

Thanet Destination Management Plan

Update report from Tourism Works

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document is a report on activities to date of the Thanet Destination Management Plan (DMP), including the development of the action plans for each of the three priorities, the areas selected for specific focus, the activity being undertaken, the results to date, and the people involved.

1. OVERVIEW OF THE DMP

The DMP is about acknowledging and understanding the importance of tourism in Thanet. Thanet District Council Cabinet formally approved the 5-year DMP in September 2013.

It aims to maximise tourism opportunities, improve facilities, attract tourism-related inward investment, create resources and connect businesses, to put Thanet firmly on the destination map.

It has been agreed that this will be achieved by

- ensuring that visitors have a great experience in Thanet, developing new experiences to attract more tourists and targeting new higher spending visitors looking for a short break.
- presenting the three towns more strongly together, playing to the strength of each and making it easy for the visitor to get around.
- investing in the experience of our beaches - Thanet's strongest natural assets
- prioritising investment in new quality character accommodation to encourage visitors to come and stay for longer.
- making the most of Thanet's location – the natural coastline, the big skies, the proximity to London by high-speed train and the potential new visitors that brings.
- stimulate the environment to encourage investment in new quality visitor attractions, visitor experiences and places to stay.

The DMP action plan aims to be driven by the private sector, working closely with the public sector. Thanet District Council is acting as a catalyst, facilitator and partner and the three towns and businesses will work together to help deliver the plan. The DMP will also provide a marketing toolkit and training for local businesses, enabling them to promote themselves as well as the area.

We are beginning to tackle some of the barriers to making things happen and raising the profile of the importance of tourism to the Thanet economy.

The Steering Group (SG) is chaired by Harry Lagan, who is representing the Broadstairs Tourism and Leisure Association and who owns and operates a self-catering unit in Broadstairs. The vice chair is Nick Cole, representing the Thanet Business Forum. There are 11 private sector businesses represented on the SG and 5 from the public sector, making a total of 16 members.

2. KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

A Steering Group (SG) and three Working Groups (WG) have been set up representing the wider tourism industry. Membership is detailed in Appendix 1.

- 59 people from both the public and private sectors have been engaged through these groups.
- Four SG meetings have been held, plus two extra meetings to finalise the SG status.
- 10 project workshops have been conducted, resulting in action plan progress.
- 9 projects from the DMP action plan are currently being progressed

Beach Management & Development

Activity	Outcome
Main concerns of businesses in relation to the beach	List of main concerns/issues from Beach Business Group, Beach Business workshop and Steering Group.
Beach Audits	One audit for each beach – a detailed assessment of all the facilities of all 17 beaches and bays in Thanet.
Beach Management Plan	Draft produced June 2014 with 16 recommendations highlighting opportunities for further beach development.
Beach Business Group	A beach business group has been set up and a pre-season meeting held, bringing together beach businesses and relevant council departments for the first time. We now have contact details for everyone and are able to contact all by email when any real time beach issues occur. This has resulted in better communications between businesses and Thanet District Council.
Internal Council Beach Group	Work is being done on prioritising improvements to beach showers, toilets, coastal buildings and shelters. Work to assess the repairs, improvements, maintenance and funding for the showers and coastal shelters is planned for September.
Real Time Signposting	Chalk boards and seaweed notices re-done and new dog signs produced and installed.
Toilets	Toilets in Broadstairs harbour and middle beach, St Mildred's, Botany Bay and Dumpton have been repainted and St Mildred's toilets have had a new roof and windows.
Internal Byelaws and enforcement Group	Work on assessing byelaw enforcement and how to improve enforcement. One meeting with officers has been held and an action plan drawn up.
Bay inspectors Offices	All have been repainted.
Botany Bay	Car park resurfacing has been done.

Coastal Regeneration

Activity	Outcome
Priority Sites	List of potential sites has been drawn up that could have tourism-related opportunities, including hotels, B&Bs, self-catering apartments, shops, restaurants and cafes etc.
Information for Investors	Research on information for investors, developers and re-locators has been carried out and a list of sources and links drawn up. This includes relevant and timely tourism statistics and planning and funding information relating to Thanet. This will demonstrate that Thanet is supportive and welcoming of new investment and has many opportunities for business development.

Telling Our Stories

Activity	Outcome
Community Engagement	Raised profile of Thanet Big Weekend through media Interviews, press releases, Council staff communications, Tweets and visitor attractions co-operating. The foundation has been set for future collaboration between participating attractions. Working media relationships have been established with the Thanet Gazette and Academy FM.
Shared Story usage	8 of Thanet's larger visitor businesses are using the shared story in their marketing campaigns and it has been disseminated to businesses through group members, and to the general public via local radio.
Toolkit	Under development to be available in October for all tourism-related businesses to use as an information and photographic resource and to help some improve their knowledge and skills in marketing. 72 businesses to receive training over the winter.
Way finding	Sub-group of the three Town Teams set up to share knowledge and work together to create a project to welcome visitors at train and bus stations and help them find their way into and around town
Trails	Review of existing trails complete.

