



## Kent Coastal Network

### **Towards integration on the Kent Coast**

This topic paper is part of a KCC coordinated project to develop an Integrated Coastal Action Plan for Kent. The aim is to generate wider discussion and it is accompanied by a consultation response form.

**Title:** - Tourism & the Visitor Economy

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### **Introduction:**

Tourism in Kent is worth over £2.5billion to the county economy and Kent's coastal towns contribute 70% of this income. *(Kent Cambridge Model)* Kent's coast extends east of the line between Dungeness in the south and Whitstable in the north (see reference to rest of coast, below). This extent comprises a chain of larger and smaller towns interspersed with heritage coastline and protected landscapes. This area of the coast has a particular focus for Visit Kent with the VECK programme of activity.

The rest of Kent's coast includes the Borough of Swale, comprising Sittingbourne and the Isle of Sheppey, Medway, Gravesham and Dartford which make up the sub regions for the Thames Gateway, an area identified as a major growth point.

The four main coastal towns of Folkestone, Dover, Margate and Ramsgate share a common heritage of tourism and cross-Channel transport having been major economic drivers. Changes in these sectors of activity have had adverse impacts on each of the towns over a period of time, exacerbated by a range of deep-rooted social deprivation issues.

In terms of tourism, the towns have been hard hit by the long-term decline in the number of UK tourists holidaying in the UK. The amount of visitor accommodation on offer has reduced and there has been under investment over time in the visitor economy infrastructure. However, in each case, major initiatives are under way to transform the towns' fortunes through regeneration, with the visitor economy identified as playing a key role in future.

*(Kent & Medway Tourism Development Strategy – KCC October 2008)*

### **This topic paper**

- Summarises Tourism & the visitor economy for the Kent coast.
- Invites comment from representatives involved in this area of concern, the responses will be used to ensure a well informed and supported plan is developed.

- This paper will align itself to the Kent & Medway Tourism Development strategy and the VECK (Visitor Economy Coastal Kent) Action Plan.

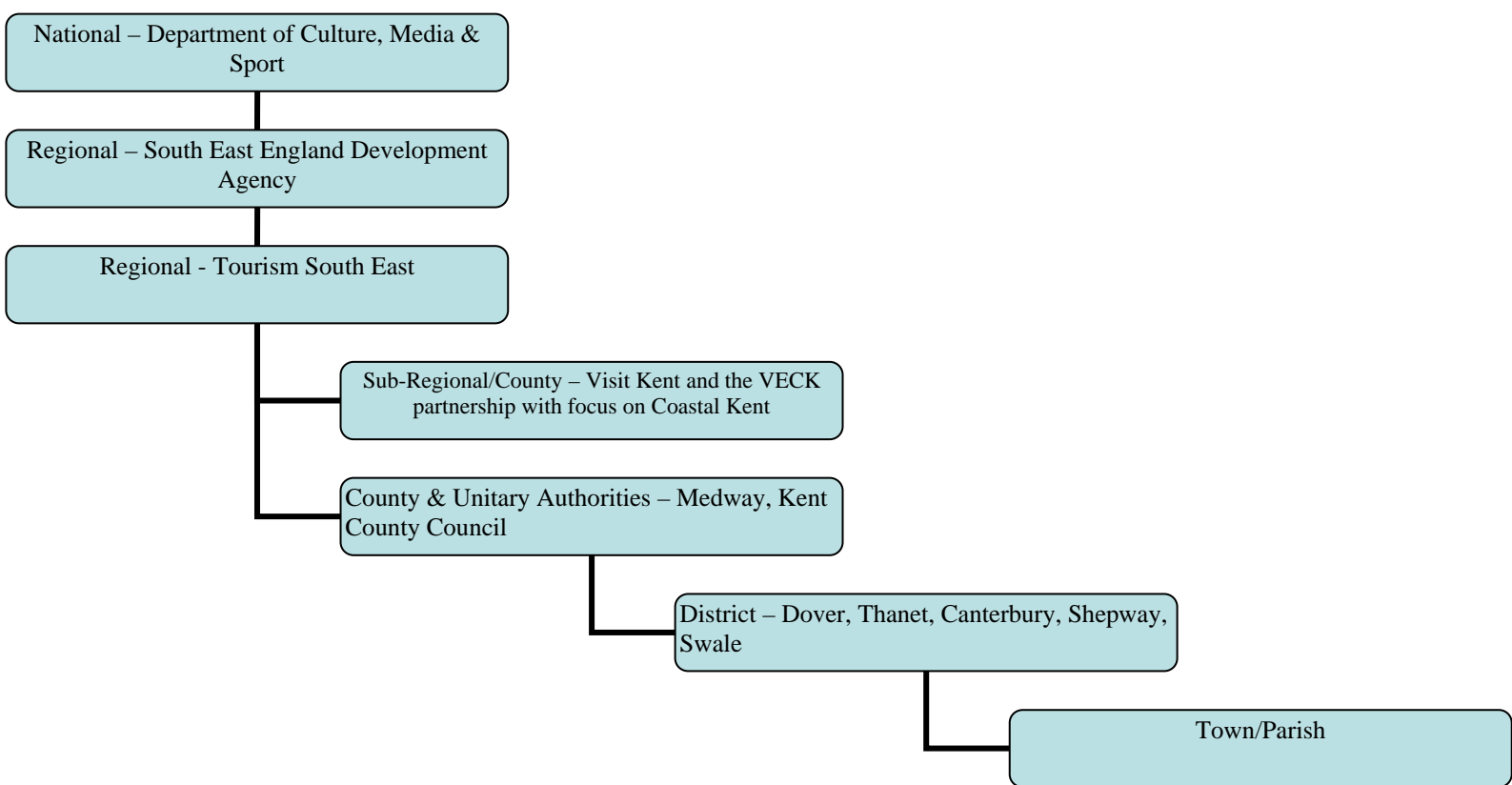
**Activity and distribution of resource: -**

