

Classification: Public

Key Decision: No

Gravesham Borough Council

Report to: Community & Leisure Cabinet Committee

Date: 13 March 2023

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

Subject: Gravesham Tourism and Heritage Strategy

Purpose and summary of report:

To report progress on the delivery of the Tourism and Heritage Strategy's objectives, the achievements and challenges of the past year and projects for the aims for the year to come.

Recommendations:

1. That Members review and comment on progress in delivering the strategy.

Key Implications:	
Item	Implications
Legal	No implications at this this stage
Finance and Value for Money	No additional budget requests at this point in time. Any future budgetary requirements will be sought following existing procedures.
Corporate Plan	#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. Promote Gravesham's arts and heritage: support local groups and community reach and expand the visitor economy
Climate Change	The strategy needs to complement the Council's carbon net zero commitments.

1. Delivery of the Tourism and Heritage Strategy's objective

- 1.1 An update of the [Gravesham's Tourism and Heritage Strategy](#) was reported to the Cabinet Committee in February 2022. This is a follow up on actions and achievements since the last report.

2. Research and surveys

- 2.1 For the last 3 and a half years, thanks to the Interreg Experience Project, the council has had opportunities to work with local and district partners, Visit Kent, and Kent Downs AONB to develop its experiential off-season economy. It has helped us take advantage of the research undertaken to develop tourism locally. The most recent surveys and reports are as follows:
- 2.2 *The Cambridge Economic Impact Model* for 2021 (**Appendix 1**) was released in November 2022. The model is the standard and adopted piece of work for measuring economic impact of tourism locally. The 2021 report looks at Gravesham's Visitor Economy post pandemic and shows a significant recovery in volume of trips and related expenditure, compared to 2020 but still below the levels seen in 2019. The council's tourism and heritage strategy recognises the need to address the fact that proportionally Gravesham is the district with the lowest figures across Kent.
- 2.3 The Kent Downs AONB also commissioned their own and specific Economic Impact report for 2019, 2020 and 2021 as part of the Experience project. The headline figures for Gravesham (**Appendix 2**) show the economic impact and the value the Kent Downs brings to the local area. The 2021 results are very positive, and the figures are almost back to the same level they were in 2019 before Covid-19 struck.
- 2.4 In recent years, the tourism sector has seen a big shift in visitors' expectations and the demand for Experiential tourism products has grown exponentially. 'The Gravesham Experiential Offer' report was commissioned by Visit Kent as part of the Experience project to support partner districts such as Gravesham, focus on the development of their products and offers, and identify the local opportunities and gaps.
 - 2.4.1 Key trends that resonate with the Gravesham Borough offer.
 - 2.4.2 The area's product strengths & opportunities.
 - 2.4.3 Building on the current product for Gravesham.
 - 2.4.4 Gravesham specific.
 - 2.4.5 Opportunities & examples.
 - 2.4.6 Gaps & considerations.
 - 2.4.7 Opportunities offered by the NDW & Kent Downs AONB.
 - 2.4.8 Kent experience product snapshot grid highlighting seasonal opportunities.The full report can be found at: [PowerPoint Presentation \(visitkentbusiness.co.uk\)](https://www.visitkentbusiness.co.uk)
- 2.5 Given the growth in Airbnb accommodation, work has been commissioned by Visit Kent to understand its scale and value to the local economy. The Air DnA research gives us an insight to how many Gravesham properties are using the Air BnB platform, the supply and demand, occupancy, number of bookings and how much income it generates.

Gravesham Air BnB Data						
	Available Listings	Booked Listings	Occupancy	Supply (Nights)	Demand (Nights)	Revenue
Jan-22	73	52	32%	1386	438	\$ 106,833
Feb-22	69	55	51%	1289	651	\$ 172,323
Mar-22	80	65	50%	1703	845	\$ 181,297
Apr-22	80	69	60%	1625	980	\$ 250,836
May-22	86	77	52%	2041	1057	\$ 269,727
Jun-22	81	72	62%	1727	1071	\$ 268,314
Jul-22	86	80	70%	2011	1412	\$ 345,397
Aug-22	81	80	70%	1848	1301	\$ 354,951
						\$ 1,949,678
2021 vs 2022 Data						
	Available Listings	Booked Listings	Occupancy	Supply (Nights)	Demand (Nights)	Revenue
January	46%	48.6%	-12.9%	64.8%	43.6%	113%
February	50%	71.9%	30.8%	67.6%	119.2%	303.4%
March	66.7%	97%	36.2%	104.7%	178.9%	178.4%
April	60%	76.9%	34.8%	74%	134.4%	295.2%
May	68.6%	87.8%	-3.7%	96.4%	89.1%	137.9%
June	62%	75.6%	21.2%	74.6%	111.7%	130.8%
July	53.6%	63.3%	11.1%	72.9%	92.1%	61.4%
August	44.6%	45.5%	0.1%	45.9%	46.0%	40.7%

