



MAIDSTONE DESTINATION MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR 2019

REPORT FOR MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

MARCH 2019

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1 ABOUT THIS PLAN

This is a one year rolling action plan to commence in April 2019. It is a practical document for use by everyone involved in developing, marketing and managing tourism in Maidstone.

The original DMP covered the three years 2015-2018 and most of the actions within the Plan have either been completed or are underway. The Shared Story, target market segments and the main themes set out in the original Plan remain valid. Therefore, moving forward, the objective is to develop a rolling plan of actions, reviewed annually. That way the momentum of the DMP is sustained and there is a regular opportunity for partners to check the direction of travel is responding to emerging trends, new opportunities and changes in the marketplace.

This first annual action plan has been developed through a process of review and analysis, a business survey, and an industry workshop where around 50 businesses drawn from across the Borough and representing all parts of the sector, came together and worked through a series of exercises facilitated by Blue Sail. Participants took a fresh look at the key strands that make up the DMP and identified the actions for 2019 to contribute to shaping this Plan. We fed back the key messages arising from the workshop to local councillors to get their views on the DMP and how actions aligned with wider Council priorities.

The big things that came out of the process are:

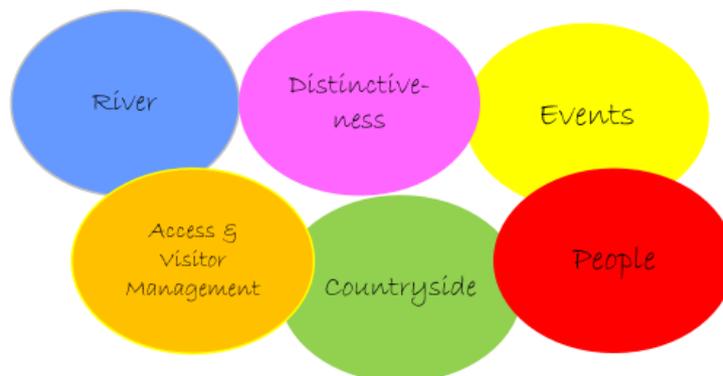
- ▶ **Connecting town and countryside** - there should be a stronger focus on finding opportunities to connect the town and countryside to drive more overnight stays.
- ▶ **Distinctiveness** - creating and promoting distinctive experiences is essential to a successful destination and can be used to strengthen competitive positioning, extend the length of trip, diversify the evening economy and support local pride.
- ▶ **Collaboration** – is essential to deliver the Plan and create a sustainable industry – that is collaboration between businesses and between businesses and the Council.
- ▶ **Transport connections** - at a strategic level, improved transport connections are an important enabler and the needs and views of the tourism sector need to be incorporated in transport planning.
- ▶ **Digital communication & visitor information** - the importance of digital solutions is paramount for visitor marketing and communications, for trails, interpretation and for transport and other visitor information needs.

Businesses agreed that the three strands of the DMP – County Town, Countryside and Events – remained central but that the sub-themes for the County Town (River, Access & Visitor Management and Distinctiveness) had wider applicability across the Borough

and were of equal importance to the three original strands to the Plan. A sixth strand of People was identified with a focus on employment and careers in the sector.

Here are the six strands. The Action Plan has identified activity for each strand over the coming year.

- ▶ **River** – a strong emphasis for investment in the original Plan, it remains a priority and activity should encourage visitors to move between the town and countryside
- ▶ **Distinctiveness** – essential for competitive positioning and an opportunity for collaboration between businesses using the Shared Story
- ▶ **Events** – another area of focus over the last three years and a recognition that there is more to do and a need to make more of what is already happening
- ▶ **Access and visitor management** – a need to focus on transport and to prioritise digital innovation and investment
- ▶ **Countryside** – to develop activity that grows the potential of the countryside and links with the town more strongly, including through working with more businesses
- ▶ **People** – a new strand focusing on careers in the industry, which will be built up over the next few years.



While many of the actions set out below are for the Council to lead, the responsibility for the action is spread across various departments. **To ensure joined up thinking and delivery, it would be helpful to establish a cross-department officer group.** The river and events each have their own industry-led delivery group and the new People strand will work through existing groups to ensure Maidstone contributes to the skills and careers debate and benefits from regional and county initiatives.