Tourism on Kent's coast is delivered by a range of public and private sector agencies, organisations and individuals. The main delivery body for tourism in Kent is **Visit Kent** a public/private partnership set up by Kent County Council. The Visitor Economy for Coastal Kent partnership (VECK) was set up by Visit Kent and is a partnership between Visit Kent, Tourism South East, Thanet District Council, Canterbury City Council, Dover District Council, Shepway District Council and East Kent Partnership now the East Kent LSP. Formed as a result of Visitor Perception Research on East Kent which indicated that visitors were unaware of the coastal product and held negative perceptions of coastal towns, the objective of the partnership is to raise the profile of the coastal towns and embed activity within the work of Visit Kent.

**Broad activities and areas of interest.**

<b>Iconic Heritage</b> Canterbury, Dover White Cliffs	<b>Built Heritage</b> Museums, Castles	<b>Natural Heritage</b> Diverse landscape, Beaches	<b>Catering</b> Places to eat
<b>Public Realm</b> Creative quarters	<b>Retail</b> Independent Specialist	<b>Events/Festivals</b> All coastal Magnets	<b>Activities</b> Golf Water Walking cycling
<b>Accessibility</b> Transport	<b>Accommodation</b> Hotels, B&B Self-catering Caravan/Camping Quality programme	<b>Hospitality</b> Welcome Information/VIC's Greeters/Pride	
<b>Creative Industries</b> Galleries/Art Turner	<b>Marketing</b> Strategic/Tactical	<b>Geography</b> AONB's walking/cycling routes coastline	

## Regulators: -



## Integration of Tourism & the visitor economy on the Kent Coast

### Tourism, Biodiversity and Quality of the Water Environment

Consumer research conducted by Visit Kent indicates that the strongest associations with the area as a potential visitor destination are attractive countryside, history and heritage. Proximity to the continent is also a factor for potential UK visitors while overseas visitors have also identified the coast as an attraction. Visitor attractions should not just be considered as stand alone paid for entry sites or buildings. The Kent example relevant to this theme include:

- Unique landscapes – the Kent Downs, Romney Marsh, the White Cliffs of Dover and Thanet’s sandy bays and beaches
- Wildlife and birdwatching are of increasing interest

Visit Britain’s Annual Visitor Attractions Survey for 2007 has highlighted that attractions based at or near to the coast attract the greatest proportion of visitors and emphasises the importance of the countryside as a key component of Kent’s visitor offer.

