ways to help achieve that ambition, and recognises the importance of town and country.

To realise the full potential of tourism in Maidstone – and for the DMP actions for Maidstone Town to be delivered in full – the Town Centre Vision must be delivered, in particular investment on the River Medway and in the town centre. Tourism marketing and visitor support for local cultural events and activity will also contribute to the delivery of Maidstone's Cultural Strategy – which in turn will support tourism, as heritage and local cultural activity is an important part of what makes a destination special and appealing to visitors.

This DMP will also align closely with the council's Green & Blue Infrastructure Action Plan – currently in development.

### Volume & value headlines<sup>2</sup>

- ▶ **A huge impact:** Maidstone Borough attracts over 4 million visits a year and visitors spend over £250 million in the local economy, supporting jobs and services for local people. Nearly £66 million of that visitor spend is on shopping and £56 million is on food and drink.
- ▶ **Most visits are day trips:** Like most UK visitor destinations, day visits dominate – at 91%. This is not surprising, as the Borough is centrally located for Kent residents and within relatively easy reach of large resident populations in London, South East England, and near-Europe. In addition to people visiting the Borough from home, Leeds Castle and other large heritage visitor attractions in the area bring in day visits from tourists staying elsewhere in Kent or in London.
- ▶ **Staying visitors spend more per trip:** 35% of all visitor spend comes from the 9% who stay at least one night in the Borough.
- ▶ **Most UK staying visitors are "VFR":** Nearly half of Maidstone's UK visitors are visiting friends and relatives (VFR). UK VFR to Maidstone only accounts for 13% of visitor spend: most UK staying visitor spend is from holidays/short breaks, then from business visits.
- ▶ **Overseas staying visitors spend most per trip:** Of staying trips, 21% are from overseas, but they contribute 40% of staying-visitor spend. Most international visitors are coming on business or VFR – only 9% are on holiday.

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<sup>2</sup> from Economic Impact research 2013

### Current leisure visitors headlines<sup>3</sup>

- ▶ **Leisure visitors from within Kent** are very important, as you would expect for a County Town:
  - They come year round (although numbers are higher in the summer months).
  - They are more likely to be motivated by Maidstone's shopping than visitors from further afield. Around half said they visited Leeds Castle, Fremlin Walk and Mote Park.
  - Other attractions they went to (on the same visit) were Bluewater, Chatham Historic Dockyard, Rochester Castle, and McArthur Glen – reflecting the importance of shopping as a leisure activity when visiting places closer to home.
- ▶ When it comes to **leisure visitors from outside Kent**:
  - 78% are travelling without children
  - 62% are 55+ – which matches the strong propensity among baby boomers (born 1946-64) to take multiple short breaks
  - 81% use the web to plan their travel; 55% use Visit Kent website; 47% use Visit Maidstone website. Nearly two-thirds say they look to recommendations from friends and family when choosing a places to go
  - The main drivers for UK visitors to Maidstone are historic aspects/heritage (54.9%), closely followed by an interest in the attractive countryside (53.5%). (NB shopping was not a motivating factor for people from further afield – although 1 in 4 said they shopped once in Maidstone.)
  - Once in Maidstone, main activities were: heritage (46.5%), eating out (42.3%), visiting countryside (35.2%), and country pubs (31%). One in three visited Leeds Castle.
  - There is strong evidence of people using Maidstone as a base to visit other places in Kent – on the same visit, 42% visited also Canterbury Cathedral, 27% Chatham Dockyard, 22% visited Bluewater, 18% Dover Castle, 17% Hever Castle.

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<sup>3</sup> Key findings from Visit Kent's new survey into Visit Maidstone's database of leisure visitors

## 3 GROWTH MARKETS FOR MAIDSTONE

### PRIORITISING VISITOR MARKETS

When planning investment and marketing, it makes sense:

- ▶ **To get more benefit from the visitors who are already coming here:** for example, to persuade people on a day visit to stay longer, do more, repeat and recommend, and to persuade people who are staying overnight in the Borough but then exploring further afield to spend more of their money within the Borough itself.
- ▶ **To have in mind and target people who will bring money into the local economy to support local jobs and services.** So higher-spending day visitors, staying visitors (especially staying in serviced accommodation), business visitors and international visitors are all important targets.
- ▶ **To prioritise people who can visit at times when the local accommodation providers have capacity.** Maidstone's annual occupancy figures are between 70% and 80%. The most-recent hotel study (2011 – so patterns may have changed) showed strong midweek occupancy year round, thanks to corporate business but also to some midweek leisure in the summer months. Saturday nights were particularly strong throughout the year, with weekend visitors coming for weddings, functions and events & festivals as well as leisure breaks (independent travellers and groups).
- ▶ **To target those people who will enhance the place and local people's quality of life and so be welcomed by the community.** This means not proactively targeting those segments where increased numbers would present management challenges and costs, or environmental damage, without significant positive economic and community benefits to counterbalance the negative impacts.
- ▶ **To prioritise people who will be easiest to persuade** – that is, people who are already receptive to the idea of visiting places like Maidstone, and are already looking for a break that features one or more of the special activities and experiences the area can offer. Focusing on people who will really enjoy visiting the area – and so will recommend it to others and may become repeat visitors – is more important than ever now that online user reviews and social media are such a key part of the decision-making process.

This does not mean that other people won't come. It is just a question of targeting finite resources where they will have most impact. Individual organisations and businesses will continue to invest in their own specific markets. The DMP is about the destination as a whole, and where best to put joint effort.



## TARGET MARKETS

There are lots of different ways to segment markets. None of them tells the whole story. But for this DMP, a useful way to think about Maidstone's visitor markets is **by purpose**: what is motivating them to visit? Studying existing market intelligence, talking to the industry, and researching visitor reviews online, three strong motivations emerged for higher-spend, staying visitors with potential to grow.

Below are three bespoke categories created to guide the next stages of thinking about product development and marketing strategy. Visitors are already coming to do these things, so the critical questions for Maidstone are how to **increase their spend** (e.g. by lengthening their stay and/or diverting them away from other Kent destinations to spend more within the Borough) and how to **attract more** of the same type of people to visit.



### SEGMENT 1: "ME" TIME

- Leisure segment
- High-spend couples & friends
- Staying in hotels, upmarket B&Bs
- Looking for relaxing, indulgent and unique experiences
- Leisure shopping & enjoying eating/drinking are important
- Good market for – spa hotels, golf courses, vineyards, gastro pubs, upmarket restaurants & retail brands



### SEGMENT 2: GETTING TOGETHER

- Business & Leisure segments
- Strongly linked to location – easy access
- Looking to get together – for corporate meetings, reunions, family celebrations etc
- Seeking shared experiences – a big event or a visit to an iconic attraction could be the catalyst/centrepiece to the trip, and so the deciding factor



### SEGMENT 3: EXPLORE

- Leisure segment
- Linked to location – using this as a base to explore Kent
- Looking for stimulating, authentic experiences, & strong sense of place
- Staying in characterful independent accommodation – serviced & self-catering
- Good market for – heritage attractions and experiences, local producers, niche events

## 4 CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The research, audit and consultations identified the following challenges and opportunities for Maidstone's visitor economy that have shaped the Shared Story and the priorities for action:

### Location is a strength but comes with challenges

- ▶ Maidstone is a convenient base for a business or leisure trip. Its accessible location has encouraged investment in new quality hotels in the Borough, creating local jobs and attracting visitor spend. However, Maidstone does not have the strong visitor appeal of nearby places such as Canterbury, Chatham Historic Dockyard and Rochester. As a result, people may stay the night in the Borough, but spend their money elsewhere during the day
- ▶ Several of Maidstone's larger hotels and visitor attractions are more strongly associated with Kent than with Maidstone and are promoted that way. Those attractions and hotels bring significant benefits to the Borough attracting higher spending international and business visitors. Maidstone needs to find opportunities to build stronger relationships with these businesses that make it relevant and desirable for them to position their businesses both within Kent and within Maidstone. A stronger destination brand and offer for Maidstone will help encourage that.

### There is a need to define and strengthen the town's visitor offer

- ▶ Visitors need a reason to choose Maidstone over other destinations. The County Town status in itself is insufficient; the status needs to mean something to visitors. Visitors are looking for experiences that are special, true to the place and which resonate with what interests them.
- ▶ The most significant opportunity is the river – as a place to spend time on the water and along the riverbank. It presents a real opportunity to create a blue-green corridor to link the town with its countryside and to open up All Saint's Church and the amphitheatre to visitors.
- ▶ Within the town there is a need to make it easy for visitors to find their way around and for the town partners to address issues of car parking and pedestrian signing and access to the river and along the riverbank. Visitors need to feel confident to explore. Providing more activities and animation will encourage visitors to discover the town's heritage and culture.
- ▶ There is a tendency to see the town and countryside separately – yet connecting the town to the countryside in tangible ways creates a stronger critical mass of experiences and provides opportunities to extend the visitor stay and spend across a wider area.

### Maidstone's countryside is an underplayed asset

- ▶ The Borough's rural offer is a strong asset – the villages, a concentration of oast houses, the river valleys, the Downs and Weald and a thriving horticultural sector with opportunities to strengthen Maidstone's associations with local produce and the Borough's rural heritage.
- ▶ Long-distance walks pass through the Borough. These are brand names that guarantee quality footpaths, but the Borough is not strongly enough associated with these routes.
- ▶ There is an opportunity for Maidstone to make more of the Garden of England brand, by positioning Maidstone at its heart, and associating the Borough strongly with Kent produce, tapping into the growing interest in local produce and food provenance to offer distinctive experiences for visitors.

### Major events is a strength with potential for further growth

- ▶ Maidstone benefits from having several large event venues and significant event-management expertise – in private and third sectors as well as within the Council. It has developed a reputation for hosting very successful events and festivals – both home-grown and bought-in.
- ▶ However, the programming of events could be better coordinated, marketing strengthened and opportunities for joint projects and new events explored.

## 5 MAIDSTONE'S SHARED STORY

### ABOUT THE STORY

The Shared Story is the foundation for the destination brand. It is a commonly agreed positioning that everyone uses when they are planning how to invest in improvements and new experiences, and when they are talking to people who don't know the place.

It is a short and simple brand narrative that makes it clear what is special and different about the place. It does not overpromise; it goes with the grain of the place and it is authentic and true. It focuses on the brand values – the distinctive qualities that capture the essence of the place: it isn't a list of everything that is on offer.

If everyone uses the same broad ideas to develop the place and then uses some of the same concepts and phrases to talk about it externally, the image of and the experiences in the place will be much stronger. That leads to greater impact, which means more visitors and stronger investment.

The Maidstone Shared Story sets the agenda for developing and managing the destination: so the first draft of the Story was created before the priorities for the DMP were decided, and before the Action Planning took place.

The Story's main themes – the brand values – are:

- ▶ **Kent & Kentishness:** *"At the heart of the Garden of England", "a strong Kentish feel", "oasts, orchards and vines", "Blossom Trail", "the natural place to stay when visiting the county", "prosperous villages", "Pilgrims' Way", "North Downs", "Kent Weald", "the best of Kent produce"*
- ▶ **A destination with status and history:** *"Kent's historic County Town", "one of England's great rivers", "an important battle", "Roman and Medieval roots", "quintessential Tudor England", "the loveliest castle in the world", "Kent's capital"*
- ▶ **A great location:** *"less than an hour from London", "halfway between the channel ports and the capital city", "a great base for exploring", "always within easy reach"*

There is a separate report that explains the rationale behind the choice of words and phrases in the Story.

The Story was created by:

- ▶ Looking at what is currently being said and written about the place – by locals, media, and visitors
- ▶ Working with stakeholders in a creative workshop to explore what they believe is the essence & difference of the place
- ▶ Applying Blue Sail's knowledge about what differentiates places
- ▶ Testing and discussing a first draft with the DMP Project Group
- ▶ Taking on board Project Group and Action Planning Group feedback and producing this final version.

## THE STORY

### In a page:

At the heart of the Garden of England is Kent's historic County Town of Maidstone, set in a region of wide fertile river valleys and ancient woodlands, dotted with prosperous villages. Less than an hour from London and you're in another, gentler world ...

The busy County Town itself – the site of a famous battle from the English Civil War – stretches across one of England's great rivers, the Medway. To the north is the Pilgrims' Way, an ancient route from London to Canterbury along the tops of the North Downs. To the south is the gentle rolling landscape of the Kent Weald, with its oasts, orchards and vines ...

There's a strong Kentish feel to Maidstone and its villages ... the ragstone walls, the weatherboarding, the Kent peg tiles, the green hop ales, the soft fruit and top fruit ... apples and cobnuts, and bowls of cherries at the farm gate. The County Town's roots may be Roman and medieval, but you could say the countryside – with its timbered 16<sup>th</sup> century houses – is quintessential Tudor England: it was Henry VIII, after all, who ordered the cherries to be planted, and who first called this "the Garden of England". And Leeds Castle – just east of the County Town and known as "the loveliest castle in the world" – was home to six medieval queens then transformed into a fairytale Tudor palace.