2 THE ACTION PLAN

Here are the actions for the financial year April 2019 to March 2020. Longer-term actions identified by businesses at the workshop and ongoing/longer term actions from the 2015-2018 DMP are also captured here to ensure they are revisited as part of the rolling programme. Lead partners are shown in **bold**.

RIVER

| Action | Who needs to be involved |
|--|---|
| Design and produce wayfinding maps – digital and print format | Maidstone Borough Council working in partnerships with Maidstone River Park Partnership |
| Enhanced coordinated promotion of activities & attractions along the river to encourage visitors to explore further | Maidstone River Park Partnership working with local river businesses in the town and countryside |
| Identify locations for cycle racks; explore potential for cycle racks to be provided at visitor attractions/cafés along river; identify funding support to enable (delivery for 2020/21 onwards) | Maidstone River Park Partnership Visitor attractions/cafés Maidstone Borough Council , Kent County Council, One Maidstone |
| Audit volume, location and maintenance of bins and public lavatories along river within Borough to identify needs and potential sites for extra provision (delivery for 2020/21 onwards) | Maidstone River Park Partnership and volunteers |
| Improve facilities for events at amphitheatre for enhanced programme in 2020 onwards including evening events to create more diverse evening economy | Maidstone Borough Council , Maidstone River Park Partnership One Maidstone |
| Establish a regular clear up/maintenance programme – litter picking (on footpaths and on the water), vegetation management etc | Maidstone River Park Partnership , Maidstone Borough Council , visitor attractions/cafés, landowners, Environment Agency |
| Achieve CIC status for Maidstone River Park Partnership | Maidstone River Park Partnership |

Longer term actions are:

- ▶ **Create more river-based events & activities** that appeal to visitors, animate the river and contribute to extending the visitor day into the early evening.
- ▶ **Explore opportunities for more camping cabins/pods** - to enable long distance walking and canoeing.
- ▶ **Continue to monitor car parking and investment in moorings** - to meet demand at locations across the Borough.
- ▶ **Continue with footpath investment along river** – including signing to include distances to key points and accessibility for cyclists.

DISTINCTIVENESS

| Action | Who needs to be involved |
|---|---|
| Ensure Local Plan recognises importance of local distinctiveness for tourism, prioritises it and identifies specific food and drink and arts related opportunities for Maidstone. | Maidstone Borough Council |
| Review Visit Maidstone promotional material – messages, stories and communication media – to strengthen messaging | Maidstone Borough Council working with local businesses |
| Identify ways to capitalise on Garden of England, e.g. through eating establishments using and promoting local food and drink more prominently on their menus, developing more food and drink related trails across the countryside and strengthening their promotion (some actions for implementation 2020/21) Also explore and shortlist arts projects e.g. trails, promotions to position Maidstone’s creativity more strongly (for implementation 2020/21) | Maidstone Borough Council working with local businesses, One Maidstone and arts organisations |
| Use Shared Story to inspire the creation of local business-led experiences – town and countryside | Maidstone Borough Council , One Maidstone, arts organisations, visitor attractions, cultural venues and businesses, accommodation, shops and food businesses (small producers and cafés, restaurants and pubs) |

| Action | Who needs to be involved |
|---|----------------------------------|
| Continue to add to the image library to increase the range of creative ‘only here’ images. Ask stakeholders who have contemporary-style images e.g. Hush Heath Estate, for permission to add theirs to the destination library. Promote the library to local businesses to increase use of the resource and ensure consistent messaging | Maidstone Borough Council |
| Review toolkit materials for update/expansion with particular focus on needs of cultural businesses (to deliver and promote to all tourism-related businesses in 2020) | Maidstone Borough Council |

Longer term actions are:

- ▶ **Encourage quality tourism and cultural businesses into Maidstone** – through inward investment priorities and messaging, providing targeted support for small creative businesses.
- ▶ **Develop a closer relationship with cultural organisations and cultural businesses** – to develop cultural experiences and promotion.
- ▶ **Continue to pursue a shopfront improvement scheme** – pilot in Maidstone and consider for other smaller towns.
- ▶ **Develop more themed itineraries and trails across the Borough** – and engage with a wider range of businesses to deliver this.