There is a renewed and growing interest in the natural environment, as a place for recreation and leisure. Increased demand and the potential

consequent flow of visitor traffic to the rural hinterland and coast can increase pressure on these resources. At the same time tourism can serve to highlight the importance of environmental conservation if visitors are to continue to enjoy these places in the future. Some of the positive physical impacts of tourism in natural settings have been:

- The creation of park areas and renewed attention on the importance of wildlife and biological preservations
- The 'sun, sand and sea' factors of tourism have highlighted concerns over ozone depletion and global warming and what this could mean for the place as well as the visitor
- The depletion and contamination of water resources at sea and inland has helped draw further attention to the need for better environmental stewardship and planning for all types of development, not just tourism.

While problems with tourism's impact have created greater concern for the environment, it has also created a new demand for natural places, which might not otherwise exist, particularly for areas that are more readily accessible. More and more people will travel to places highlighted for their scenic beauty or unique natural setting, leading to even greater environmental destruction. The effects can be:

- Loss of vegetation and natural habitat to make way for new developments and other visitor facilities
- Trampling of plants and reduction in local biodiversity
- The compaction and erosion of the soil
- General spread of litter

A positive outcome of the negative physical impacts of tourism has been the growth in environmentally sensitive and responsible tourism. Tourism can create change which can be inappropriate and obtrusive if it does not reflect the sensitivities of the site or destination. Careful planning and management are key to mitigating the environmental concerns of tourism.

Examples in Kent's coast include White Cliffs Countryside Project, Thanet Coast Project and Rock Doc in offering their activities to visitors and to local residents.

Isle of Thanet has a number of blue flag beaches demonstrating not just environmental quality, profiled to visitors through the Beaches and Bays campaign run in partnership with Thanet District Council and Visit Kent.

Sustainable tourism is a complex topic and is far more than just offering green credentials. Kent works with Visit Britain and Tourism South East to promote the Green start and Green Tourism Business scheme to tourism providers in Kent.

Kent's coast product in terms of tourism related to biodiversity (and geology) is:

- White Cliffs (National Trust)
- White Cliffs Countryside Project guided walks programme

- Romney Marsh Visitor centre
- Pegwell Bay -Viking Trail
- Saxon Shore Way
- National coastal cycle routes
- The Warren
- Coastal Park
- Samphire Hoe
- Fowlmead Country Park
- Diverse coastline
- Thanet's beaches and bays
- Seal and mystery boat tours
- Wildlife tourism –TSE are currently trialling this on the Downs and if successful this can be rolled out to Kent's coast, targeting the specialist wildlife visitor
- English Riviera is promoting a UNESCO geopark for Torbay. Kent's coast, particularly Shepway and Dover may have an equally good claim to geopark status.
- Deal, Ramsgate and Dungeness were listed recently as one of the top fifty most authentic places on earth, profiled in BA highlife magazine
- Dungeness featured as one of the top 10 destinations that showcases the natural environment (Radio Kent)
- Britain's largest heronry is on the Hoo Peninsula

### **Tourism & the Historic Environment**

Kent's heritage visitor attractions are also what make the area unique and distinctive. History and heritage have the strongest associations with the area as a potential visitor destination. On Kent's coast they include:

- Iconic, genuine heritage – Dover Castle,
- Walmer Castle, Deal Castle, Richborough Roman Ruins
- Dover Museum and Bronze Age Boat
- A whole host of smaller museums and lesser known attractions that make up the heritage product
- Historic interpretation trails

The majority of Kent's leading visitor attractions are heritage based and there has to be a focus on conservation and preservation . Dover has recently been awarded £3.8 million from the DCMS "Sea Change" Programme to improve connections between the harbour and Dover Castle and for additional improvements in and around the Castle. Tourism and cultural heritage management can often share little in common apart from their resource base.