This area at Kent's heart is the natural place to stay when visiting the county – half way between the channel ports and the capital city. It's a great base for exploring – along the Medway on a river cruise, hiring a boat or canoe, or walking and cycling beside the river. Following the Blossom Trail in the spring. Visiting vineyards in the autumn. Sampling the best of Kent produce in contemporary restaurants and gastro pubs. Enjoying the shops and markets in the broad streets and squares of the County Town.

It's Kent's capital for big events too – with tens of thousands at a time coming here for the South East's biggest pop concerts, classical extravaganzas, and business shows.

And always within easy reach are Canterbury, Chartwell, Hever, Sissinghurst, Romney Marsh, and the coast.

### In a paragraph:

There's a strong Kentish feel to Maidstone and its villages. At the heart of the Garden of England is the historic County Town, surrounded by oasts, vineyards, orchards and hop fields, with the great River Medway running through it. The town has Roman and medieval roots; the countryside is quintessential Tudor England. Less than an hour from London and the Channel ports, this area is the natural place to stay to explore Kent – to sample the local produce, shop in the broad streets and squares of the County Town, walk the Pilgrims' Way, cycle beside the river, experience Kent's biggest events, and visit the loveliest castle in the world ...

### In a sentence:

There's a strong Kentish feel to the County Town of Maidstone and its historic villages – a region of rivers and oast houses, of vineyards and cherry orchards, of gastro pubs and ancient castles ... and a natural place to stay to explore the Garden of England.

## 6 PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

### STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Taking into account the growth markets, challenges and opportunities, these are the Strategic Priorities:

- ▶ Increase the value of tourism by targeting higher-spend markets with growth potential
- ▶ Use tourism to reinvent what a County Town means for the 21<sup>st</sup> century
- ▶ Encourage more overnight visitors to the Borough to come into the town centre – including in the early evening – and to explore Maidstone’s countryside and villages
- ▶ Connect the town with its surrounding countryside in tangible ways that encourage visitors to explore further and stay longer
- ▶ Strengthen potential visitors’ awareness and image of the Borough by using the Shared Story to develop a strong brand positioning.

### ACTION STRANDS

The DMP process has identified three important “strands” where resources should be focused over the next three years, in order to deliver the promise of the Shared Story. These three strands are:

- ▶ Improving the **County Town’s** appeal to visitors;
- ▶ Improving the impact of **Events** on the visitor economy; and
- ▶ Making more of the **Countryside**.

There are detailed Action Plans – worked up by stakeholders in the Action Planning sessions and then finalised by Blue Sail and the Project Group – for the Shared Story and then each of these strands in Appendix 1. Below is an overview of each of the three strands.

### Strand 1: Improving the County Town's appeal to visitors

Tourism could help Maidstone redefine what it means to be a County Town in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, using the Shared Story as inspiration.

Investment in the public realm has created a high-quality environment in the town centre. The town has many fine historic buildings and is home to the Maidstone Museum and Bentrif Art Gallery, the new County archive building – the Kent History Centre, and the Hazlitt Theatre. It is an important retail centre for visitors from Kent: the open-air Fremlin Walk (the fourth most-visited shopping centre in Kent) is complemented by independent shops, which account for over half the retail units in the town.

The key distinctive assets for visitors are the river, interesting heritage including the Museum, and Mote Park, which is a major events venue that attracts over 1 million visits p.a., and was voted 2<sup>nd</sup> most popular park in the UK in a national poll. There is considerable opportunity to make more of these assets for visitors. Investment in tourism will also enhance the offer for people living and working in the town and help drive higher spend and contribute to a thriving local economy. But as a visitor destination the town faces some challenges:

- ▶ **The offer is fragmented**, with heritage sites and independent shops located across the town
- ▶ **Access into the town by car is challenging** for people who don't know the place and it is not clear where best to park for different activities e.g. shopping, visiting the museum, the river
- ▶ **Access to the river is difficult to find** and via subways in places – the sound and presence of the bridge gyratory dominates the river experience in some parts
- ▶ **The rail stations provide no sense of arrival** or orientation for visitors – the first impression is more commuter town than visitor destination
- ▶ **There is a limited early evening economy** for visitors – later evening economy is dominated by pubs and clubbing aimed at a younger regional audience, which may put off target visitor markets
- ▶ **Most of the Borough's visitor accommodation is outside the town centre**, so visitors staying overnight in the Borough need a strong reason to come into the town centre or to extend their day time visit into the early evening before returning to their hotel.

To help address these challenges, the Action Plan for this Strand focuses on three areas – **realising the potential of the river** as an important visitor attraction in the town and a reason to visit; **redefining the County Town** for visitors including connecting the town more strongly with the surrounding countryside; and **encouraging visitors to explore** the town and in its fringes.

## Strand 2: Improving the impact of Events on the visitor economy

Events have many positive impacts on local economies and communities. The DMP is focusing on ways to improve the impact of business and leisure events *on the visitor economy* – which in turn will support jobs and services for local people. The DMP takes into account MBC's Festivals & Events Strategy, which is about events that take place in the Borough's parks and open spaces – but the thinking includes larger venues such as Leeds Castle, Kent Showground and Kent Life.

The DMP's actions will support the development of events *with wider reach* (actual or potential) – i.e. events that will draw visitors from further afield (from beyond Kent), and/or enhance the image of the area further afield as a vibrant place to visit.

The Shared Story says Maidstone is “Kent's capital for big events ... with tens of thousands at a time coming here for the South East's biggest pop concerts, classical extravaganzas, and business shows.” This is a USP for Maidstone, so maintaining and strengthening the “capital for big events” status is a priority. It also means that there is significant events expertise in the Borough – in the big event venues as well as in the public agencies. The DMP should aim to tap into and make the most of this professional expertise.

This does not mean that the DMP will ignore smaller events – but from a visitor economy perspective the focus for actions will only be on those smaller events that are either clustered into festivals or seasons to give them greater reach, or that have a strongly distinctive niche appeal that draws visitors and generates publicity from further afield.

Broadly, over the next three years, the aim is to achieve:

- ▶ **More partnership working** – between the big event venues themselves, between venues and the public agencies, and between venues and the tourism sector (especially accommodation providers) – on programming, marketing and infrastructure.
- ▶ **An “events-welcome” environment** – streamlining processes and provide toolkit to assist with traffic management and signing,
- ▶ **Better event development** – a strategic, proactive approach to event development that supports the visitor economy, including attracting new events, nurturing/growing existing events, and clustering events and joint marketing for greater impact, in line with the Council's Festivals & Events Strategy.

The DMP actions – in general, but for this strand in particular – need to look beyond the administrative boundaries and take into account the impact of major events taking place in neighbouring areas. KCC's input will be important and helpful for this.



### Strand 3: Making more of the Countryside

While Maidstone is perhaps best known for being the County Town, the Borough includes a substantial area of countryside and many rural villages with a strong Kentish feel, a concentration of oast houses, orchards and vineyards. This rural landscape further reinforces Maidstone's positioning as part of Kent, the Garden of England. Part of the North Downs AONB and the Kent Weald lie within the Borough, and several long-distance footpaths including the Pilgrims' Way pass through it.

The majority of the Borough's visitor attractions, including Leeds Castle, destination pubs and visitor accommodation are located in the countryside. The Borough's rivers – the River Medway and its tributaries – provide opportunities to get on the water and by the waterside, and walking, cycling and boat links between town and country. There are footpaths and cycle routes out from Maidstone town to nearby villages, and more managed rural landscapes and rural parks such as the Hucking Estate present good countryside for the less intrepid explorer. The countryside offers a network of footpaths, bridleways and cycle paths.

There is potential to make more of Maidstone's countryside offer through developing trails, 'soft packaging' and marketing, and to position rural Maidstone more strongly within the Kent Garden of England brand. More investment is needed to bring together the range of information and activity already happening, to make it easy for visitors to find and to inspire them to explore. There are opportunities to develop more activities. The objective is to encourage visitors staying in the countryside to explore further, do more and to visit the town of Maidstone too.

The DMP will concentrate on three areas of activity:

- ▶ Making more of the offer through visitor marketing, communications and information
- ▶ Developing **new themed trails** that use local produce, Tudor and other Kentish associations for inspiration ('software')
- ▶ Investing in wayfinding 'hardware' – **new routes** (e.g. along river towpaths, routes that link Maidstone town to its countryside, circular routes: walk/cycle one way and train back), visitor **information points** and improved footpath/towpath **signing**.

## 7 MAKING IT HAPPEN

### OVERSEEING DELIVERY OF THE DMP

The Project Group which has managed the development of the DMP will evolve into the DMP Group, responsible for overseeing the delivery of this Plan. The DMP Group will meet quarterly to review progress. It may want to meet more frequently in the first 6 months, as it moves forward with early tasks.

The core DMP Group will comprise one member and two officers from Maidstone Borough Council, a representative from Visit Kent and six industry representatives, chosen for their interests and expertise in the themes of the action plans – events, town and countryside. Additional people will be co-opted as needed, for their specialist input.

The role and composition of the DMP Group will be reviewed at year three to check it remains the best way to deliver the DMP.

**The DMP Group will oversee delivery of the Action Plans. Early tasks will be to cost and prioritise the Action Plans and to identify a Lead Organisation for each Action.**

Some of the DMP actions will be driven forward by individual members of the DMP Group. But the Group will also set up a number of themed **task-and-finish groups** to progress actions over the life of the DMP, e.g. for the Shared Story/Destination Branding, for audits, food and drink, developing toolkits. The Steering Group will identify and invite members of different local organisations and individuals to be part of these task-and-finish groups. This will build ownership and engagement with different interests in the Borough and encourage ownership of the DMP and its delivery.

### PARTNERSHIP WORK

Partnership is key to a strong visitor economy. The DMP Group will:

- ▶ Develop **strong working partnerships** between all the organisations and businesses involved in tourism
- ▶ Involve local businesses to help **create a distinctive joined-up experience** across the Borough
- ▶ Develop **strong relationships with Kent-wide organisations** to strengthen Maidstone's County Town status

## 8 ACTION PLANS

*S = short term (1 year) M = medium term (2-3 years) L = long term (3-3+ years)*

### FOUNDATION ACTION PLAN: EMBEDDING THE SHARED STORY / DESTINATION BRANDING

To ensure that Maidstone's brand positioning is strong and delivers on the promise it makes to visitors, the Shared Story should be used by stakeholders in public, private and third sectors to inform business decisions, steer investment, and shape marketing and management priorities. "Fit with the Shared Story" should become a criteria against which to judge investment decisions for businesses, grant applications for agencies, planning decisions and resource allocation for local authorities. To achieve this, the Shared Story needs to be widely shared, the rationale understood, and the themes and concepts applied. The Shared Story has set the scene for the DMP. Now it can be used as a tool to bring people together and continue to agree priorities and actions – both individual and collective – to strengthen the visitor economy.

Actions	Who needs to be involved	Timescale	Potential funding sources
<b>Run Workshop sessions</b> 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.	Maidstone Borough Council Visit Kent	S	Kent Business Rates pool
<b>Develop an Online Shared Story Toolkit</b> 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".	Maidstone Borough Council Explore Kent Produced in Kent Visit Kent Visitor attractions/businesses	S	Kent Business Rates pool

## ACTION PLAN 1: COUNTY TOWN

**RIVER**

*Major investment plans have been identified for the river in the past. Realising some of these investments is critical to unlocking the full potential of the river for the visitor economy. Some of these investments are long term and unlikely to be completed within the lifetime of this plan but actions to move them forward need to begin now. The priorities are to make the river an attraction in its own right – a “must see” for visitors to Maidstone. To achieve that requires improving access, investing in visitor hubs along the river and enabling visitors to use the riverside as a pedestrian/ cycling green corridor to explore more of Maidstone and its countryside. This needs to be supported by events on the river and by marketing activity that profiles the river more strongly to target markets. One of the biggest challenges for improving the river is the very large number of single-interest groups. It is important to bring together all the interests and broker solutions to shared issues.*

Actions	Who needs to be involved	Timescales	Potential funding sources
<b>Programme of enhancements</b> and improvements to make the river more accessible and appealing to visitors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• signing and entrance points to the river from the town centre</li> <li>• footpath investment – signing to include distances to key points, accessibility for cyclists</li> <li>• investment in moorings</li> <li>• parking for river visitors</li> </ul>	Kent County Council – cycle routes and infrastructure Maidstone Borough Council Environment Agency Town Centre Management	M-L	£2m of Single Local Growth Funding has been allocated to create a cycle path along the river from Allington to East Farleigh. MBC £500,000 subject to final decision on funding.