Funding

Match funding for the DMP	Research on what is available started.
Workshop for businesses	A funding workshop has been held for businesses and a shortlist of funding sources has been produced. 12 people attended the workshop with 6 businesses receiving individual follow up sessions.

Communications

Basecamp	Project management tool for all people involved in working and steering groups to communicate and access documents is up and running.
Media	Working media relationships have been established with the Thanet Gazette and Academy FM.
Social events	Two social networking events have been held to encourage people to get to know each other and share knowledge and experience.

3. Overview of activity November 2013 to July 2014

3.2 Beach Management Working Group

This group is working to deliver a programme of prioritised beach-by-beach improvements, informed and steered by a new Beach Management Delivery Group. In order to enhance quality, protect the environment and deliver new distinctive experiences the group is looking at the options for community and industry-managed beaches that are freely available to everyone and incorporate the best creative and commercial ideas.

There are three sub-groups currently working on the following:

1. Produce a Beach Management Plan and Audit

Roger Budden and Alison Burgh from Real Places were commissioned to undertake an audit of the 17 beaches and bays in Thanet and prepare proposals for improvements and development opportunities. The first draft of the Beach Management Plan has been produced.

2. Improve public information

Beach signs are being reviewed and improved to give better information about seaweed and make dog signs clearer and friendlier in their tone.

3. Establish a Beach Business Group (BBG)

A Beach Business Group has been established to provide a forum for beach business operators and concession owners to meet each other as well as relevant Council Officers at the start and end of the season. Council Officers have met to look at the issues and comments raised by the BBG members to see what can be done to improve the coastline. Updates on beach issues have been sent to the group throughout the season and all beach businesses receive the monthly "Tourism Matters" e-newsletter.

3.3 Coastal Regeneration Working Group

This group is working on making a stronger case for tourism regeneration in specific underused or derelict coastal buildings and targeting inward investment to specialist developers, who can inject creative solutions and deliver new quality developments.

The emphasis is on reinforcing what is distinctive about Thanet and creating much needed character accommodation. There are currently two sub-groups working on the following:

1. Creating a shortlist of tourism development priority sites and how they might be promoted. The draft list of sites has been created and a sub-group is meeting to further investigate the possibilities.
2. Producing clear, relevant and distinctive information about Thanet to highlight tourism investment opportunities.

3.4 Telling out Stories

Telling our stories is about using the Shared Story developed for the DMP to create a stronger sense of place through a joined-up approach to marketing, information and interpretation, including helping small tourism businesses improve the quality of their marketing through skills development and support. The emphasis is on business engagement, support for the DMP and delivering a consistent quality product.

There are three project groups

1. Shared Story Network and Toolkit:

1a The Shared Story

Members of the group have started to use and disseminate the Shared Story. For example, Turner Contemporary has put the whole story on the website, Quex has shared it with all the businesses on the Estate, The Thanet Gazette has distributed it to appropriate advertisers, such as estate agents, to encourage usage, Isle magazine has incorporated it in articles and the Visitors' Guide, Ramsgate Town Centre has distributed it to local businesses.

1b The Marketing Toolkit

A specially formed subgroup of local businesses has been working with Thanet Tourism and Visit Kent to develop a comprehensive guide for the contents and has helped to select a company to deliver the Toolkit through a competitive tendering process. At the same time, a photographic brief is being developed with the aim of creating a bank of free, high quality images depicting the Shared Story, which can be used by businesses. Marketing and toolkit training courses are being developed and will be offered to businesses.

2. Local Community Campaign

To support and grow local pride in Thanet as a place to live in and visit. To date, this has involved collaborative promotional work for the Big Thanet Weekend, media interviews about the DMP and the Shared Story, and meetings with groups, such as the Town Teams and Ramsgate Heritage Society.

3. Welcome, signage and trails programme:

3a Way finding and Wayfaring

Each of the three main Thanet Town Teams have started to develop projects related to this theme and a way finding sub-group has been set up so the three towns can investigate ways of collaborating, sharing their work and resources, integrating the work already done and seeking funding.

Both Southeastern Trains and Stagecoach have been engaged and will become more involved.

3b Trails

An audit of existing trails has been carried out. A sub-group is now being formed to investigate integration of existing walking and cycling trails.

3c Tourism map

A comprehensive tourism map showing the whole of Thanet, with attractions, beaches, trails, transport and general tourism information is being designed.