2.6 The last Gravesham residents' perception survey took place in Winter 2021/22 and looked at the tourism activity during the winter period (Wave 4). The data was collected through an online survey aimed at Kent residents via Visit Kent's and partners' resident databases and shared via promoted post on social channels. The survey was also incentivised and gave respondents an opportunity to be entered into a prize draw (**Appendix 3**).

- Gravesham residents exhibited a high level of support for winter tourism in their local area, with 72% selecting some level of agreement, with the largest percentage selecting 'agree' (38%).
- In addition, a significant proportion of Gravesham residents felt the overall impact of tourism on Kent was positive (71%), with only 5% stating they felt this was negative and the remaining 24% selecting 'don't know' or neutral.
- When comparing this sentiment to wave 3, support for tourism in their local area saw a slight increase of +3%.

3. 2022/23 Actions

3.1 The following is a list of key actions and achievements over the last year:

3.2 As well as signing up to the Air DnA research, a conscious effort has been made to look at opportunities to expand the supply of visitor accommodation in Gravesham. Links have been made with 'Badgells Wood' campsite in Meopham ([Badgells Wood \(badgellswoodcamping.co.uk\)](http://Badgells Wood (badgellswoodcamping.co.uk))) and the 'Roost Group' luxury serviced accommodation (The Roost Group | Unmatched Short-Stay Accommodation).

3.3 An increase in our guided tours' bookings, including tours for Viking Cruise ship passengers on visits to the London International Cruise Terminal at Tilbury in March and April 2022.

3.4 [The Pocahontas Motion](#) was passed and adopted by Council in June 2022. One of the official copies has been sent to President Joe Biden.

3.5 Gravesham hosted the Commonwealth Games' Queen's Baton Relay on 8 July 2022 with great coverage of the event for the area.

- 3.6 Visit Kent hosted their tourism networking event at the Gurdwara in on 22 September 2022. Many tourism businesses from across the County were represented.
- 3.7 On 1 September, the CEO of Gloucester County, Virginia, Carol Steele, visited Gravesend. The Tourism Manager took her on a tour of the borough to showcase the area's tourism and heritage offer.
- 3.8 "Countryside Walking Tour Leaders" training delivered in Gravesham in November 2022 as part of the Kent Downs AONB Experience project.
- 3.9 The Dickens Theatre Company was commissioned to put on "A Christmas Carol" play at Gad's Hill Place on 17 and 18 December. As the two original times were quickly fully booked, another time slot was added on the Saturday.
- 3.10 An Instagram influencer and Kent ambassador, Laura Sutcliffe, visited Gravesend with her two children on Saturday 11 February. She is very much focused on family days out and offers. She started by visiting the Borough Market and then headed down to the riverside leisure area and park. In the afternoon, LV21 and The Panic Room Entertainment Centre kindly hosted her. She made an Instagram story of her experience, and it can be found on her page @teandbiscuits.
- 3.11 20 In-Bound Tour Operators from all over the U.K. visited Gravesend on Sunday 12 February and were led by the Director of Communities, the Tourism Manager and one of Gravesham Accredited tour guides on an hour tour to showcase the town's main tourism and heritages, as well of the expanding experiential offer. This was followed on Tuesday 14 February with Gravesham participating in exhibition/networking with those operators at Walmer Castle. The programme was co-ordinated by Visit Kent as part of the Experience programme.
- 3.12 Working with the various tourism businesses in the borough, the Tourism Manager has developed a special programme of events has been put together to showcase the borough during for English Tourism Week (17 to 26 March 2023). The full programme can be found at [Tour-week-version-2-FAWweb.pdf \(visitgravesend.co.uk\)](#), also attached as **Appendix 4**.
- 3.13 The Visitor Information Officer based in the Visitor Information Centre at Gravesend Borough Market continues to promote events locally and further afield via the website and social media and offers a quality service and warm welcome to visitors to the area. Last year the website had a total of 95,000 page views and 261,000 events count. The tourism twitter account has now just under 3100 followers and is slowly growing its following base on Instagram with just over 1500 followers. The visitor information officer liaises with Thames Clipper, promoting their sailings from Gravesend. It also works closely with partners such as Thames Defence Heritage and Gad's Hill Place by promoting tours of their venue and handling the bookings. It assists the market and the Arts and Cultural teams by promoting their events and exhibitions and handling the bookings for their workshops.
- 3.14 Clearing of vegetation has taken place at the site of the Rosherville steps at Fountain Walk, Northfleet. An interpretation panel will be installed in the vicinity in due course.
- 3.15 Conservation and consolidation works have been undertaken to the restabilise the Tudor Gravesend Blockhouse foundations located in Royal Pier Road, Gravesend. An article on this Scheduled Ancient Monument, written by local historian Victor Smith, was published in the Winter 2022 (No. 119) issue of the Kent Archaeological Society Magazine.