Actions	Who needs to be involved	Timescales	Potential funding sources
<b>Focus on strengthening visitor hubs</b> on the river: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve access, facilities, activities and interpretation</li> <li>Explore opportunities for more camping cabins/pods (luxury camping huts – alternative to camping in the open) to enable long distance walking, canoeing etc</li> </ul> Priority hubs : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Church of All Saints/amphitheatre</li> <li>Cobtree by Kent Life</li> <li>Lockmeadow</li> </ul>	Attractions and businesses e.g. Kentish Lady River Cruises, boat restaurant, All Saints Church, Museum of Kent Life, Lockmeadow Maidstone Borough Council Visit Kent Environment Agency Medway River Users Association, Rowing Club Kent County Council	M-L	Arts Council – Grants for the Arts
<b>Create river-based events &amp; activities</b> 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	Maidstone Borough Council Business owners Medway Valley County Partnership Maidstone Town Team Town Centre Management Invicta Rowing Club and other river user groups	S-M	Sponsorship Town Centre Management, Town Team, Arts Council – Grants for the Arts
<b>Build up marketing activity</b> over time linking to countryside theme. Develop marketing collateral – maps, trails, leaflets	Maidstone Borough Council Visit Kent Business owners Explore Kent Kent Downs AONB Unit	S-M-ongoing	Maidstone Borough Council Businesses involvement in campaigns/advertising in leaflets etc

Actions	Who needs to be involved	Timescales	Potential funding sources
<b>Prioritise river management</b> – litter, dredging, landscaping, lighting, policing, anti-social behaviour, mooring, illegal camping	Police Environment Agency – dredging, water litter picks Maidstone Borough Council Kent County Council – Highways Town Centre Management and Maidstone Town Team	S-M and ongoing	Volunteering e.g. for litter picks with Environment Agency, prioritisation of existing maintenance budgets

### CREATING A DISTINCTIVE COUNTY TOWN

*This is about animating the town and providing reasons for visitors to come, stay longer, explore further and spend more – supporting local shops, places to eat, and leisure and cultural venues. It is about using the assets and resources the town has to reposition it as the County Town for visitors. These actions require close working between town partners and local businesses.*

Actions	Who needs to be involved	Timescales	Potential funding sources
<b>Develop local markets and fairs</b> – food (including a farmer's market), arts & crafts etc: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review existing provision</li> <li>Develop and deliver new markets in different town centre locations and develop a calendar of markets throughout the year</li> <li>Use County Town Market Charter and history as part of the positioning for street markets</li> <li>Introduce street food</li> <li>Develop local market management plan – litter/cleaning, selection of stall traders, access</li> </ul>	Maidstone Borough Council Maidstone Town Team Land Securities (Fremlin Walk) Produced in Kent (food events and link to Kent programming and promotion) National Association of British Markets Stall holders Town Centre Management	S-M-ongoing	Kent Business Rates Pool, Town Team, Private Sector

Actions	Who needs to be involved	Timescales	Potential funding sources
<b>Use themed trails and quarters</b> to help make the town more legible for visitors and encourage exploration: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify trail themes and quarters</li> <li>Develop a programme of animation and interpretation including:</li> <li>Making use of green spaces</li> <li>Pavement trails/digital trails using app</li> <li>Distinctive lighting</li> <li>Mark the quarters e.g. with sculpture, distinctive street sign branding, lighting etc.</li> </ul>	Maidstone Borough Council – planning department Local businesses Town Teams Town centre Management	S-M	Section 106 planning
<b>Shopfront improvements</b> including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shop front design and window displays (produce toolkit)</li> <li>Maintenance to frontages e.g. redecoration, brand signs</li> </ul>	Maidstone Borough Council – including Planning Department Building owners	S-M	Building owners, shops and eating places, Matched funding for shopfront upgrades from Kent Business Rates Pool and Section 106
<b>Strengthen town's association with the countryside</b> through celebrating and promoting local food <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage local restaurants to source local produce and promote it</li> <li>Explore potential for a new local produce centre</li> </ul>	Produced in Kent Local restaurants and cafes Maidstone Borough Council	S-M L – for local produce centre	To be explored

**ACCESS AND VISITOR MANAGEMENT**

*There is work to do to make it easier for visitors arriving by car, coach and train to find their way into the town. This means providing information and orientation at the main arrival points and then ensuring consistent and continuous signing and information across the town. It means integrating existing signing and information with planned investment in new quarters and on the river. The new traffic-flow management planned for the bypass creates an opportunity to improve signing for visitors.*

Actions	Who needs to be involved	Timescales	Potential funding sources
<b>Agree a strategy for improved access</b> by car and coach into the town centre and support with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear uncluttered road signing</li> <li>• Signing to car parks/coach park</li> <li>• Visitor orientation in the car/coach parks</li> <li>• Pedestrian signing from car parks to the town centre and main attractions.</li> </ul>	Maidstone Borough Council Kent County Council Highways Department Car park companies Coach operators	M-L	Kent Business Rates Pool
<b>Review coach parking provision</b> – volume, location and facilities – to reflect needs of international coach parties for shopping, and take account of potential growth	Maidstone Borough Council Coach operators Businesses welcoming coach groups e.g. House of Fraser, Museum	M	To be explored
<b>Improve welcome and visitor facilities</b> at the rail stations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcome sign and town map on board</li> <li>• Clear signing to drop-off/pick-up points</li> </ul> Longer term, a need to deliver new development at Maidstone East station to improve first impressions and provide additional welcome & visitor facilities.	Southeastern Trains Maidstone Borough Council Network Rail	S-M-L	Redevelopment proposals exist for Maidstone East Station and these improvements could be incorporated. £1m of Single Local Growth Fund is available in 2016/17 for the redevelopment of the Ticket Office buildings.



## ACTION PLAN 2: EVENTS

Actions	Who needs to be involved	Timescale	Potential funding sources
<b>Create an Events Experts Group</b> that brings together senior decision makers from the main venues & MBC to “join the dots” when it comes to planning & infrastructure, programming & marketing	Main venues Maidstone Borough Council Kent County Council Safety Advisory Group	S	Members of the group
<b>Carry out an Audit &amp; Gap Analysis</b> – 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.	Maidstone Borough Council Kent County Council Emergency services Venues Event organisers	M	To be explored
<b>Develop an Event Organisers’ Toolkit</b> – 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)	Maidstone Borough Council Kent County Council Venues, Event organisers Emergency services, Safety Advisory Group	S	Maidstone Borough Council
<b>Set up a “No Clash Diary”</b> – 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).	Main venues Maidstone Borough Council Kent County Council Visit Kent Culture Kent	S	Venues Maidstone Borough Council

Actions	Who needs to be involved	Timescales	Potential funding sources
<b>Develop themed seasons/festivals</b> , 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).	Venues Locally-based organisers Maidstone Borough Council	M	Taskforce members Sponsors
<b>Develop a consumer-facing “Events for Visitors Calendar”</b> – comprising an online realtime 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).	Maidstone Borough Council - Visit Maidstone Venues Event organisers Visit Kent Culture Kent Kent County Council	M	Visit Maidstone Venues Event organisers

## ACTION PLAN 3: COUNTRYSIDE

Actions	Who needs to be involved	Timescales	Potential funding sources
<b>Product audit</b> – map & gap current provision of trails, walks and countryside & river experiences	Explore Kent AONB Maidstone Borough Council Visit Kent Produced in Kent Parishes Rural stakeholders e.g. Young Farmers, WI, CPRE, National Trust, RSPB, Kent Wildlife Trust, Hadlow Pilgrims' Way Company – Walk Awhile	S	Partner time Commission co-ordinator
<b>Marketing audit</b> – 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	Maidstone Borough Council Explore Kent Kent Downs AONB Unit Kent Wildlife Trust Visit Kent	S	Partner time

Actions	Who needs to be involved	Timescales	Potential funding sources
<p><b>Develop themed experiences and trails</b> that use Shared Story for inspiration, include key attractions, pubs etc along trail to drive more spend</p> <p><b>Develop marketing collateral</b> – digital and offline. Rich online content.</p>	<p>Maidstone Borough Council Kent County Council Visit Kent Key visitor attractions Other tourism businesses – including pubs and accommodation Transport operators (to enable circular walks/cycle + rail/bus routes) AONB Explore Kent Parishes</p>	S-M	Leader funding
<p><b>Audit walks and trails selected for promotion to visitors to ensure they are easy to use and attractive</b> – 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>Maidstone Borough Council Kent County Council Environment Agency AONB Parish Councils Southeastern Farmers Fishing Clubs</p>	M	
<p><b>Develop rural Visitor Information Points</b> – “i” branded.</p>	<p>Maidstone Borough Council Tourism South East Local rural tourism businesses Parish Councils Kent County Council, Highways</p>	M	Leader funding

Actions	Who needs to be involved	Timescales	Potential funding sources
Develop <b>Riverside Walking and Cycling Path</b> from Allington to East Farleigh with connections to the wider Maidstone area. Potential to expand this up to Aylesford Bridge	Kent County Council Maidstone Borough Council	M-L	£2m of Single Local Growth Funding has been allocated to create a cycle path along the river from Allington to East Farleigh. MBC £500,000. Funding from Tunbridge and Malling is in doubt and the project may need re-scoping as a result.
Work towards becoming <b>Kent's first "Walker Friendly"</b> destination using the Cyclist Welcome and Walkers Welcome <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify key towns/villages and support Walkers Welcome accreditation (prioritise villages with direct train links into Maidstone)</li> <li>Promotional activity</li> </ul>	Visit Kent Explore Kent Maidstone Borough Council Tourism South East	M	Leader funding, participant fees

## 9 APPENDIX: MARKET TRENDS

Key market trends for leisure tourism that the DMP Group needs to bear in mind:

- ▶ **Higher socio-economic groups are continuing to spend:** Post-recession, people in the lower socio-economic groups continue to curb their spending, but higher socio-economic groups have protected their leisure spend, including spend on leisure breaks, which are seen as an ‘antidote’ to the stresses of life. They are looking for inspiration as well as information.
  - So ... Successful destinations are clear about what makes them different from the rest.
- ▶ **Boomers are taking more leisure short breaks:** The Boomer generation (born 1946-64) are a really important market. They are affluent (approx. 20% of the population owning 80% of the wealth) and take 40% of UK short breaks. There is a growing trend for some Boomers to take multiple breaks (some very short) each year. There have been an extra 5 million domestic short breaks since 2006, and 4 million of those have been by people aged 55+. But it’s really important to recognise that Boomers are different from previous generations – in attitude as well as behaviour.
  - So ... Successful destinations understand what makes Boomers tick.
- ▶ **Demographic and social changes are changing leisure trip-taking:** The ageing population, with people staying active for longer; the changing shape of the family – more families with a single child and/or single parent, more families where both parents work, more divorced and step families, and more grandparents actively supporting their children and grandchildren, including planning and purchasing multi-generational trips.
  - So ... Successful destinations recognise and plan for these changes.
- ▶ **People are looking for “live” experiences:** People are looking to their trips to deliver ‘experiences’ – whether physical wellbeing, emotional, spiritual or intellectual fulfilment, to learn new skills, or to take part in events and new activities. In contrast to increasingly screen-centric daily life, shared experiences with colleagues, loved ones, friends and family are important reasons to travel. Live events and festivals have grown exponentially and can give people a strong reason to travel, as well as raising awareness of a destination.
  - So ... Successful destinations develop and market “experiences” rather than purely physical assets.

**Disclaimer:** All information and analysis supplied by Blue Sail Consulting Ltd and our sub-contractors is delivered in good faith and represents our professional judgement based on the information obtained from the client and elsewhere. The achievement of recommendations, forecasts and valuations depend on factors beyond our control. Any projections, financial or otherwise, in this report are only intended to illustrate particular points of argument and do not constitute forecasts of actual performance



## MAIDSTONE SHARED STORY

MAY 2015

# 1 THE IDEA OF A SHARED STORY™

The most successful places have a simple Shared Story to tell. It's a commonly agreed way of describing the place, that everyone uses when they're planning how to invest in improvements or new experiences, and when they're talking to people who don't know the place.

It's a short and simple narrative that makes it clear what is special and different about the place. But it mustn't overpromise. It must go with the grain of the place, and be authentic and true. It focuses on **the distinctive qualities** that capture the essence of the place: **it isn't a list** of everything that's on offer.

If everyone uses the same broad ideas to *develop* the place, and then uses some of the same concepts and phrases to *talk about* the place externally, the image of Maidstone, and the actual experiences in the place, will be much stronger. And that will mean more impact, and more visitors. It will also raise positive awareness among other external people you are trying to reach with positive messages about the place.

We're not suggesting that the offer or marketing by all the various organisations, agencies and businesses in the area should be the same – far from it. Marketing communications – the tone of voice and vocabulary – will be different for different markets.

But the Shared Story should provide strong themes, ideas and inspiration that can be reflected in marketing and development. We hope stakeholders will use components from it to bring out what is special and different about this area, and to develop their offer. This will build a stronger, clearer picture in the marketplace – a 'shorthand' for the place. And it will inspire people to look for the next level of information.

The Story should set the agenda for developing and managing the destination and will now be used to guide the DMP's Action Planning stage.

Blue Sail has helped to develop the Maidstone Story by:

- ▶ Looking at what is currently being said and written about the place – by the tourism agencies, local businesses, travel writers and visitors
- ▶ Working with stakeholders in a creative workshop to explore what they believe is special & different about the place
- ▶ Applying our knowledge about what differentiates places in the crowded and competitive visitor marketplace
- ▶ Testing and discussing a first draft with the DMP Project Group before producing this final version.



