

SWALE WESTERN AREA COMMITTEE

Proposed Walking and Cycling Routes Project

Cllr Sarah Stephen and Cllr Bonney

Report on Current work commissioned by SBC

Western Area Committee proposed project

Back ground

Currently SBC are working in partnership with the Interreg experience which is a five year project, lead partners are Visit Kent and Kent Downs AONB. The Project lead Sally Evans for Kent Downs has been approached by our officer Lyn Newton at our request to look at routes in South Sittingbourne, as the focus of the work so far has been Faversham and Swale East, and Sheppey. They have agreed to look at mapping 3 new routes, 2 circular, one nearer Sittingbourne and one further into the Down's, and 1 long linear route before their next meeting scheduled for April. Gorham Community Woodland and the Woodland Trust are keen to assist in developing experiences in the downs south of Sittingbourne.

Visit Swale has seen an upturn in more local residents seeking information on walking and cycling locally and this is likely to continue into the recovery phase as people continue to pursue leisure activities closer to home. The research that we have undertaken through Visit Kent ahead of the pandemic also pointed to the need to develop and improve the staycation product providing opportunities to convert day visits to short stays through more bookable experiences. The project builds on this notion and will enhance availability of product in the tourism, leisure and hospitality sectors.

We feel that now is the time to expand on this, coming out of Covid, and with the prospect that more people will be taking staycations for the foreseeable future. We see this as an opportunity to expand on this in a more local way, by focusing on the potential South West Swale offers for cycling and walking routes, involving many local groups and residents, but mindful to avoid any duplication of any work already in progress.

This project meets short term goals that we have identified in The Visitor Economy Framework Action Plan.

Proposal

Our vision is to use the amazing resources we have in South West Swale, The Villages, Historical Sites, Food Producers, Ancient Woodlands and Nature Reserves, War Graves to name some, and create walking and cycling experiences similar to those created for Faversham, for example a food trail, or a history trail. Once established the routes will have printed information, containing items of historical interest, local businesses contact details that would include for example, farm shops, craft shops pubs and guest house/hotels and local accommodation, creating a full visitor experience. In our increasingly technological world this information would be online through all the modes available, and we would particularly like to focus and promote digital information access too to encourage younger generations who now access their leisure information through social media and QR codes.

This proposal cross covers several portfolios and enhances the councils short term goals being achieved.

1. Economic Growth and Tourism encouraging local tourism and boosting the local economy.
2. Active travel improving the Health and well being of our residents.
3. Community agenda bringing residents together.
4. Heritage source of education for all.
5. Environment reducing carbon foot print.

The Way Forward:

We will be looking at Approaching the Sustans a group who were commissioned in the past via a KCC grant to create walks and cycling routes in Faversham and Sheppey, and other groups, organisations and companies, as well as evidence correlated from the current conservation area reviews and action plans, land scape reviews, and any other local evidence to produce a report that provides insight based evidence to support key decisions in local communities about priorities around the walking and cycling agenda, and to deliver a series of walking and cycling routes.

This would enable us to commission a local cycling and walking infrastructure plan (LCWIP) for South West Swale and its surrounding area. This will also require the expertise of separate highways consultants, and KCC Highways as the lead body on this agenda, for the project to move forward.

We will also ensure that cycling infrastructure improvements are delivered in line with developments proposed in draft local plan. The LCWIP will include designs for improvements which developers can use as part of the section 106 agreements.

Suggested Local Groups

Historical Research Group of Sittingbourne
Sittingbourne Heritage Museum
Parish Councils
Sittingbourne Foot Paths Group
CTC Swale (cycling)
Komoot Hiking around Swale
Swale Heritage Trail
Walking Kent, Kent Ramblers
Swale Media Arts

Kent Garden of England

National Groups

Get Outside- Ordnance Survey
GPS Routes
British Cycling

We would like to allocate for this project £13,000 from the Western Area Committee.

FINAL DRAFT