

Meeting	Swale Rural Forum	Agenda Item:
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Meeting Date	Tuesday 12 th January 2010
Report Title	Promotion of Tourism in Rural Areas
Portfolio Holder	Cllr. John Wright
SMT Lead	Pete Raine
Head of Service	Emma Wiggins
Lead Officer	Lyn Newton
Key Decision	No
Forward Plan	n/a

Recommendations	1. Note the report
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Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report responds to an external request for an item on 'steps to be taken to promote tourism in the rural areas' which comes from Deanna Caveney of the Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC). The report sets out the Council's role and identifies current priorities and partnership projects being developed and managed within existing resources. The report indicates that a number of the projects are defined by the current Comprehensive Spending Review and will be completed by March 2011 whilst some may extend beyond this period dependant upon the funding source.

2 Background

- 2.1 The Borough has three distinct areas in the form of Sittingbourne, Faversham and the Isle of Sheppey, as well as an extensive rural hinterland. Loss of traditional employment and skills, poor educational attainment and severe pockets of deprivation continue to present the area with challenges in securing longer term economic transition but tourism has remained largely resilient and enjoyed the benefits of the nationally promoted 'staycation' during the economic downturn of 2009. The diversity and quality of our natural environment – internationally protected wetlands on Sheppey, part of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and an extensive coastline with a rich 'defence of the realm' heritage - has contributed to the popularity of the area.
- 2.2 Acknowledged as one of the area's main industries, tourism activity is also recognised by partners and stakeholders as supporting the economic, social and environmental regeneration of Swale. A thriving tourism sector also supports other areas of the economy by providing accommodation and

meetings/conference facilities for local businesses. It can also underpin inward investment and business retention as successful businesses and skilled workers will want to relocate to an area because of the wide range of service facilities.

2.3 Tourism activity broadly falls into three distinct areas – information, marketing and promotion and strategy – supported and delivered by a broad range of partners. The Council acts as a facilitator or enabler working with partners to increase confidence, make the case for investment and provide a lever to bid for project funding. Recent examples of rural tourism activity include:

- Roll-out of the south-east pilot (with Maidstone and Ashford) for the Green Tourism Business Scheme (voluntary accreditation scheme for tourism and tourism related business applying themselves to environmental good practice)
- Fly Navy 100 and Sky Sheppey – working with the Ministry of Defence and local communities/parishes to provide a series of events and activities to celebrate the Fleet Air Arm centenary in 2009
- Sea Change (national programme to support resort regeneration) – successful funding application with parish and community organisations to DCMS/CABE¹ to create a Vision and costed delivery plan for renewal through enhancement of the public realm. Launch of the Vision – Leysdown Rose-tinted and appointment of part-time cultural regeneration officer for project delivery to 2012
- Development of proposals for new access routes (suitable for walkers, cyclists and people with disabilities) for Sheppey; the proposed recreational route for Leysdown will build on the Isle of Sheppey Green Cluster study and link with Leysdown Rose-tinted; access route completion in 2012
- ‘Soft’ launch of Team Green funded through the government initiative Future Jobs Fund (FJF) enabling employment of young people approaching a year of unemployment to undertake environmental and public realm improvement works in local communities through to 2011
- North Kent Walking Festival – an annual festival in June supported by Greening the Gateway Kent and Medway
- Support to Faversham Enterprise Partnership through ‘green grid’ to promote walking and local food and drink through food trails
- Support to individuals and organisations seeking early advice/‘signposting’ on the Kent Downs and Marshes LEADER programme to 2013
- Notification of national programmes for community engagement – Countryside 2010 (previously circulated for information) and Discovering Places (included as part of this agenda) to 2012

3 Proposal

3.1 The Council will maximise its own resources by using them as match-fund or ‘help in kind’ to secure additional resources to support project delivery in those communities where direct benefits will accrue to residents as well as visitors.

¹ DCMS (Department for Culture, Media and Sport) and CABE (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment)

- 3.2 The Council will work with partners to support project delivery in its rural communities some parish and town councils in Kent are involved in tourism through initiatives like market town regeneration, the production of visitor information and the provision of tourism information services.
- 3.3 The Council will 'signpost' individuals and organisations to agencies and organisations that support community enterprise, growth and development.

4 Alternative Options

- 4.1 None

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 Individual projects developed and led by the Council and its partners will be subject to consultation.

6 Corporate Plan Implications

- 6.1 The day-to-day tourism work forms part of the remit of the EDCS service area managed by the Regeneration Manager (Swale Borough Council) supported by Programme Support Officer (Swale Forward). The service area is contained within the Local Strategic Partnership's document 'Ambitions for Swale' as well as the Borough Council's Cultural Strategy 'Taking Part' and 2012 Vision/Action Plan 'Living the Legacy'. Tourism is also contained within Priority 1: Regenerating Swale and Priority 3: Promoting a Stronger & Safer Communities of the Corporate Plan Refresh 2009-2012 and is a key activity area. There is both a strategic and operational reflection of tourism within the EDCS Service Plan. Tourism is also an action with the Regeneration Improvement Plan following the Regeneration Inspection.

7 Financial, Resource and Property Implications

- 7.1 Many projects in the development stage are aspirational and will not be realised through existing resources alone. Each project must therefore be considered and taken forward as appropriate on its own merits.

8 Legal and Statutory Implications

- 8.1 Tourism is supported and guided by national, regional and local policies and in some instances (health and safety, food hygiene, packages) legislation.

9 Crime and Disorder Implications

- 9.1 Tourism provides a platform to showcase Swale's diverse and distinctive communities to existing and new audiences. This role is vital in the creation and upkeep of safe and attractive places for local people and visitors. Tourism supports access to and enjoyment in a broader cultural offer as well as enhancing quality of life and supporting health and well-being as well as contributing to perceived and actual safer and stronger communities.

10 Sustainability Implications

- 10.1 The Council cannot be seen as the single investor but as an enabler and facilitator with others to create new models and partnerships for both managing the local industry and creating new tourism opportunities. There must be an acceptance that there is both finite capacity and resource of the Council, its partners and external funding bodies.

11 Equality and Diversity Implications

- 11.1 Individual projects would be subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment; projects provide opportunities for residents and visitors to access a range of tourism products, services and facilities irrespective of gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, age and disability.

12. Risk Management and Health and Safety Implications

- 12.1 Risk assessments will be carried out with a mitigation/management plan as appropriate to each project.

13 Appendices

- 13.1 None

14 Background Papers

- 14.1 None