

SWALE

Your destinations of choice

A Visitor Economy Framework for
Sittingbourne, Faversham and
Isle of Sheppey 2018 – 2023



Foreword



Cllr. Mike Cosgrove
Cabinet Member for
Regeneration

Swale is geographically well placed to offer visitors and residents memorable experiences. By drawing on a rich and colourful past, a vibrant present and an even more exciting future the Council is keen to maximise the contribution of the visitor economy to Swale.

We will retain our local distinctiveness which creates our unique sense of identity in Sittingbourne, Faversham and the Isle of Sheppey. Each destination will be celebrating different offers; all will exhibit a cohesive, joined-up approach locally, working smarter with the resources available, and placing an emphasis on what really matters in each destination.

With more of us holidaying in the UK and an increasing reliance on social media to make those decisions we are investing to make sure our visitors, residents and an increasing global travel market benefit from this investment. We will maximise the contribution of the visitor economy to Swale through:

- Identity, marketing and promotion
- Infrastructure and connectivity
- Public realm improvements
- Sector support
- Developing the cultural offer
- Market segmentation and information management

Swale's visitor economy will have seen real and tangible change in five years and we aim to add another £25m to the bottom line by 2023 increasing tourism's value from £193m to £218m an increase of 11.5%. In order to achieve growth we will invest our money to improve our spaces, change perception and increase confidence in place as well as create higher tourism values from a less seasonal industry. Swale will be prepared, inspired and more effectively placed to drive growth, jobs, local pride, interest and vitality through a more effective, engaged and supportive visitor economy. Using a dedicated team and working with partners and businesses we can increase and develop the contribution that our visitors make to our local economy.

Together we can make it happen...



Photo courtesy of Shepherd Neame



Sittingbourne, Faversham and the Isle of Sheppey are distinctive places in which to live, work and visit.

The National and County Context

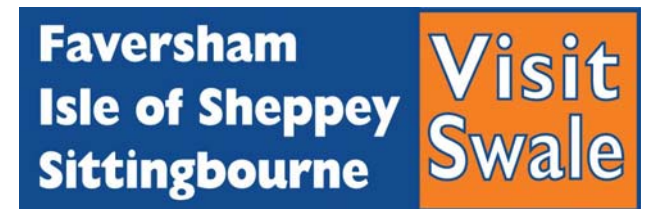
The visitor economy is the fourth largest industry and contributes in England alone £106 billion to GDP and supports 2.6 million jobs making it an important sector within the national economy. Inbound tourism is set to grow at 3.5% every year until 2025. The Council will work collaboratively through Visit England and Visit Kent to maximise Swale's opportunities. It works closely with other sectors including, sports, museums and the arts, fishing and farming, transport and retail*. Kent's visitor economy continues to show growth contributing £3.6billion and supports 72,000 jobs.

Our Visitor Economy

The value and importance of the visitor economy as a core sector is widely recognised across Swale and is reflected in the Corporate Plan and Local Plan. The visitor economy plays an important part of Swale's success being the fourth largest sector in terms of jobs and skills as well as economic performance. In an increasingly competitive visitor market we will grow our investment in place. We will continue to appeal to all key visitor markets and grow our visitor performance through an enhanced offer in our coast, country, marshland, heritage and events.

The majority of our visitors come from within the UK and we need to better understand who they are, where they come from and why they are visiting. There is opportunity to grow our market share from visitors from further afield. We are committed to develop the growth of Swale's visitor economy to the benefit of Swale's businesses and communities through sector investment to ensure the industry remains resilient, flexible and ready to face changing visitor demands.

There needs to be new offers to meet new visitor demands. The visitor experience will be both exceptional and experiential drawing upon the unique qualities and distinctiveness of the areas - Sittingbourne, Faversham, the Isle of Sheppey and the surrounding countryside and marshes. The marketing needs to reflect current trends around accessing information with greater emphasis placed on online and social media information.