## 2 THE MAIDSTONE STORY

This is the Shared Story for Maidstone. For annotations (explaining choices of words, phrases and emphases), see the next section.

At the heart of the Garden of England is Kent's historic county town of Maidstone, set in a region of wide fertile river valleys and ancient woodlands, dotted with prosperous villages. Less than an hour from London and you're in another, gentler world ...

The busy county town itself – the site of a famous battle from the English Civil War – stretches across one of England's great rivers, the Medway. To the north is the Pilgrim's Way, an ancient route from London to Canterbury along the tops of the North Downs. To the south is the gentle rolling landscape of the Kent Weald, with its oasts, orchards and vines ...

There's a strong Kentish feel to Maidstone and its villages ... the ragstone walls, the weatherboarding, the Kent peg tiles, the green hop ales, the soft fruit and top fruit ... apples and cobnuts, and bowls of cherries at the farm gate. The county town's roots may be Roman and medieval, but you could say the countryside – with its timbered 16<sup>th</sup> century houses – is quintessential Tudor England: it was Henry VIII, after all, who ordered the cherries to be planted, and who first called this "the Garden of England". And Leeds Castle – just east of the county town and known as "the loveliest castle in the world" – was home to six medieval queens then transformed into a fairytale Tudor palace.

This area at Kent's heart is the natural place to stay when visiting the county – half way between the channel ports and the capital city. It's a great base for exploring – along the Medway on a river cruise, hiring a boat or canoe, or walking and cycling beside the river. Following the Blossom Trail in the spring. Visiting vineyards in the autumn. Enjoying the best of Kent produce in contemporary restaurants and gastro pubs. It's Kent's capital for big events too – with tens of thousands at a time coming here for the South East's biggest pop concerts, classical extravaganzas, and business shows. And always within easy reach are Canterbury, Chartwell, Hever, Sissinghurst, Romney Marsh, and the coast.

### 3 WHY THESE WORDS, PHRASES & THEMES?

**Para 1:** The Story opens with the very positive imagery of “heart” and “Garden of England”. It uses “historic county town” to give Maidstone status. Then it links immediately with the rural. It mentions “prosperous” villages as this suggests there is a good quality hospitality infrastructure (places to stay and to eat). It positions the area as close to the capital, but a world away in terms of leisure and relaxation.

**Para 2:** This para focuses on Maidstone’s history and its river position. “Busy county town” suggests somewhere with the buzz and amenities of modern life (without overpromising ... the Story is about stand-out features for visitors compared to other destinations). The Story gives the River Medway status as “one of England’s great rivers”. “Ancient route” builds on the history of the area and locates Maidstone between London and Canterbury – two places with very high awareness. This para mentions “North Downs” and “Kent Weald” – both of which have salience as quality rural areas. “Oasts, orchards and vines” are all very positive and distinctive images, and directly linked to Kent.

**Para 3:** A key message for the Story is “a strong Kentish feel”. The list of Kentish attributes here is distinctive and appeals to the senses. A second very strong claim to stake (after “Kentish”) is “quintessential Tudor England”. Of course, like most of England, the area’s history is much longer and more complex than simply “Tudor”. But “Tudor” has a strong positive resonance, and this claim allows Maidstone to make the link with history and countryside, and to unpack the epithet Garden of England, giving it its historic provenance. While avoiding listing attractions, it’s important to include Leeds in the story – it’s one of Kent’s international icons. Leeds Castle has a long and varied history, but the focus here is on the medieval and Tudor links – linking it to both town and countryside.

**Para 4:** The final para focuses on location, and the idea of using this area as a base from which to explore the wider area – which research shows is a key reason for choosing it. While this is great for the accommodation providers, Maidstone doesn’t want to lose all the additional visitor spend so it first lists the things you can do *within* the borough, mentioning the outdoors activities, contemporary hospitality offer, and events – all three things that have a strong appeal to visitors. Many places have contemporary dining – so here this is linked to the strong local produce. Most places have events, so here the focus is on the large-scale events – this is distinctive, and enables Maidstone to stake a claim to being “Kent’s capital”, linking back to the “county town” status. Finally the Story mentions some of the famous place names around Maidstone that can easily be reached from here – gaining kudos by association.

At the heart of the Garden of England is Kent’s historic county town of Maidstone, set in a region of wide fertile river valleys and ancient woodlands, dotted with prosperous villages. Less than an hour from London and you’re in another, gentler world ...

The busy county town itself – the site of a famous battle from the English Civil War – stretches across one of England’s great rivers, the Medway. To the north is the Pilgrim’s Way, an ancient route from London to Canterbury along the tops of the North Downs. To the south is the gentle rolling landscape of the Kent Weald, with its oasts, orchards and vines ...

There’s a strong Kentish feel to Maidstone and its villages ... the ragstone walls, the weatherboarding, the Kent peg tiles, the green hop ales, the soft fruit and top fruit ... apples and cobnuts, and bowls of cherries at the farm gate. The county town’s roots may be Roman and medieval, but you could say the countryside – with its timbered 16<sup>th</sup> century houses – is quintessential Tudor England: it was Henry VIII, after all, who ordered the cherries to be planted, and who first called this “the Garden of England”. And Leeds Castle – just east of the county town and known as “the loveliest castle in the world” – was home to six medieval queens then transformed into a fairytale Tudor palace.

This area at Kent’s heart is the natural place to stay when visiting the county – half way between the channel ports and the capital city. It’s a great base for exploring – along the Medway on a river cruise, hiring a boat or canoe, or walking and cycling beside the river. Following the Blossom Trail in the spring. Visiting vineyards in the autumn. Enjoying the best of Kent produce in contemporary restaurants and gastro pubs. It’s Kent’s capital for big events too – with tens of thousands at a time coming here for the South East’s biggest pop concerts, classical extravaganzas, and business shows. And always within easy reach are Canterbury, Chartwell, Hever, Sissinghurst, Romney Marsh, and the coast.



## MAIDSTONE DMP Think Tank Record

**Facilitators:**  
**Amanda Shepherd**  
**Michele Grant**

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

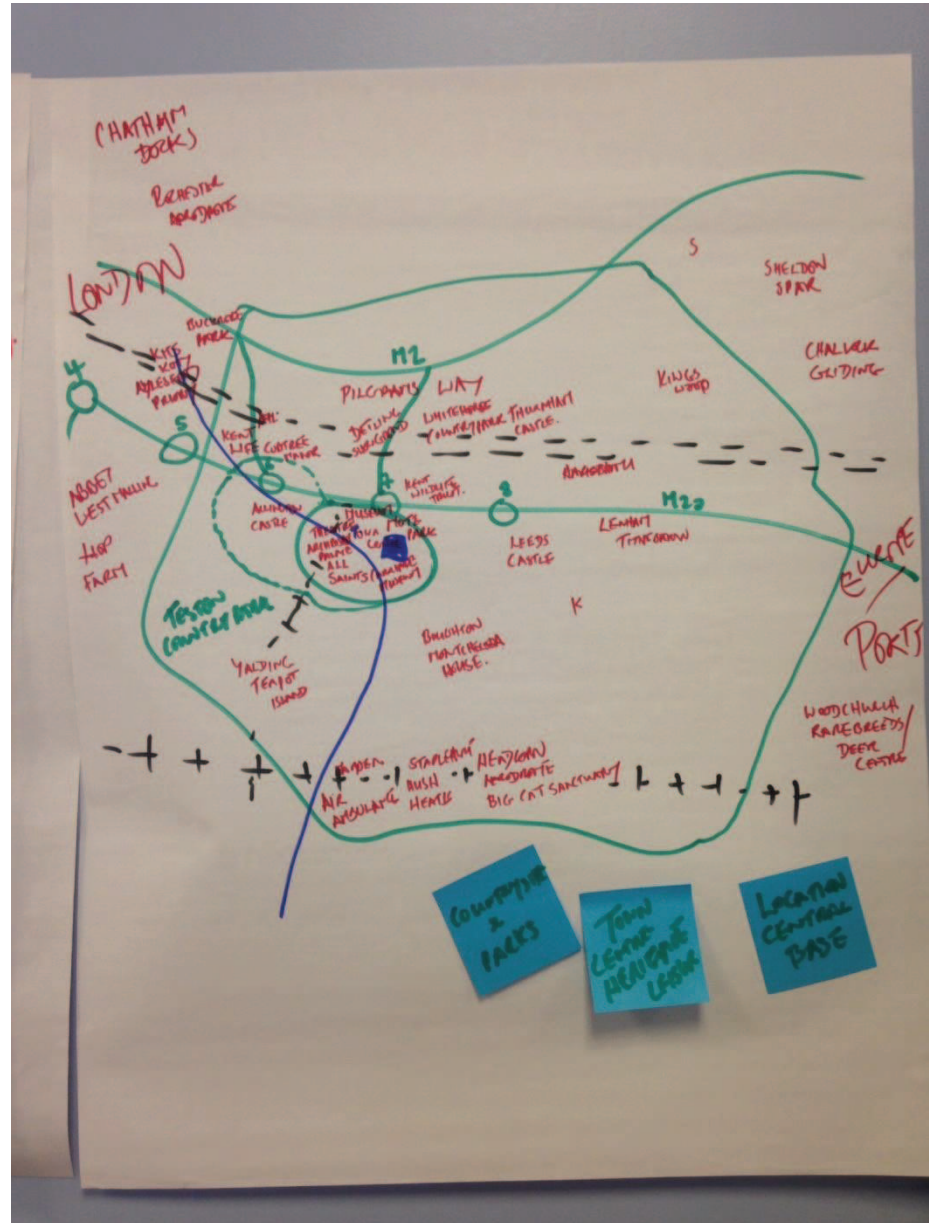
New riverside development at last  
Riverside destination regeneration