Tourism values cultural assets as raw materials for their products to generate tourism activity and wealth. Cultural heritage management value the same assets for their intrinsic merits. A partnership approach where stakeholders understand the needs of each sector is the ideal way forward. A number of campaigns highlighting Kent's coastal heritage are underway by Visit Kent e.g.:

Cinque Ports Campaign, VIP campaign, Tudor 500, which includes the creation of themed itineraries for presentation to travel trade and tour operators

### **Tourism, Geology and Geomorphology**

In terms of tourism this could be interpreted as Natural Heritage attractions. This includes land, landscape, and other geographical phenomena. Natural resources are an invaluable tourism asset and are fundamental to the development of tourism for the destination. However natural resources tend to be the least productive on their own in terms of direct economic benefit especially when in 'public' ownership. They are frequently seen as a free resource as ownership can be difficult to define, making them more difficult to manage in terms of visitor impacts unless their use can be specifically regulated.

Consideration could be given to low environmental impact and green experiences offered by places such as Dungeness.

### **Tourism & Shoreline management**

Kent's coastline is a valuable natural asset and vital to the county's tourism economy. No coastal resort town can survive without its beach. There are many approaches to coastal defences and shoreline management. Hard structures will impact on tourism and the local community, moving of the shoreline will impact on tourism with particular impact on resort towns as the tourism infrastructure is fixed.

### **Tourism & Industry**

#### **Tourism Service Resources**

This includes all those services in a destination which effectively makes tourism possible and is often referred to as 'tourism infrastructure'. These include:

- Accommodation Sector – Kent's coastline has a number of hotels, bed & breakfast, self-catering units, caravan & camping parks (static & touring) educational/dormitories, farm cottages, inns & pubs, motels and youth hostels. All Districts and Visit Kent operate an 'inspected only' policy in that they will only market properties that have been approved by a recognised national scheme such as Visit Britain or AA star scheme. Visit Kent also operates the Kent Tourism Quality Programme which provides advice to new and existing businesses in this sector on what they need to do to obtain a star grading.
- Catering sector –bars/pubs; bistros/wine bars; coffee shop/tea room; fast food; takeaway; fine dining; family restaurants; ethnic cuisine; international cuisine; picnic sites; street vendors; self service; trend is towards local, fresh, organic produce. A greater variety of dining and leisure opportunities to support the evening economy are important in the context of tourism. DCMS report 'Tomorrow's Tourism in their guidance for spreading the benefits of tourism *"encourage tourism businesses to source and promote the use of local goods (e.g. regional beers, and speciality foods) and services, employ local people and*

*offer discounts to encourage local people to use facilities provided for tourists, encourage tourism management partnerships between local authorities tourism operators and local communities so that tourism strategies are developed to benefit both residents and visitors”*

- Transport – East Kent is accessible, but whilst there is attractiveness to being by the sea this is compromised in East Kent by poor rail links to London, the introduction of HS1 is a real opportunity. Road links facilitate movement on the coastal routes to the continent and London but do not encourage movement off the M20 and A2. These factors make it easier to travel through the county than to move around it. Seaside towns with good road and rail access to larger centres of population, such as Brighton, are able to compete strongly in the visitor market.
- Ports & Harbours – are part of the transport links and accessibility of the destination. Ports and their development remains a vital economic asset and are often at the heart of many communities, including Kent coastal towns with Dover, Folkestone having a role as a marina and Ramsgate.
- The Channel Tunnel and Dover are significant gateways for both freight and passenger traffic to and from the continent. This has advantages in terms of potential visitor accessibility from the continent but also has disadvantages in terms of the volumes of traffic in transit through the area. While the amount of passenger traffic through Dover has declined in recent years, the use of the port by cruise ships has increased significantly. Plans for further port development include a new marina and ferry terminal as well as enhancing significantly the seafront environment. In terms of air travel, limited passenger services are currently available from Kent International Airport and from Lydd. Research into the potential for introducing more passenger services from Manston is currently taking place. The extent of the potential for attracting inbound business will largely depend on decisions on outbound services. (*Kent & Medway Tourism Development Strategy*)
- Hospitality – is a significant service resource for tourism, and plays a fundamental supporting role in the overall visitor experience. Visitor Information Centres, maps, brochures and community attitudes towards visitor activity. Many visitors will not want to visit a place with a negative image or which has a reputation for being less than friendly. Kent's coast suffers from poor perception and negative images particularly Dover and Margate, Visit Kent offer the Pride programme and Greeters programme along with training programmes to address this issue.
- General community services - includes health, public safety and security, emergency repair and general domestic supplies which maybe used by tourists.
- Visitor Information Services along Kent's coast are managed and operated by local authorities, services are under review to ensure that they are meeting consumer demand and changing trends particularly in use of new technology.