*Source: <https://www.visitbritain.org/value-tourism-england>

Our priorities

To deliver results our strategy is based on six key priorities:

- Identity, marketing and promotion
- Infrastructure and connectivity
- Public realm improvements
- Sector support – Open for Business
- Developing the cultural offer
- Market segmentation and information management

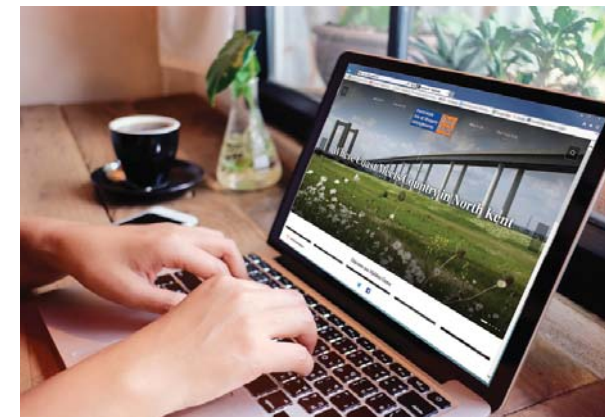
A joined-up approach on delivery will provide clarity, reduce duplication and provide efficiencies. An improved visitor offer will create more reasons to visit Sittingbourne, Faversham and the Isle of Sheppey. A five year strategy and action plans will provide a framework for collaboration and partnership. There is an enhanced budget of £250,000 in place with an additional officer resource to ensure delivery.

Our strengths lie in our outstanding landscapes – coast, country and marshland; our rich and varied heritage; our festivals and events alongside our local food and drink which celebrates Kentish culture and diversity.

Our weaknesses come from poor infrastructure, a limited knowledge of our consumers based on weak market intelligence and the fast changing pace around accessing information requiring improved on-line and social media opportunities.



Photo courtesy of Macknade Fine Foods



Our current performance

SWALE

5 million trips

£193 million visitor spend

4,561 jobs supported

This equates to 1 in 11 of all jobs in Swale (1 in 10 across the UK)

59% of our visitors are on holiday

41% of our visitors are here for other reasons
(including meeting family and friends and business)

KENT

60 million trips

£3.6 billion visitor spend

72,000 jobs supported



Source: Cambridge Model based on 2015 data.
The national benchmark tool used by Kent to measure tourism performance. Data extracted from surveys must be interpreted with a degree of caution



Photo courtesy of Elmley Nature Reserve



Photo courtesy of Visit Kent

To support the growth of Swale’s visitor economy to the benefit of local businesses and communities, making the most of our local resources and assets.

Outcomes

Identity, marketing and promotion

Promote a positive image of the area to inspire visitors

Key actions are:

- To use campaigns to target specific audience groups that will grow footfall increase dwell time and deliver greater visitor economy revenues
- To further develop and enhance Visit Swale
- To support and develop industry partners so they can actively engage with their customers and potential customers and improve on-line and social media activity
- To develop new audiences through the use of on-line and social media opportunities
- To highlight and promote the identity of the area through greater collaboration with Screen South and Kent Film Office



Infrastructure and Connectivity

Enhance the visitor experience

Key actions are:

- To work with partners to create travel incentives (including joint ticketing where possible) for residents and visitors
- To improve promotion of the destination through a Swale App
- To promote high quality transport connections
- To increase the number of car and coach parking facilities to improve access to the coast as well as town centres
- To increase destination infrastructure for shared use routes
- To review highways infrastructure and signage



Public Realm and Place Shaping

Be a beacon for the visitor economy

Key actions are:

- To deliver consistent and improved signage to aid residents and visitors (vehicular and pedestrian)
- To deliver improvements to the public realm in our town centres and strategic gateways to create a more visitor-friendly environment (car parks, lighting, street furniture, signing)
- To enhance our beaches, coastal paths and open spaces
- To improve visitor services and facilities
- To encourage and promote quality upgrade and minimum standards to meet resident and visitor expectations



Sector Support – Open for Business *Support businesses*

Key actions are:

- To support and encourage visitor economy businesses to develop new products and packages to stimulate additional visits and bookings
- To develop a Welcome Programme
- To increase tourism investment through flexible planning
- To boost productivity by extending and promoting year-round tourism through targeted funding to increase out of season offers through festivals, green tourism, wildlife promotion and activity breaks
- To improve the quality of the tourism offer
- To create better career and education opportunities (including apprenticeships) to boost recruitment, skills and long-term careers