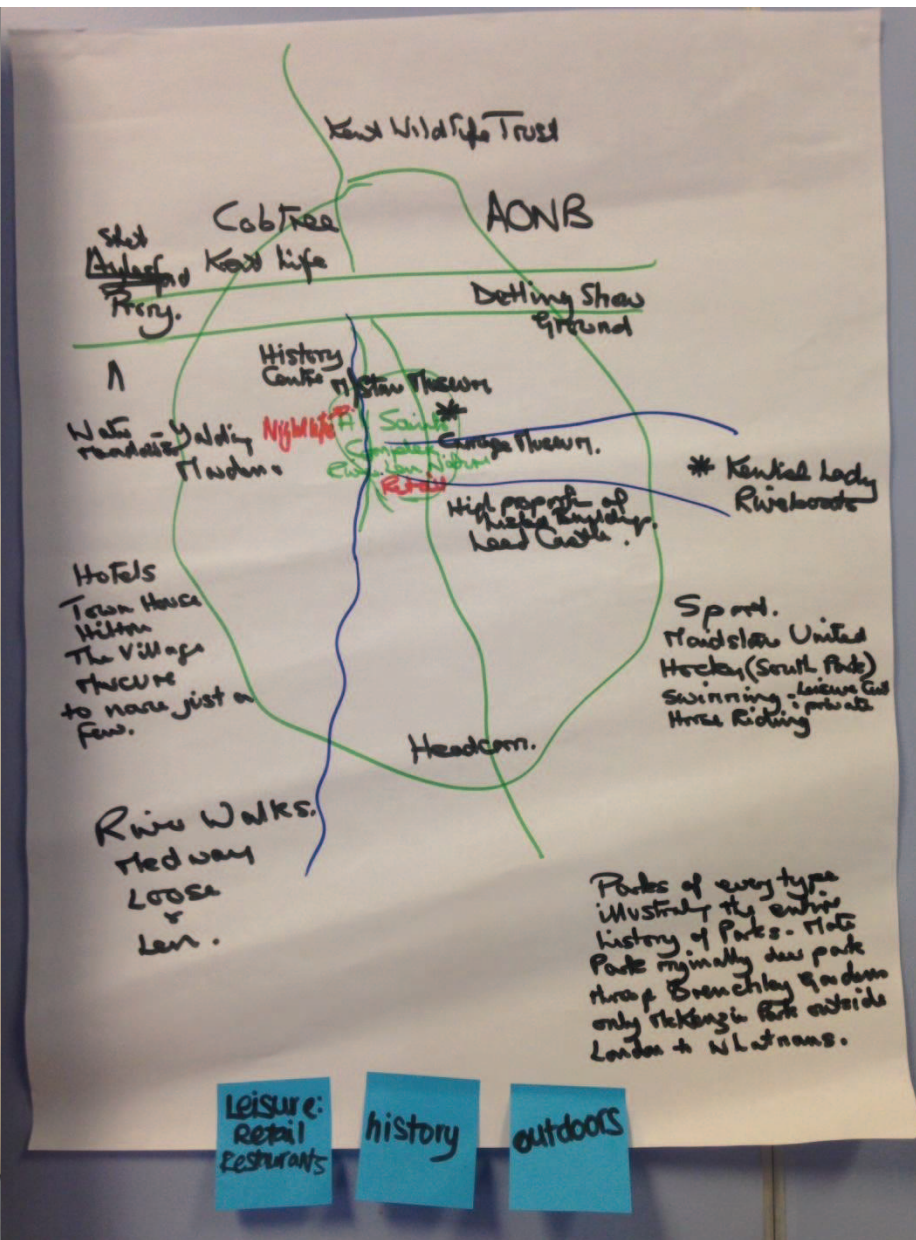
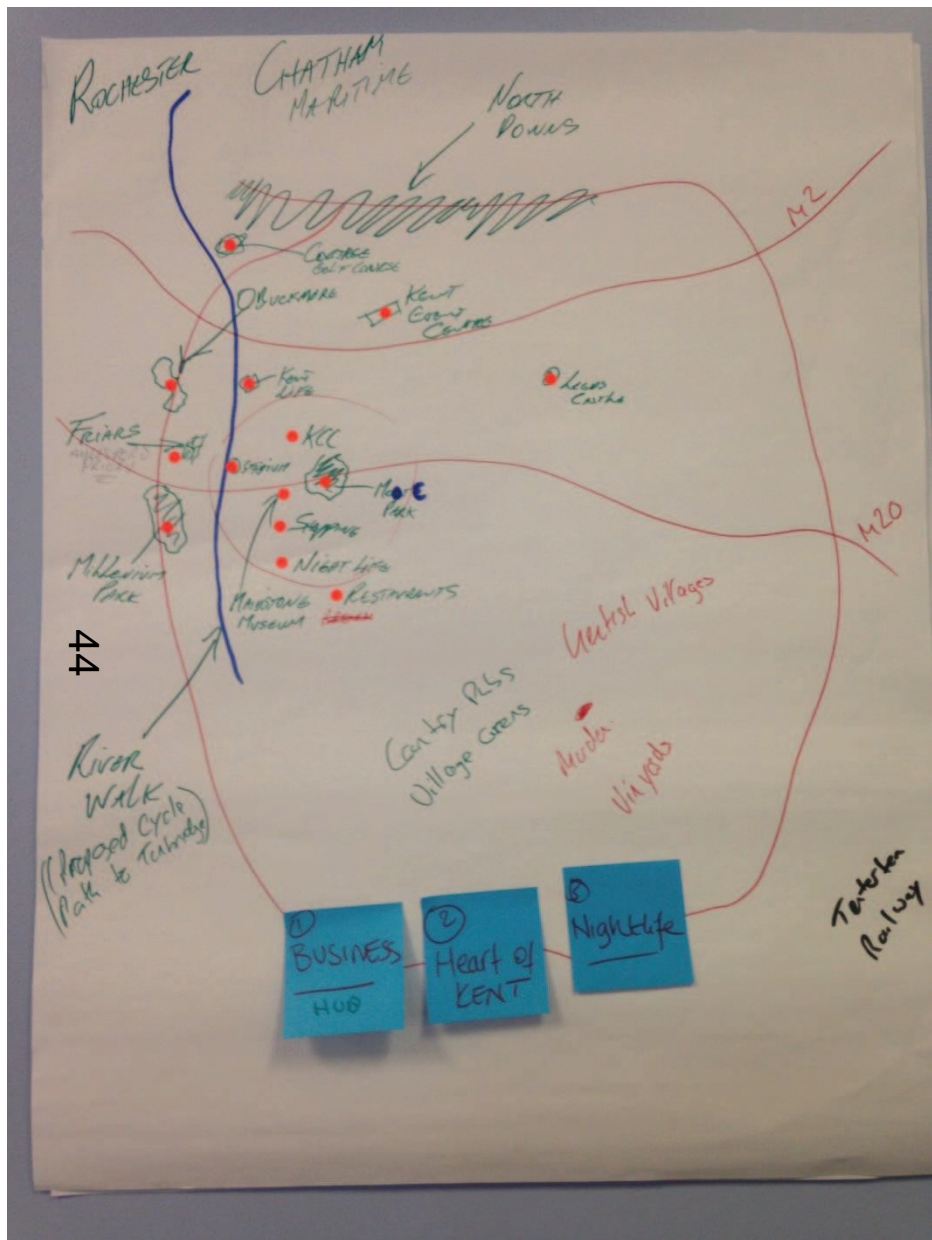
# Mapping

We asked you, in small groups, to sketch rough maps of Maidstone borough, mark the main tourism features and visitor experiences, include relevant things for visitors beyond the boundaries, and any developments in the pipeline. Then list any themes that emerged. These are the results ...

43

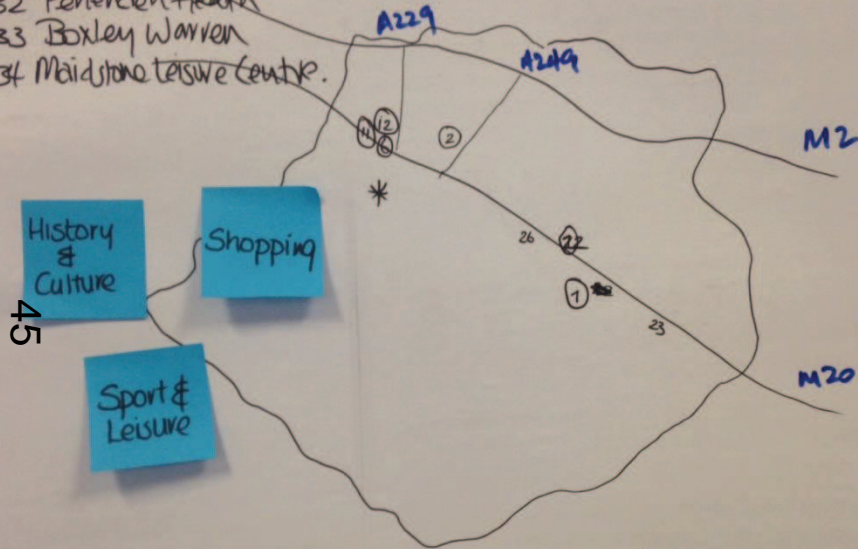








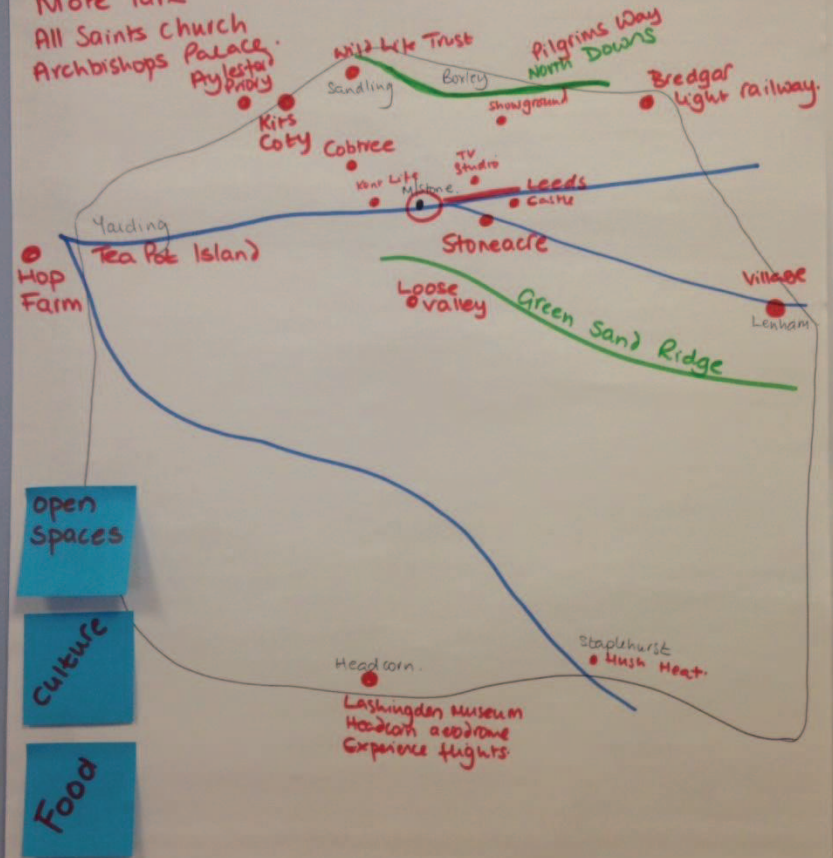
- 27 History & Library Centre
- 28 Pilgrims Way
- 29 Len Valley
- 30 Maidstone Studios
- 31 Vinters Valley
- 32 Penenden Heath
- 33 Boxley Warren
- 34 Maidstone Leisure Centre.



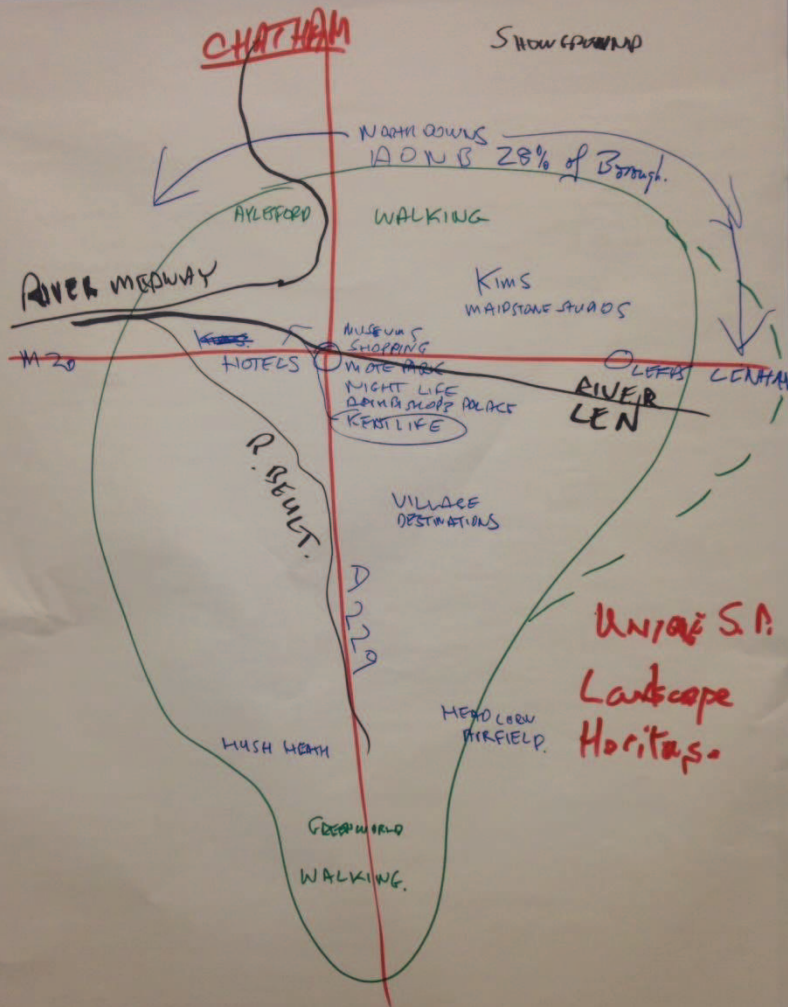
- |                         |                      |                        |
|-------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| 1 Leeds Castle          | 9 Whatman Park *     | 17 Town centre *       |
| 2 Kent Showground       | 10 Kentish Lady *    | shops                  |
| 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

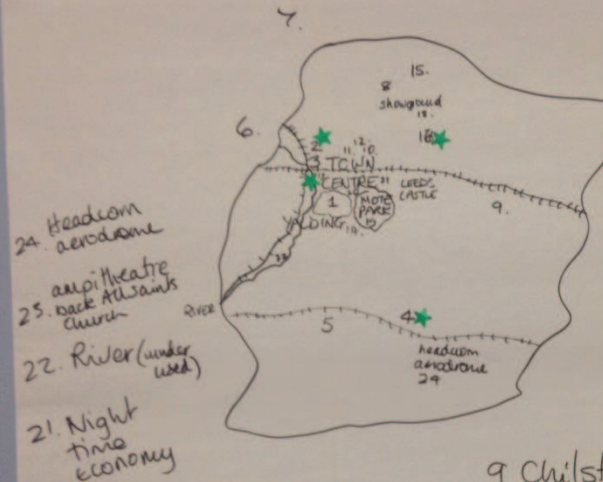
- Museum
- Carriage Museum
- River Trips
- Mote Park
- All Saints church
- Archbishops Palace
- Pyleston Priory