## **Tourism and Recreation**

- Sports can also be used as a tool to achieve regeneration. Leisure and recreation are important to our social well-being and the coast is home to a wide range of both water and land-based activities.
- Within Kent's coast there are areas that are very popular with windsurfers, also other water sports such as sailing and water skiing. This is an area that could be developed further but would need to involve the sport enthusiasts to ensure that what is developed reflects their needs. A new sea sports centre is being developed in Dover, which will re-enforce Dover's future potential to attract special interest visitors
- Golf is another key asset for Kent's coast with championship links courses and the Open coming again to Kent in 2011. Visit Kent has embarked on a Tourism Development and marketing campaign for the Kent product with raised profile for Kent's coast. Developing golf packages with tour operators is key to its success.
- Walking and cycling are popular pursuits for visitors to Kent's coast. Routes need to be well maintained, attractive, well signposted, safe and with refreshment stops en route. The accommodation sector need to be well informed on how to welcome walkers and cyclists and the infrastructure for bike hire needs to be well established.

## **Tourism & Regeneration**

Major regeneration programmes are being progressed in Dover, Folkestone and Margate.

- A 30 year masterplan for Dover was produced in 2006 and has a strong focus on future port facilities and complementary seafront development.
- Dover has been awarded £3.8 million from the DCMS's "Sea Change" programme to improve connections between the harbour and Dover Castle and for additional improvements in and around the Castle.
- Folkestone – work of the Creative Foundation has led to the establishment of a Creative Quarter and staging in 2008 of the first 'Triennial' event.
- Master plan for Folkestone Harbour
- Margate – plans for Turner Contemporary Gallery with opening scheduled for 2010.
- Development partner sought for the Rendezvous site and other key sites including Dreamland. Broad theme is culture
- Whitstable, Broadstairs and Deal are relatively successful destinations and the development challenge will be to enhance rather than detract from their appeal
- Romney, Hythe and Sandwich suffer from lack of visitor awareness but have the right mix of characteristics to develop further.

One of the key challenges to face in terms of tourism development in the coastal areas is to arrive at a position where the towns combine to attract greater visitor interest rather than compete in the same markets. A start has been made in the form of the establishment of the Visitor Economy of Coastal

Kent (VECK) group. This has led to initial identification of shared assets such as cultural tourism facilities and sports tourism opportunities, this approach needs maintaining and building upon.

Key elements such as marketing, visitor welcome and quality have to be in place to support investment in tourism and regeneration infrastructure.

### **Policy directions for Tourism on the Kent coast**

1. Identify the common product offerings that span the coastal area of Kent?
2. Identify the coastal areas of weakness and strengths to the visitor market?
3. In your opinion what partners should be involved in delivery of tourism?
4. What makes Kent's coast unique and distinctive from other destinations? (USP)
5. What support from Visit Kent would you like to see for tourism?

**Credit:** *Kent & Medway Tourism Development Strategy Kent County Council, October 2008*  
*Regeneration of East Kent Coastal Towns Kent County Council 2004*  
[www.visitkent.co.uk](http://www.visitkent.co.uk) [www.ktanet.co.uk](http://www.ktanet.co.uk)