

**Classification:** Public

**Key Decision:** No

## **Gravesham Borough Council**

**Report to:** Community & Leisure Cabinet Committee

**Date:** 2 February 2021

**Reporting officer:** Tourism and Town Twinning Manager  
Assistant Director (Communities)

**Subject:** Gravesham Tourism and Heritage Strategy

### **Purpose and summary of report:**

To report responses to consultation and outline additional associated work which has influenced the amendments proposed to the Tourism and Heritage Strategy prior to its approval by the Cabinet Member for Community & Leisure.

### **Recommendations:**

1. That the Cabinet Committee makes known its views on the amendments proposed to the draft Tourism and Heritage Strategy (appendix 2).

## **1. Consultation on the draft Tourism and Heritage Strategy**

1.1 A draft strategy was reported to this Cabinet Committee in September 2020 prior to consultation with tourism organisations, local businesses, visitors and residents. The consultation took place from 9 December to 17 January via the Council's website, Visit Gravesend Facebook and Twitter pages, and via email databases.

1.2 The headline responses from the consultation are as follows:

1.2.1 99 people/organisations participated in the survey - 87% local residents, 4% local businesses and 3% tourism organisations, 6% other.

1.2.2 53% of responses view Tourism in Gravesham as important; 36% view it as very important.

1.2.3 When asked "What do you think is important about Gravesham's appeal to visitor?", the top 5 answers were - its history, the river, its built heritage, its buildings/architecture, the villages and countryside.

1.2.4 When asked "What do you value the most about the borough's heritage?", the most popular answers were - Riverside/Riverfront; Gravesham's History; Gravesham's Heritage; Architecture/Buildings; Parks and Green Spaces;

1.2.5 When asked “Have you visited any attractions in Gravesham?”, 92% said yes, 8% said no. The most popular answers regarding the places visited were– The riverside; New Tavern Fort and Gardens; the Promenade and Canal Basin area; Pocahontas/St George’s Church; country parks; Gravesend Borough Market; Windmill Hill.

1.2.6 When asked about ranking the 7 objectives within the strategy (1 lowest to 5 highest), the results show the following:

	Objective	Very High	High	Medium
1	Increase day visits and longer stays	32%	25%	27%
2	Grow the stock, quality and variety of visitor accommodation	25%	26%	30%
3	Strengthen Gravesham’s visitor offer	50%	27%	13%
4	A programme of festival, arts and cultural activities to appeal to visitors from further afield	50%	24%	13%
5	Extend the effectiveness of Gravesham’s visitor information and promotion	45%	28%	14%
6	Strengthen local partnership working, skills and work opportunities within the tourism and hospitality sector	40%	35%	16%
7	Value and coordinate the expertise, archiving and interpretation of Gravesham’s heritage and telling its story	54%	27%	9%

1.2.7 Objectives in respect of interpretation of Gravesham’s heritage/story; strengthening Gravesham’s visitor offer; and a programme of festival, arts and cultural activities were ranked the highest.

1.2.8 A number of issues were raised repeatedly by respondents: the tired appearance of the town and its cleanliness; the need for a wider range and quality eateries; the need for an art space and museum; the value of the borough’s culture and heritage; lack of shopping experience; focus in investing in the leisure and hospitality businesses. These demonstrate that respondent’s perceptions of the Borough’s visitor experience are linked with wider improvements.

1.2.9 The consultation demonstrates the importance that respondent place on tourism and heritage in the Borough, indicate what respondents value as being important and their ranking of the objectives support the need to do more to do more to make more of the Borough’s tourism and heritage product. This is consistent with the overall direction of the strategy.