46



Shepherd Neame  
(a Faversham)



historic  
buildings +  
history

open  
space

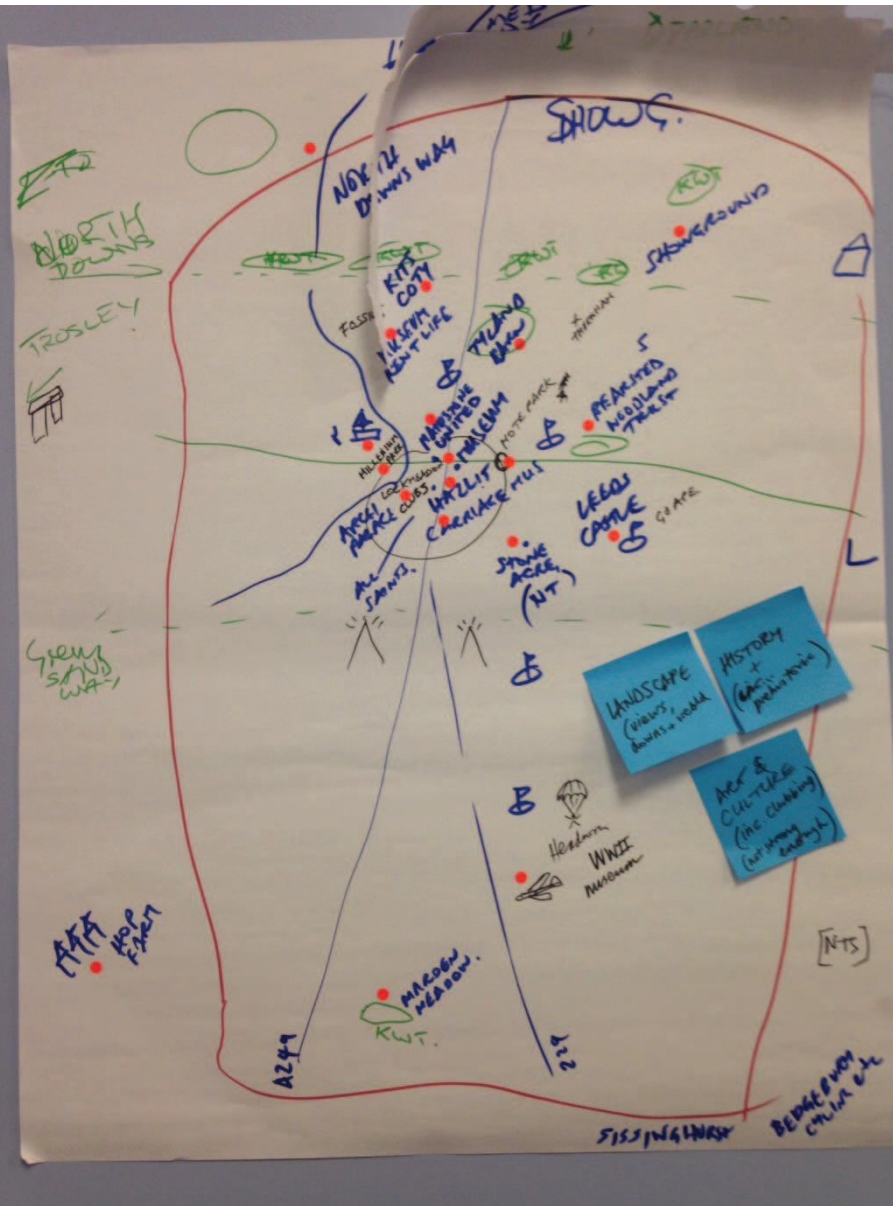
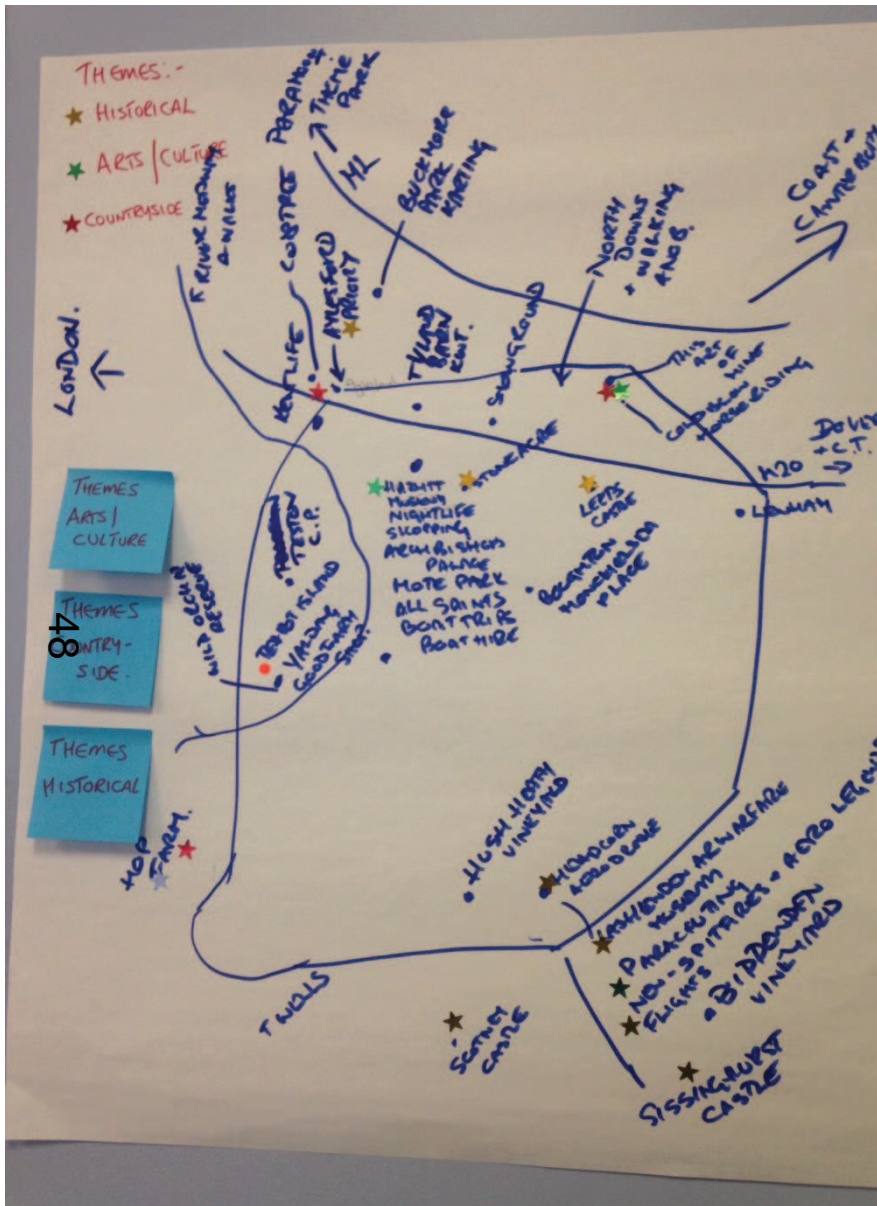
shop  
(night time  
economy)

1. Archbishops palace  
All Saints church  
Carnegie museum
2. Cebtree + Kent Rural life
3. Millenium 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 (chart sutton)
14. Ode crafts (Ode St)
15. Moko Park leisure centre  
golf mini train
16. handgliding Thurham
17. MUF
18. country park
19. shop + eat + garden centres
20. theatre
21. Night time economy
22. River (under used)
23. Headcom aerodrome
24. Headcom aerodrome
25. Back All Saints Church
26. Night life
27. Raina shop place
28. Kent life
29. Headcom aerodrome
30. Headcom aerodrome
31. Headcom aerodrome
32. Headcom aerodrome
33. Headcom aerodrome
34. Headcom aerodrome
35. Headcom aerodrome
36. Headcom aerodrome
37. Headcom aerodrome
38. Headcom aerodrome
39. Headcom aerodrome
40. Headcom aerodrome









## 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





## What's good?

We split the room into groups of 4, and asked you to brainstorm “what’s GOOD about tourism in Maidstone now”. Each group produced a long list and then chose their 3 most important things. We’ve made this word cloud of these top 3s: the larger the word, the more often it appeared.

# Heritage

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## & not so good?

Next we asked you to brainstorm “what’s NOT SO GOOD about tourism in Maidstone now. Each group produced a long list and then chose their 3 most significant important things. We’ve made this word cloud of these top 3s: the larger the word, the more often it appeared.

51



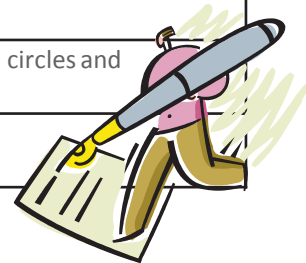
We asked you, solo, to write us a postcard. On one side of your postcard complete the phrase:  
*"If you ask me, what this place needs is ..."*  
 And on the other side of your postcard:  
*"And if we did that then ..."*  
*("That's what I reckon any way")*

52



<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





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# Market research findings

KENT GARDEN *of* ENGLAND [visitkent.co.uk](http://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
<b>£251,608,000</b>	<b>TOTAL VALUE OF TOURISM</b>
5,190	Estimated actual employment
8%	Proportion of all employment

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

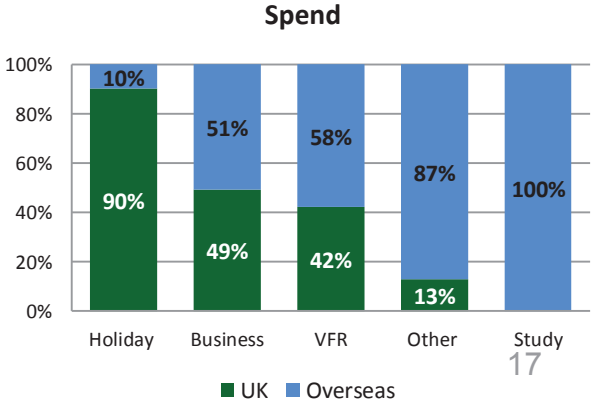
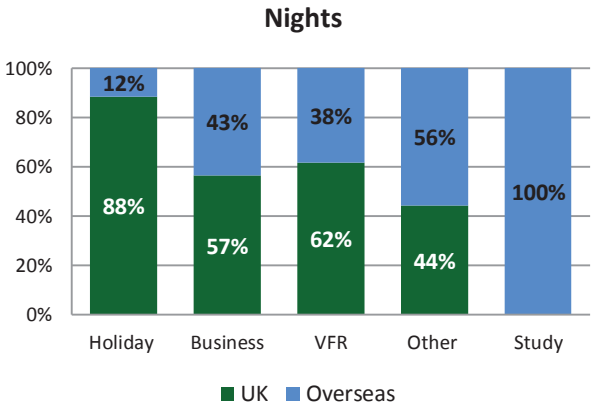
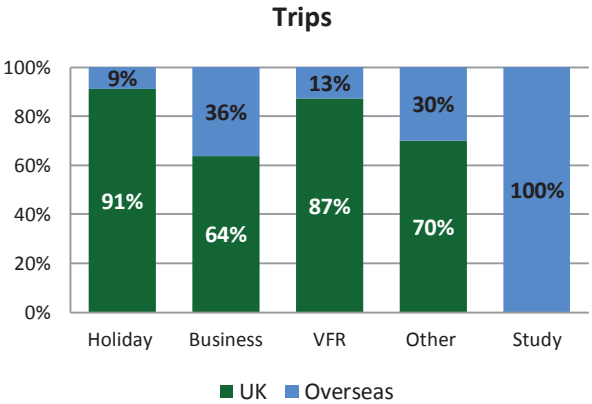
\* It is assumed that 40% of travel spend will take place at the origin of the trip rather than at the destination.

# 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

57

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

50  
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	2011/12 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

## 09 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 Mallang 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 ...





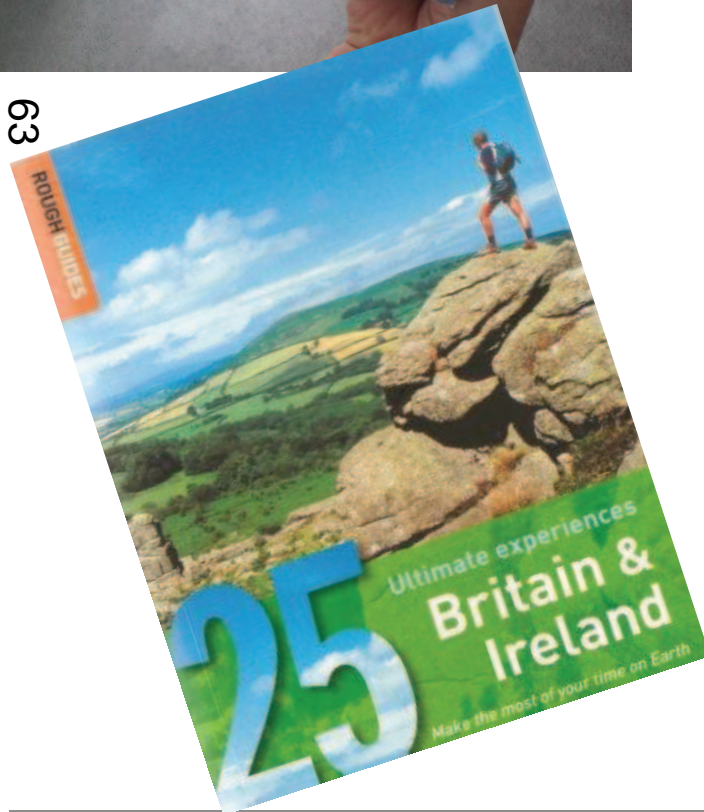
## SLIDES SHOWN AT THE WORKSHOP



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:

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*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.*

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... 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*



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Maidstone Borough	Unexpected Innovative
Maidstone	Potential Opportunity Maid-in-Stone Opportunity Memories Variety Varied
Maidstone Town	Fragments Moving Changing Potential Challenging
Fremelin 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

web bluesail.com  
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michele.grant@bluesail.com



BLUE SAIL ►

VISITORS PLACES DESTINATIONS

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

*- Michele & Amanda*

## Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee

**13<sup>th</sup> July 2015**

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

**Yes**

## Parking charges in Mote Park

<b>Final Decision-Maker</b>	Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee
<b>Lead Director or Head of Service</b>	Dawn Hudd, Head of Commercial and Economic Development
<b>Lead Officer and Report Author</b>	Marcus Lawler, Commercial Projects Manager
<b>Classification</b>	Non-exempt
<b>Wards affected</b>	All

### **This report makes the following recommendations to the Committee:**

1. That parking charges are introduced in Mote Park.
2. That the preferred options at para. 4 are approved to enforce the charges.
3. That authority to delegated to the Parking Services Manager to issue concessions and free parking permits to volunteers of the Mote Park Fellowship; community and special interest groups that already pay to use the park (such as Maidstone Victory Angling Club; Big Bang Productions; Cygnet Model Boat Club; etc.); park residents; and charitable or community groups (such as MENCAP) based on an agreed criteria.
4. That a budget of £77,000 is earmarked for the delivery of this project from the capital programme funding for commercial projects.
5. That authority is delegated to the Head of Commercial and Economic Development to spend the budget to implement the proposal.