- 3.16 Work continues to add detail to a catalogue of items within the council's collection of artefacts and paintings as a means to widen public access. An exhibition of items from the collection will be exhibited under the title *The Curiosity Collection Part One* in the Blake Gallery 13 to 31 March 2023.
- 3.17 Renewal of Service Level Agreements for the operation of Milton Chantry, New Tavern Fort and the Cold War Bunker in Woodlands Park have been discussed with Thames Defence Heritage.

4. Challenges

- 4.1 Gravesham's supply of hotel accommodation locally remains a challenge. The temporary use of the Best Western by the Hospice and the recently publicised loss of the Clarendon Royal hotel have added to the strain.
- 4.2 Gravesham local heritage sites are heavily dependent on volunteers to open and run them. The pandemic and then need for training of new volunteers has also placed some pressure on the delivery of the services.

5. Focus for 2023/2024

- 5.1 A historic cycling tour around Gravesend heritage and tourism sites, has been developed with Born2Ride and the tours will be trialled, one Saturday a month, from April to August.
- 5.2 National Lottery Heritage Fund expressions of Interest were submitted earlier in the year to help with the maintenance, repair, and development of some of the borough's heritage assets. These need to be strengthened further to demonstrate intent to widen participation of audiences in heritage.
- 5.3 With the commitment by Thames Clippers to bring fast river services to Gravesend, discussions are taking place in respect of itineraries for visitors to support trips from London to Gravesend.
- 5.4 Ongoing promotion activity, together with working on the development of a new Visit Gravesend website to promote the borough more effectively to visitors. Options are currently being explored.
- 5.5 Continued working to develop the catalogue of items within the council's collection and public access.

6. Appendices

- 6.1 The following documents are to be published with the report:
 - 6.1.1 Appendix 1 – Gravesham's Visitor Economy 2021
 - 6.1.2 Appendix 2 – Kent Downs AONB Economic Impact of Gravesham
 - 6.1.3 Appendix 3 – Gravesham Residents Research Wave 4
 - 6.1.4 Appendix 4 – Gravesham Events – English Tourism Week

7. Background Documents

- 7.1 There are no background documents.

Lead Officer: Virginie Whittaker

Email: Virginie.whittaker@gravesham.gov.uk

Secondary Implications	
Risk Assessment	This report is a positive action to raise the profile of Gravesham as a tourism destination and bring economic benefits to the Borough.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	<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 personal data or special category data or criminal offence data?</p> <p>A definition of each type of data can be found on the Information Commissioner’s Office website via the above links.</p> <p>No</p>
	<p>b. If yes to question a, have you completed and attached a DPIA including Data Protection Officer advice?</p> <p>Click here to start typing</p>
	<p>c. If no to question b, please seek advice from your nominated DPIA assessor or the Information Governance Team at gdpr@medway.gov.uk.</p> <p>Click here to start typing</p>
Equality Impact Assessment	<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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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>
Crime and Disorder	No direct implications
Digital and website implications	Promotion of the borough via the Visit Gravesend website and social media channels.
Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults	No direct implications.