3.5. Funding

Funding Meeting

A funding sub-group meeting was held in March to:

1. Review DMP project plans to identify where funding might be needed.
2. Look at work being done by Visit England, Kent County Council, Tourism South East and Thanet District Council on possible funding sources for DMP activity, and review list of sources in relation to projects.
3. Consider how the SG can support the project groups in applying for funding from all sources, including the funding set aside for the DMP by Thanet District Council Cabinet.

Funding Workshop

A workshop for businesses was held in May, run by Visit Kent. The course content included:

- Getting an understanding of the big picture for funding - grant funding and loan finance for the tourism industry in the UK.
- Defining finance requirements – what does the business want to achieve?
- An overview of relevant grant funding streams, including Heritage Lottery Fund – what they are and how to access them.
- An overview of loan finance, including Expansion East Kent, Kent County Council's Regional Growth Fund scheme and local tourism success stories.
- Information on new innovative funding models such as crowd funding and how to make them work.
- Techniques for writing a winning a funding bid and the key content that funders are looking for.

3.6 Communication

A communication plan for the DMP is in place to make sure that businesses and residents in Thanet know about the DMP, and how they can get involved. In the meantime, the following communications are in progress or have taken place:

- An online project management tool, Basecamp, has been set up to communicate with and between all group members.
- DMP Light: A summarised version of the DMP is being prepared for print and PDF/website use.
- Radio interviews: A close working relationship has been formed with Academy FM. So far, two interviews have taken place - one highlighting the Thanet Big Weekend and the other discussing Isle magazine, the DMP and the Shared Story.
- Press release: Announcing the commissioning of Tourism Works to help facilitate the DMP
- Media Briefings:
 - Meeting with Rebecca Smith, the editor of the Thanet Gazette

- Meeting with Howard Evans of Academy FM
- Social event: All members of the Steering Group and Project Groups were invited to two two-hour, early evening social events to provide people with an opportunity to network and get to know each other better in an informal situation. The social event will take place every 6 weeks.
- General support: Since the start of the implementation of the DMP, more than 59 individuals and businesses have given their time to attend meetings and workshops and some have given venues and refreshments free of charge to host these events.

4. CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

The foundations for the Steering Group and the Working Groups have been firmly set, directly engaging some 59 people from both the public and private sectors, and many more through networking, individual meetings, and disseminating the Shared Story. The scope and ambition of the DMP is being formulated more clearly through constant review and updating of action plans.

A considerable amount of activity is happening, with beach management audits completed and the beach management plan in its final stages, the marketing toolkit is under production, a photographic library is being developed, way finding activities are underway and an investors' pack is being developed.

Work in the forthcoming months will focus on drilling down to individual actions, looking at feasibility, budgets and funding.

Involving a lot of people means that sometimes implementation can be a long and slow but steady process, which needs constant nurturing. Realistically, people from the private sector can give only limited time but there is definitely a great enthusiasm for the project and a willingness to be involved.

Going into next year, we see some of the priorities for the DMP being:

- **Building financial plans for priority projects**

Produce costings for projects, giving a total required and a breakdown of works/actions. Prepare funding proposals, showing how much is required from the DMP, possible sponsorship, matched funding from other organisations and bodies and possible grants.

- **Building stronger relationship with Town Councils and Town Teams**

Identify areas of work that are a priority for Town Councils and Town Teams and see where they support the work of the DMP. Seek joint projects.

- **Building stronger relationship with beach businesses**

Increase frequency of meetings, and in good time for the new season. Encourage more participation in beach management.

- **Sponsorship**

Research and develop sponsorship packages for toilets, showers, dogs, seagulls, coastal shelters, beaches, way finding and the investors' pack.

- **Top Ten Businesses**

Build stronger relationships with some of the bigger players in Thanet, with resources, such as Shepherd Neame, Southeastern, Thorley Taverns, Southern Water, Stagecoach, Premier Inn, Travel Lodge, Visit England, East Kent College, KM Group, Thanet Gazette. Also consider companies such as Cardy's, Fuji, Cummins, Emco Wheaton and Thanet Earth.

- **Promoting DMP to small businesses**

Getting the message about the DMP out to small businesses through Tourism Matters, Toolkit promotion, mentoring and an industry event.

- **Engaging the community**

Develop the community side of the Telling our Stories action plan, involving residents in using and appreciating local tourism facilities.

- **Structuring meetings differently**

Review the working of the Steering Group and workings groups and invite members to make suggestions for improvements or changes to the way we work.

- **Improve communication and engagement with and within Council departments**

Spend more time with Council officers and members promoting the DMP internally and seeking further involvement and ideas.

APPENDIX 1

List of all group members