### **This report relates to the following corporate priorities:**

- Keeping Maidstone Borough and attractive place for all: Ensuring there are good leisure and cultural attractions.

### **Timetable**

<b><i>Meeting</i></b>	<b><i>Date</i></b>
Policy and Resources Committee	Not required
Council	Not required
Other Committee	Not required



# Parking charges in Mote Park

## 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 On 28<sup>th</sup> June 2013 the Council considered a report of the Director of Regeneration and Communities entitled Leisure and Culture Services. The decision record shows that:

2. *That the establishment of a new business team called Maidstone Culture and Leisure (MCL) under the Head of Commercial and Economic Development be agreed.*
3. *That the principle of reducing the net cost of cultural and leisure services to the Council be agreed and delegated authority be given to the Director of Regeneration and Communities to progress the projects identified in paragraphs 1.3.7 – 1.3.9 of the report of the Director of Regeneration and Communities and, in particular, agree:-*
  - vi) *A review of parking demand and traffic management inside and outside Mote Park be undertaken including consultation with residents living adjacent to the park and park users regarding both day to day arrangements and those put in place when events are held in the park.*

1.2 This report is the culmination of that review and recommends the introduction of a nominal parking charge at Mote Park as the third of three measures, (the others including the Mote Park Adventure Zone and bringing catering in the park back in-house), designed to contribute to the operating budget of the council's Parks and Open spaces and to allow investment in improving the infrastructure in the park; particularly the café and toilets.

1.3 The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) was approved, as part of the Council's budget in February 2015. The MTFS contains a £200k contribution from the council's commercialisation programme, including introducing parking charges in Mote Park. Savings from the operating costs or from other sources of revenue will be required in order to balance the Council's budget if the nominal charge for parking is not approved.

1.4 Implementing the recommendations in this report is estimated to generate an income contribution in excess of £180k per annum, for an up-front capital investment of £77,000.

## 2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

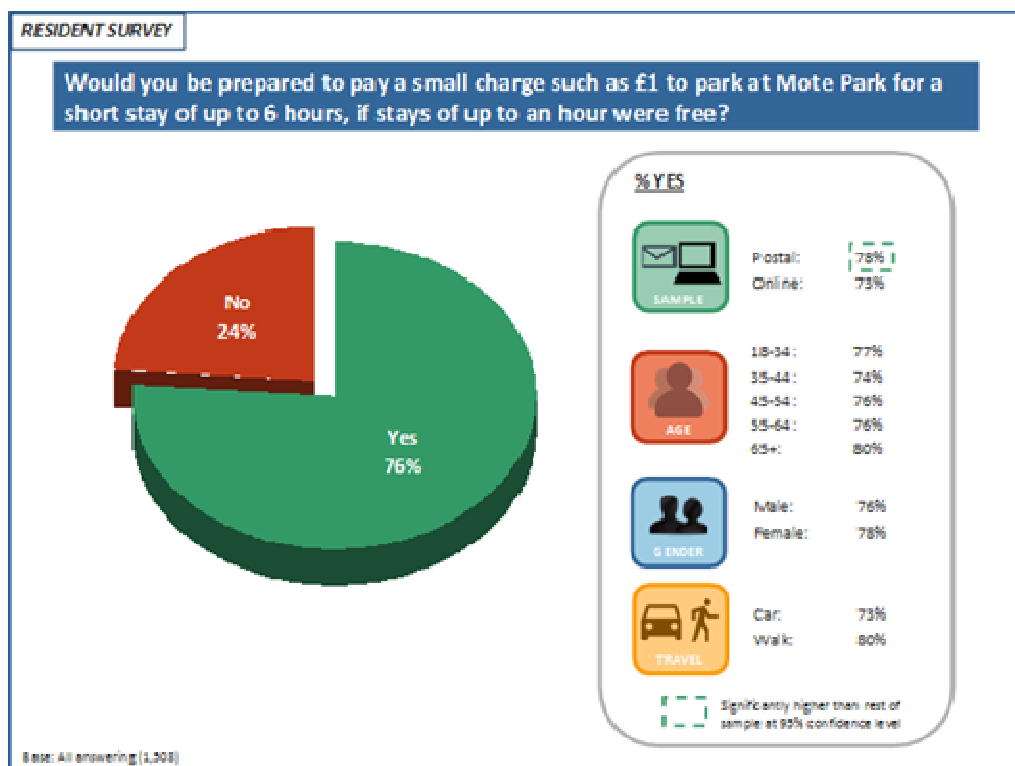
2.1 Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) is responsible for around 70 parks and open spaces of which 6 are major parks. The council has a budget of £1.8 million for day-to-day maintenance and Health and Safety remedial work (for example removing branches that are at risk of falling) for parks and open spaces. This is a significant investment, which represents approximately 10% of the council's total operating budget.



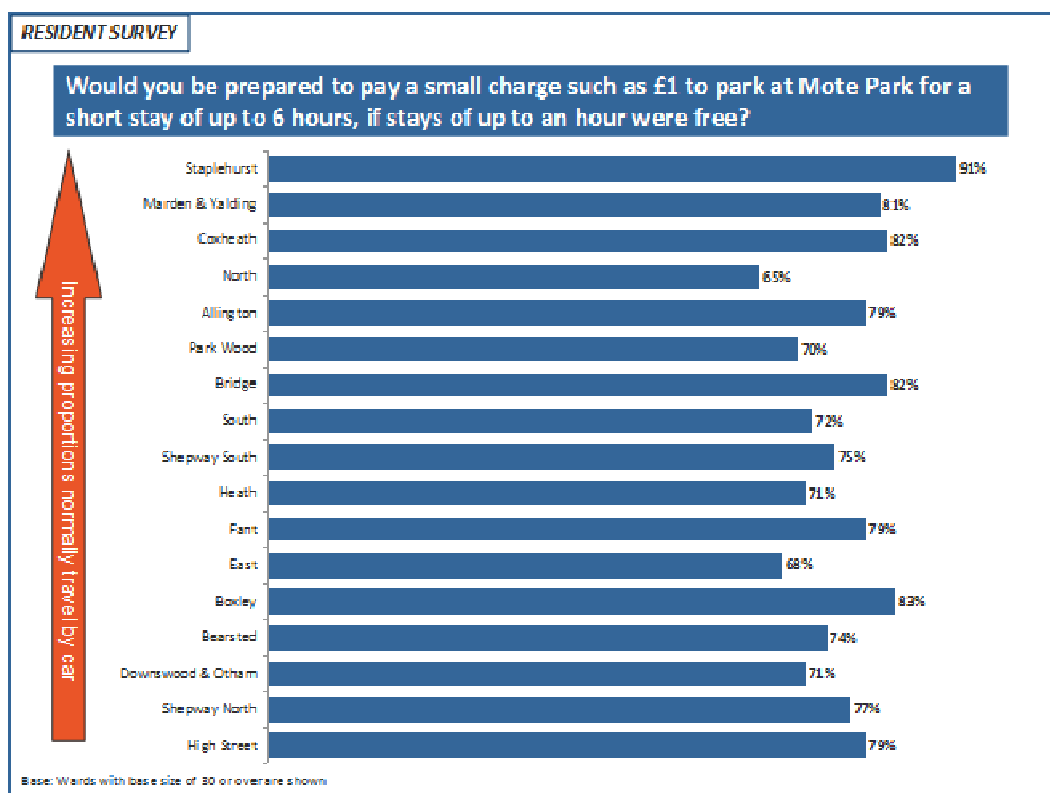
- 2.2 The council has achieved Green Flag status for Whatman Park, Clare Park and Cobtree Manor Park, with the 'jewel in the crown' undoubtedly Mote Park, a 460 acre park with easy access to Maidstone town centre. The park not only has Green Flag status but was recently voted Britain's second favourite park in a national poll.
- 2.3 Mote Park has long been a major visitor attraction. Sensory Trust surveyed user numbers and demographics in 2008 as part of preparing a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a restoration project. Estimates for that year were 660,000 user visits and 180,000 car visits.
- 2.4 The bid was successful and Mote Park received £2.5m to fund a joint MBC and Heritage Lottery fund project completed in 2011 which significantly improved the leisure offering. It has been so successful the park has experienced an increase in visits from circa 660,000 in 2009 to over 1,000,000 in 2013/14. Cars visiting Mote Park have increased from an estimated 180,000 in 2010/11 to 385,000 in 2013/14. Numbers for both types of visits for this year are currently up 10% on previous years.
- 2.5 The increase in visits to the parks, and in particular Mote Park, has increased the pressure on the budget to maintain the current standards. There have been a range of measures to make best use of the limited resources, including the involvement of volunteers, the value of which currently stands at around £40,000 per annum (according to Heritage Lottery Fund values). However, there is a real risk that Mote Park will start to absorb a disproportionate amount of the budget allocation as the rise in visits to this park continues, to the potential detriment of the Borough's other parks and open spaces.
- 2.6 The current funding arrangements for parks and open spaces, are no longer considered sustainable and current standards cannot be maintained within existing budgets. The council's financial position continues to be challenging and it is expected that the funding settlement for future years will see even further funding reductions. In order to minimise the impact of the funding reductions, the council agreed to identify alternative sources of revenue, with the proposal to introduce parking charges one of a range of measures proposed.
- 2.7 In order to inform the proposals for Mote Park, the Council commissioned Lake Market Research to conduct a survey of users of the park and a representative sample of 5,000 homes within the borough. The on-line version of the survey was advertised on the Council's website and widely across social media. The full report can be found at Appendix 1. Key findings are as follows:
- 2.8 A large number of the people using Mote Park are travelling from outside of the Borough. Research shows 42% of people who use the park are visitors from outside the Borough; this equates to over 460,000 people and over 180,000 cars.

## 2.9

76% of residents that responded to the survey indicated that they would be prepared to pay a small charge of up to £1. 73% of all respondents that travel to the park by car indicated that they would be prepared to pay the charge.



When analysed by ward, the results showed the majority of those surveyed would pay the nominal charge, from all Maidstone wards; particularly from those with the highest proportion of residents who travel by car.



2.10 A second piece of research was conducted to establish the numbers of cars that visit the park. When the joint Maidstone Borough Council and Heritage Lottery fund project was completed in 2012, automatic counters of pedestrian and vehicle visitors were installed. When this data is combined with the responses to the market research, it has allowed accurate analysis of car and pedestrian visits. In the year 2013/14 384,796 vehicles visited the park.

2.11 The third piece of research has been to look at major parks within Kent, to understand what provisions for parking exist, and what charging measures are in place. A summary is as follows:

<b>Park</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Weekday Charge</b>	<b>Weekend Charge</b>	<b>Season Ticket</b>
Teston Country Park	KCC	£1.20	£1.70	£40.00
Shorne Country Park	KCC	£2.00	£2.50	£40.00
Trosley Country Park	KCC	£1.50	£2.00	£40.00
Manor Park West Malling	KCC	£1.50	£2.00	£40.00
White Horse Country Park	KCC	£1.00	£1.50	£40.00
Dunorlan	Tunbridge wells BC	FREE	FREE	
Tonbridge	Tonbridge and Malling BC	Town centre Parking		
Leybourne Lakes	Tonbridge and Malling BC	£0.80 up to 4 hours, £2.80 over 4 hours	£0.80 up to 4 hours, £2.80 over 4 hours	£25.00
Haysden Country Park	Tonbridge and Malling BC	£0.80 up to 4 hours, £3 over 4 hours	£0.80 up to 4 hours, £3 over 4 hours	£25.00
Bowl Water		£4.00 per person includes Parking		£35.00 per person (concessions available)
Bedgebury Pinetum	Forestry Commission	£9.50 per car Free entry to park		
National Trust		£2/£2.50 average if parking available	Cheaper if member	
Swanley Park	Swanley Town Council	£2 in school holidays	£2 weekends	

2.12 The final piece of research has been to ascertain the views of stakeholder groups on the impact of the introduction of parking charges. These have included: Maidstone Victory Angling Club; Cygnet Model Boat Club; residents of the park; residents around the park; Mote Park Fellowship; ecological interest groups; Maidstone Model Engineering Society; British Military Fitness; Mote Park Watersports Centre; Mencap Charitable Trust. Initial verbal feedback from these groups has been positive, given the context of the Council's funding position. The implementation plans will include arrangements for free parking permits and discounts based on set criteria.