EVENTS

| Action | Who needs to be involved |
|---|---|
| Create and sustain a proactive Events Group | Leeds Castle and other large events venues, Maidstone Borough Council (to lead on helping to establish but then to become member with private sector leadership), visitor attractions, accommodation businesses and locally based event companies/large event organisers |

| Action | Who needs to be involved |
|---|---|
| Launch Event app - an event notification and software tool for large events in the borough, and for the booking of Maidstone Borough Council parks and open spaces for events. Event organisers can submit all event notification and all event management documentation for the Safety Advisory Group. | Maidstone Borough Council, Events Group |
| Develop evening elements to events and festivals | Events Group |
| Undertake a review of traffic management for events to identify opportunities to improve arrangements | Events Group, Safety Advisory Group (SAG), Kent County Council Highways Department, emergency services, local businesses |

Longer term actions are:

- ▶ **Continue with the annual themed “the summer of.....” festival season.**
- ▶ **Combine smaller events under a single umbrella** - to strengthen offer and widen impact
- ▶ **Develop events packages** – involving hotels and attractions.
- ▶ **Continue to develop and deliver new markets in different town centre locations** - and develop a calendar of markets throughout the year.

ACCESS & VISITOR MANAGEMENT

| Action | Who needs to be involved |
|---|--|
| Get businesses involved in Kent Big Weekend e.g. both recommending attractions to be included and taking part to grow their knowledge and enable them to recommend to their visitors | Visit Kent, Maidstone Borough Council, visitor attractions, accommodation and retail businesses |
| Review parking charge arrangements from visitor perspective, e.g. pay on departure, potential role of parking app. Identify and learn from case studies of best practice (to implement in 2020/1) | Maidstone Borough Council |

| Action | Who needs to be involved |
|--|---|
| Develop more walking and cycling experiences, packages and promote them to encourage visitors to drive less once they've arrived | Kent Downs AONB, One Maidstone, Explore Kent, Maidstone Borough Council, South East Trains |

Longer term actions are:

- ▶ **Encourage more businesses to develop evening activities and promotions** – to develop and manage the evening economy and perceptions of the town after dark. This is a cross-cutting ongoing action with opportunities under the distinctiveness and events strands, and in marketing and promotion.

COUNTRYSIDE

| Action | Who needs to be involved |
|--|--|
| Walking Festival – plan pilot launch for Autumn 2019 – to extend season and test concept | Maidstone Borough Council, Explore Kent, Kent Downs AONB, Ramblers Association, Visit Kent, Kent County Council, tourism businesses |
| Tackle fly-tipping - promote Country Eye app | Kent Police, Heritage Watch, Maidstone Borough Council |
| Develop a More to Maidstone campaign that promotes countryside experiences to local residents and businesses to create ambassadors | Maidstone Borough Council, all businesses, Kent Downs AONB, Visit Kent |
| Develop interactive digital map provision (roll out 2019/2020/1) | Explore Kent, Visit Kent, Kent Downs AONB, Maidstone Borough Council |

Longer term actions are:

- ▶ **Build up the Walking Festival over three years** – expand and evolve to create a distinctive walking festival.
- ▶ **Achieve “Walker Friendly” destination status using the Cyclist Welcome and Walkers Welcome** – and promote that status.

PEOPLE

| Action | Who needs to be involved |
|---|--|
| Agree how best to work with existing County and regional groups to ensure engagement and dissemination of information across the sector | Kent Hospitality and Tourism Guild, Kent County Council, tourism businesses, Maidstone Borough Council (to help set up) |

| Action | Who needs to be involved |
|--|--|
| Familiarisation trips for school pupils to local tourism businesses (as part of More to Maidstone) | Kent Hospitality and Tourism Guild, hotels and visitor attractions, Kent County Council education service |

Longer term actions will emerge from closer collaboration with existing groups and include:

- ▶ To offer Continued Professional Development (CPD), internships, apprenticeships opportunities, work experience and placements for students in tourism SMEs working with Mid-Kent College, schools and the Kent Hospitality and Tourism guild.