1.2.10 Consideration could be given to reordering the objectives in the strategy to reflect priorities.

## 2. Value and Volume of Tourism 2019

- 2.1 Since reporting the draft strategy, the Council has received an update on the economic impact of tourism in Gravesham for 2019. The value & volume of tourism is derived from the tourism sector recognised “Cambridge Model”.
  - 2.1.1 Tourism was worth an estimated £124 million to the Gravesham economy and supported an estimated 2,793 jobs.
  - 2.1.2 Gravesham received 2.1 million visits, made up of 186,000 staying trips (8.8%) and 1.9 million day trips (90.5%).
  - 2.1.3 Out of the 186,000 staying trips, 79% were domestic visitors and 21% were overseas visitors.
  - 2.1.4 The main visitor expenditure was on retail, food and drink and transport.
- 2.2 These figures have been updated in the strategy. They are based on data available before the Pandemic, but are still helpful in indicating the relative importance of tourism to the Borough’s economy and as a baseline for measuring recovery and future change.

## 3. Experiential Tourism

- 3.1 Gravesham is participating in a legacy Interreg project named ‘EXPERIENCE’ with Visit Kent, Kent AONB and other Kent partners. This project focuses on the development of tourism ‘product’ with a focus on Kent’s ‘Experiential Offer’.
- 3.2 Work has progressed to a point where it can influence the objectives of the tourism and heritage strategy and development of Gravesham’s appeal to visitors. The project is helping to focus on development of visitor ‘experiences’, especially those designed for smaller groups which can be bookable in advance. This is an appropriate way forward for Gravesham to attract and recover its visitors post the Pandemic.
- 3.3 ‘Experiential’ tourism is a growing influence on visitor choices with the key trends being that:
  - 3.3.1 Visitors are looking for *local & authentic* experiences, where they feel less like a tourist and more like a local. In the search for authenticity, the most popular experience is one that takes them behind the scenes to gain an insight into a different way of life, culture or industry.
  - 3.3.2 An experience leaves the visitor ‘positively’ changed – *Transformative Travel*. This can be through education, wellbeing and mindfulness or by gaining a deeper insight and understanding.
  - 3.3.3 *Engaging with the countryside* – accentuated by lockdown, there is an increased desire to get out into the countryside. Although walking and cycling are key activities, when this is combined with other interests such as food & drink or heritage, the consumers’ interest increases significantly.
- 3.4 Research shows that that 65% of the domestic visitor market book an ‘experience’ before leaving home; 80% looking to book an ‘experience’ are prepared to travel up to an hour, any longer and the percentage drops dramatically; 60% are influenced by an ‘experience’ when selecting a destination.

- 3.5 Gravesham has many visitor and heritage strengths, identified within the tourism and heritage strategy, and the EXPERIENCE project is helping to identify opportunities to develop visitor and heritage ‘experiences’ and addressing gaps. The project recommends expanding Gravesham’s ‘product’ around the following themes:
- 3.5.1 *Food & Drink* – to appeal to the growing interest in local food and drink. Such experiences are the most popular bookable visitor product across promotional platforms. The diversity of Gravesham’s food and drink offer can be promoted with trails, visits to producers, markets, etc.
  - 3.5.2 *Multicultural interest* – e.g. guided visits to the Gurdwara; raising the profile of Gravesham’s established programme of cultural festivals, linked to other visits and events, e.g. at the Borough Market, generate a reason to travel and appealing interest beyond the local community
  - 3.5.3 *Heritage* – e.g. Dickens related experiences, including guided visits to Gad’s Hill Place, walking tours of Higham and Cobham, linking to the North Downs Way; river based trips and guided tours of Gravesham’s defence heritage.
  - 3.5.4 *Markets* – building upon the current market offer and cultural events, notwithstanding the impact of the Pandemic, alongside its heritage and place within the Town’s story.
  - 3.5.5 *Pop culture* - Linking into the ‘playcation’ trend for gaming, experience/panic rooms, especially in respect of their appeal to younger people and families and ‘off season’. Strengthening Gravesham’s appeal, aligned with London Resort’s potential offer.
- 3.6 Specifically, access to the countryside, long distance trails and points of historic interest are some of the Borough’s strengths. Generally, 39% of a domestic audience and 29% of international visitors show a high interest in the countryside; and Gravesham’s proximity to large concentrations of populations create the potential to draw more visitors from within less than one-hour’s journey time.
- 3.7 ‘Experience’ products can be developed around Food & Drink; Hidden Heritage; Literacy; Agriculture; Health and Pilgrimage (Pilgrim’s Way/North Downs Way). Opportunities include:
- 3.7.1 ‘Taster’ walks – self-guided or guide led, linked with countryside activities, points of heritage interest.
  - 3.7.2 Pilgrimage/transformational walks linking to the North Downs Way and Kent Downs
  - 3.7.3 Capitalising on the Borough’s string of Country Parks within the Kent Downs AONB – perfect backdrops for rural courses and activity, such as wild cooking and foraging.
  - 3.7.4 Widening access to the countryside for the Borough’s diverse communities.