Developing the cultural offer *Create experiences*

Key actions are:

- To develop a range of new and unique and distinctive experiences to include food and drink, sport and leisure, festivals and events, arts and culture, history and heritage and outdoor activities in coastal and rural destinations
- To deliver enhancements to Sittingbourne, Faversham and the Isle of Sheppey's physical environment that benefit residents and visitors as well as develop a Welcome Programme
- To promote local distinctiveness through quality specialist street markets that enhance, animate and promote the individual towns
- To increase access opportunities



Market Segmentation and Information Management

Create a one-stop sector resource

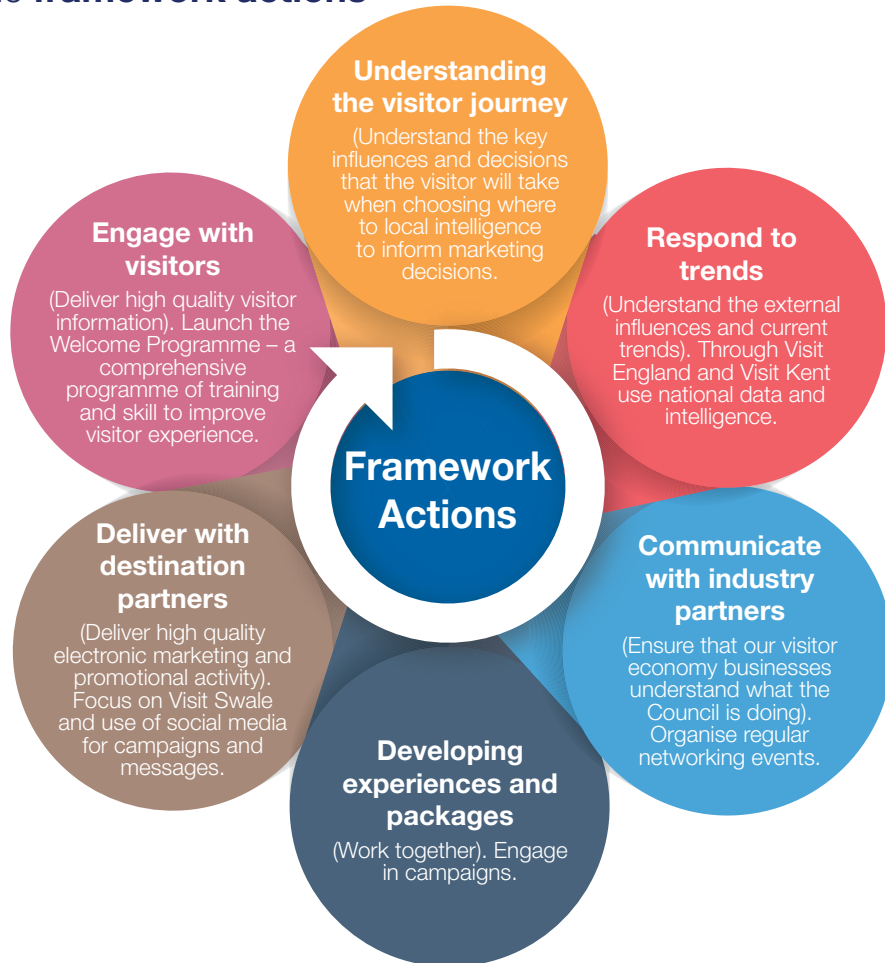
Key actions are:

- To commission an economic impact assessment bi-annually
- To develop collection of relevant visitor economy data and intelligence to ensure businesses are better informed (key facts, attractions monitoring, visitor survey, business tourism, hotel occupancy, visitor economy intelligence)
- To undertake market segmentation to inform key marketing campaigns



Measuring Performance

The outcomes will be delivered over the next five years using the **framework actions**



Measuring and understanding our performance is vital to success. We will undertake surveys and market intelligence studies moving forward. Swale Borough Council will share destination intelligence enabling partners to review and benchmark their own performance, monitor trends and respond to new opportunities.



Photo courtesy of Robert Canis

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If you would like alternative versions (i.e. large print, audio, different language) we will do our best to accommodate your request.

Please contact the council at:

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Photo courtesy of Visit Kent