2.13 The financial and operational position of the park has also been reviewed, with the principal findings including:

- The park has an existing income target of £30k originally set in previous years which it has not been able to achieve.
- The Mote park officer funding ends in October 2015. The Mote Park office post has been funded by Heritage Lottery project which was for a 3 year period ending this October. The post, originally funded by the Heritage Lottery Project, has been crucial in driving the park forward. Achievements include: Green Flag; exceptionally high levels of volunteering in the park; Trip Advisor certificate of excellence; second most loved park in the country; 6,000 friends on the Mote Park Facebook Page; establishment of an active and vibrant Friends group; and the establishment of a strong events offer in the park. Currently there is no provision to extend this post past October this year.
- The tree stock in the park requires a rolling programme of maintenance to prolong its life. To make a significant improvement to the tree stock an annual budget of £25,000 per annum should be allowed for inspection and works for five years.

### 3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 A range of options have been considered in relation to the introduction of parking charges in Mote Park.
- 3.2 The first option is to consider whether a nominal charge should be introduced or not.

Option	Advantages and disadvantages	Recommendation
Implement charges	<p>Allows the parks budgets to balance by meeting the £30k income target from the Medium Term Financial Strategy</p> <p>Contributes to the maintenance of the parks and allows capital improvements (i.e. café and toilets) in Mote Park.</p> <p>Small cost incurred by car users</p> <p>Parking outside of the park may be impacted, which will require measures to be put in place.</p>	Recommended
Do not implement charges	<p>Alternative savings or revenue of £200k will have to be identified.</p> <p>Maintaining current standards becomes unsustainable without additional revenue funding</p>	Not recommended

- 3.3 Analysis of the patterns of car park use shows that over 98.5% of parking visits are up to 6 hours in length. The charge proposed is a nominal charge of £1, which if introduced would need to deter commuters, who usually require a parking period in excess of 6 hours. The proposal would introduce a charge of twice the town centre rate for stays over 6 hours to minimise the risk of commuters using the park.

Option	Advantages and disadvantages	Recommendation
Charge £1	Least cost to motorists  Potential gross revenue of £214k based on 100% current estimated visits	This will allow a substantial contribution to the revenue target in the MTFS – recommended.
Charge £1.5	Medium cost to motorists  Potential gross revenue of £480k based on 100% current estimated visits	Not recommended.
Charge £2	Highest cost to motorists  Potential gross revenue of £640nt estimated visits	Not recommended.

- 3.4 If a charge is introduced an option could be to provide a short period of free parking as suggested by the Economic and Commercial Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2015.

Option	Advantages and disadvantages	Recommendation
Offer 1 hour free parking	<p>Meets the aspirations of some special interest groups</p> <p>Meets the recommendation of Economic and Commercial Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee</p> <p>Having a two stage parking approach will require more complex implementation and operational arrangements</p> <p>Having a two stage parking approach will be more difficult and costly to enforce</p> <p>A free hour period reduces revenue opportunities by at least £54k if charges are set at £1 based on current usage.</p>	Not recommended
Do not offer 1 hour free parking	<p>A standard charging period is easier for the public to understand and is cost effective to implement and enforce</p> <p>Does not reduce revenue opportunity</p>	Recommended



- 3.5 If charges are introduced there would be the option to introduce season tickets that would be available for residents that are regular users of the park, as suggested by the Economic and Commercial Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2015 2015. A season ticket costing £40 would be proposed to keep the cost in line with the other season ticket prices for car parking in parks (for example in KCC's parks).

Option	Advantages and disadvantages	Recommendation
Offer a season ticket	<p>Ensures that regular park users are not penalised</p> <p>Allows residents of the borough greater flexibility</p> <p>Weighs the balance of charges towards non-borough residents</p> <p>Administrative burden and cost of £25 to issue each ticket (based on charge for existing resident's parking scheme).</p> <p>Meets the aspirations of previous committees</p> <p>Loss of some revenue</p>	Recommended
Do not offer a season ticket	<p>Regular users of the park could end up paying considerable charges</p> <p>Offers no advantage to residents</p>	Not recommended

- 3.6 If charges are introduced an option would be to offer concessions to special interest groups, including those already paying to use the park, as suggested by the Economic and Commercial Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2015.

<b>Option</b>	<b>Advantages and disadvantages</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
Offer concessions	<p>Meets the recommendation of Economic and Commercial Development Overview and Scrutiny</p> <p>Ensures special interest groups already paying to use the park do not pay twice to use the park</p> <p>Allows continued use of the park by charitable groups</p>	Recommended
Do not offer concessions	May restrict the ability of charities to continue using the park	Not recommended

#### **4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 Based on the options set out above in section 3, the preferred option is to introduce parking charges in Mote Park with the following conditions:
- The charge will be set at £1 for stays of up to six hours (with no return in 2 hours).
  - Stays of longer than six hours will be charged at twice the rate of the town centre car parks.
  - A season ticket will be offered to borough residents at an annual cost of £40. (Maximum stay of six hours with no return in 2 hours)
  - Special interest groups will qualify for concessions. (No maximum stay)
- 4.2 It is proposed that authority is delegated to the Head of Commercial and Economic Development to finalise operational details in conjunction with the Parking Services Manager; spend the budget in support of delivery of the project; to obtain the relevant permissions and licences to implement charges.
- 4.3 If the Committee approves the preferred option then the Council will be required to enforce the scheme by way of a Traffic Regulation Order. It is proposed that the enforcement function is delegated to Parking Services. The cost of

enforcement will be part of the operating costs. The council will also monitor and review the impact on parking in the areas around the park and identify measures to mitigate any adverse impact that may arise due to the introduction of charges.

4.4 As described at para.4.6 the report has made prudent assumptions for the contribution this proposal will generate. After the first year of operation quantitative data will be available on the actual revenue generated and at that time future estimates, assumptions and allocations will be revised. For the initial year of operation it is recommended that the net revenue from the introduction of charges is used to fund the following , in the order set out below:

- Meeting the remainder of the existing income target of £30k; any surplus then being deployed to:
- Contribution to the £33k cost of retaining the Mote Park Officer; any surplus then being deployed to
- Contribution to a tree management programme which will be £10,000 in 2016/17; £15,000 in 2017/18; and £20,000. At this point the programme funding will be reviewed. Any surplus then being deployed to:
- Contribution to the MTFS, which if the assumptions at para.4.6 are correct will be £98,000.

4.5 A capital budget to deliver the project has been calculated as follows:

<b>Item</b>	<b>Cost</b>
Project Management and QA	£12,000
Traffic regulation order (including advertising; consultation; survey; signage; etc.).	£5,000
Pay and display machines purchase and installation.	£40,000
Signage	£10,000
Access control (bollards; crocodile teeth; etc.).	£10,000
Project manager's discretionary budget	£10,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£87,000</b>

#### 4.6 Operating costs and revenue are estimated as follows:

<b>Parking Charge Income</b>	<b>No free period</b>	<b>1 hour free period (Est. 58,000 visits)</b>
Maximum income (based on current car trips with no uptake of season tickets or concessions) with VAT deducted.	£320,000	£271,000
<b>Costs</b>		
Parking services (CEOs etc.)	£24,000	£36,000 (Additional enforcement visits required, increasing deployed hour costs)
Cash collection	£5,000	£5,000
Repairs and maintenance	£6,000	£6,000
Pay unit vandalism	£8,000	£8,000
<b>Total operating costs</b>	<b>£43,000</b>	<b>£55,000</b>
<b>Maximum net contribution</b>	<b>£277,000</b>	<b>£216,000</b>
Season ticket; changing use patterns; and concession discount (assumed 128,000 visits)	-£105,600	-£105,600
<b>Estimated Net Annual Income</b>	<b>£171,400</b>	<b>£110,400</b>

It should be noted that for financial planning purposes, the estimated net annual income assumes two thirds of the current car trips will pay the charge, to ensure that the level of income is not overstated. The actual income levels will be established in the first year of implementation and will then be used to estimate and adjust the assumptions for future years.

## 5. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

### 5.1 Previous Committee feedback and resolutions

The consultation results are set out in section 2 of this report.

Feedback from Cabinet and the Economic and Commercial Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee has been incorporated in this report.

## 6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 6.1 Should the Committee approve the recommendations in this report, they will be implemented as part of the wider programme of improvements on going in Mote Park, which includes: a new café and visitor centre; new toilets; re-siting of the maintenance operational base; and the Adventure Zone. A project manager will be appointed and will be responsible for incorporating parking charges into wider programme. The main actions will be as follows:

Action	Start	Finish
Advertise and formally consult with all stakeholders on TRO; implementation.	Aug 2015	Nov 2015 (Dependant on Committee dates to review formal objections to TRO)
Construction of pay points and other infrastructure for parking	Nov 2015	Dec 2015
Identification of possible parking displacement and implementation remedial measures	Dec 2015	March 2016 (review of findings)
<b>Start of charging</b>	<b>Jan 2016</b>	

- 6.2 If approved this project will be communicated to stakeholders, via a communications plan designed in conjuncture with the Communications Manager.

## 7. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
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<b>Impact on Corporate Priorities</b>	<p>This report supports the corporate priority of:</p> <p><b><i>Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all.</i></b></p> <p>Ensuring there are good leisure and cultural attractions</p> <p>Providing a clean and safe environment</p>	Zena Cooke, Director of Communities and Regeneration
<b>Risk Management</b>	A risk register will be maintained as part of the project, setting out the likely risks and the actions that will be taken to mitigate them.	Richard Clarke, Head of Audit Partnership
<b>Financial</b>	<p>A provision for commercial projects is contained within the capital programme and the recommendations within this report will be covered by that provision.</p> <p>The budget of £200,000 is a Council wide assumption of income from the Commercialisation Strategy. As the most significant proposal coming forward for 2016/17 this scheme will need to deliver the majority, if not all of the target.</p> <p>In addition there is a need to identify further corporate savings of £1.2m and careful consideration should be given to the use of any additional income above this target.</p>	<p>Zena Cooke, Director of Communities and Regeneration (s.151 Officer)</p> <p><i>Tbc finance officer (Maxine Mahon?)</i></p>
<b>Staffing</b>	There are no direct staffing implications arising from this report. Need to reference how we are dealing with the PM.	
<b>Legal</b>	The freehold title to Mote Park is subject to a covenant requiring Maidstone Borough Council to keep the majority of the park as public open space for the benefit of the public. It could in theory be argued that the charging of a fee for the use of the car park, albeit a nominal amount, is contrary to this covenant on the basis that it might restrict access to some users. There are previous legal cases which have held that charging for admission to parks in certain circumstances is consistent with the requirement to provide free and unrestricted access. Taking these cases into account together with (1) the results of the consultation which show the	John Scarborough Head of the Legal Partnership

	majority of consultees are in favour of a small charge and (2) the fact that the charge is nominal and for parking only (ie not for entrance into the park), the Head of Legal Partnership supports the recommendations in the report.	
<b>Equality Impact Needs Assessment</b>	<p>An Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken to ensure there are no equality implications.</p> <p>Blue Badge holders will enjoy an extension of the Council's existing policy which provides for free parking in Council owned car parks.</p> <p>Before installation of the infrastructure required for the operation of this proposal disabled groups will be invited to review plans for their input regarding ease of use for those with particular requirements.</p>	Clare Wood, Policy and Performance Officer
<b>Environmental/Sustainable Development</b>	<p>There are no direct implications arising from this report.</p> <p>Planning permission for pay and display machines should not be required: Part 12, class a, Town and Country Planning General Permitted Development (England) Order 2015.</p>	<p>Jason Taylor, Parks and Leisure Manager</p> <p>James Bailey, Development Manager</p>
<b>Community Safety</b>	No implication.	
<b>Human Rights Act</b>	No implication.	
<b>Procurement</b>	The council will comply with all relevant legislation and procedures. The procurement process will be conducted with the support of the Procurement Manager.	David Tibbit, Property and Procurement Manager
<b>Asset Management</b>	The proposals in this report will contribute towards maintaining the current standards of Mote Park.	Jason Taylor, Parks and Leisure Manager

## 8. REPORT APPENDICES

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

- Appendix I: Lake Market Research report.

## 9. BACKGROUND PAPERS



- Car Park Charges in Mote Park report of the Head of Commercial and Economic Development 10<sup>th</sup> March 2015 to Economic and Commercial Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- Leisure and Culture Services report of the Director of Regeneration and Communities 28<sup>th</sup> June 2013 to Cabinet.