#### **4. COVID-19 Context**

- 4.1 The Tourism and Heritage strategy has been written in a time of uncertainty, during which the tourism, leisure and hospitality sector has been severely impacted and will be different as and when recovery starts to take shape.
- 4.2 The Experience project is helping businesses within the sector to adapt, to diversify and develop new 'product'; encouraging collaboration within and beyond the sector, aiming to reach new audiences, help recovery and create greater resilience.
- 4.3 Visit Kent are looking to work with businesses/organisations through the Experience Development Programme offering a range of support to build and launch new products, including specialist 1:1 consultancy and business planning, new photography, marketing campaigns and proactive testing and sales with the travel trade.
- 4.4 Four Gravesham businesses have signed up to the programme so far, including The Panic Room, Meopham Valley Vineyard, Stable House Meditation and White Horse Farm. The Tourism Manager is encouraging others to apply and has also submitted an expression of interest around support for Food and Drink trails on behalf of the Council's own development activity.
- 4.5 This activity can be reflected in the action planning associated with delivery of the strategy.

#### **5. London Resort Update**

- 5.1 London Resort's proposals was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate at the end of 2020. These have the potential to significantly change the way visitors perceive Gravesham as a place to visit. The strategy recognises the need to understand in more detail the relationship, especially in respect of visits and stays 'beyond the park'. These can be incorporated into this strategy and the action plan as they become better known.

#### **6. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 6.1 There are no background papers pertaining to this report.

Anyone wishing to inspect background papers should, in the first place, be directed to Committee & Electoral Services who will make the necessary arrangements.

IMPLICATIONS	APPENDIX 1
<b>Legal</b>	No implications at this stage
<b>Finance and Value for Money</b>	No additional budget requests at this point in time. Any future budgetary requirements will be sought following existing procedures i.e. via a Management Team report.
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	This report is a positive action to raise the profile of Gravesham as a tourism destination and bring economic benefits to the Borough.
<b>Data Protection Impact Assessment</b>	<i>A data protection impact assessment (DPIA) should be carried out at the start of any major project involving the use of personal data or if you are making a significant change to an existing process.</i>
	<p>a. Does the project/change being recommended through this paper involve the processing of <a href="#">personal data</a> or <a href="#">special category data</a> or <a href="#">criminal offence data</a>? A definition of each type of data can be found on the Information Commissioner's Office website via the above links.</p>
	<p>b. If yes to question a, have you completed and attached a DPIA including Data Protection Officer advice?</p>
	<p>c. If no to question b, please seek advice from your nominated DPIA assessor or the Information Governance Team at <a href="mailto:gdpr@medway.gov.uk">gdpr@medway.gov.uk</a>.</p>
<b>Equality Impact Assessment</b>	<p>a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community? If yes, please explain answer. No</p>
	<p>b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality? If yes, please explain answer. No</p>
	<i>In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above</i>
<b>Corporate Plan</b>	<p>#2 Place - a dynamic borough; defined by a vibrant and productive local economy taking advantage of growth in the area, supported by its strong and active community.</p> <p>Promote Gravesham's arts and heritage: support local groups and community reach and expand the visitor economy</p>
<b>Climate Change</b>	The strategy needs to complement the Council's carbon neutral commitments.
<b>Crime and Disorder</b>	No direct implications

<b>Digital and website implications</b>	Promotion of our key themes and priorities will be delivered through the Visit Gravesend website and social media channels.
<b>Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults</b>	No direct implications