

**Report for Swale Rural Forum on Rural Tourism**

A Framework for Destination Development in Swale 2011-2014 is the overarching document which guides the work programme which supports tourism and its growth in Swale. It cites various other documents including the Swale Core Strategy which sets out the vision for Swale which includes, by 2031:

- Sheerness and Leysdown becoming beacons of coastal rejuvenation
- Queenborough emerging as a waterfront destination
- Successful rural communities across the downs

The outstanding natural environment of Swale is seen as a valuable asset.

Statistics gathered from 2009 suggest that tourism activity currently contributes £207.3m to the local (Swale) economy supporting 4,214 direct jobs.

**Current tourism projects**

- Art at the Centre was successfully developed to use art as a driver for regeneration and tourism. It originally focussed on Queenborough and Rushenden but in recent years has worked across Swale. This programme has been running since 2005 and draws to a close March 2012.
- Leysdown Rose Tinted is a cultural regeneration programme, again using art as the driving force, funded by SBC, Arts Council and LEADER funding. This project is working with local residents and traders to help regenerate Leysdown. Landscaping and planting have already improved The Spinney, and a village sign is being produced, as well as interpretation boards at Capel Fleet Raptor Point.
- Beach Huts on Sheppey at Sheerness, Leysdown and Minster. Feasibility study carried out end 2011 which suggested there is potential but a number of issues would need to be addressed, including location, construction material, size/style and management options (re-sale, annual let, weekly/daily let).
- Cross Sheppey Greenway – a shared use route ultimately linking Leysdown with Sheerness. The initial stage will link Leysdown with Eastchurch. It is intended to provide a safe, off-road route for pedestrians and cyclists. The project has already received £7k or feasibility work.
- Sheppey Country Break – a series of online itinerary ideas will be produced to encourage day-trippers to come to the Island and explore what it has to offer. It will engage with local businesses, getting them to work together more, and work with Sheppey Tourism Alliance. Emulating the Blean Country Break which was produced in 2011.

For 2012, service planning is currently under way and tourism priorities are yet to be identified, considering the greatly reduced resource to deliver this.

### Funding Opportunities

- LEADER - £294,762 funding committed in Swale since 2009 on a range of projects. One of the aims of LEADER is 'to foster sustainable rural tourism'. Projects funded so far include: Faversham Area Food Trails, Cheese-makers of Canterbury, Mobile Farm Experience, Doughty Family Butcher, Living Brogdale, Slow Summer Snail Farm, and Can-Do Signage in Leysdown.
- Coastal Communities Fund – designed to support economic development of coastal communities by promoting sustainable economic growth and jobs. Minimum bid of £50k, supporting capital and revenue projects, match funding is not essential. All coastal communities are eligible including those in rural areas.
- Growing Places Fund – KCC have received £2.8m. This fund is designed to be spent on site infrastructure (e.g. roads, utilities) to 'unblock' an area's potential for housing and development.
- Paths for Communities (P4C) Scheme: This is a new government funded grant scheme to be managed by Natural England aimed at enabling local (predominantly rural) communities to work with land owners to develop and enhance local public paths in ways that deliver wider benefit. There will be a particular emphasis on projects which appeal to visitors and tourists, contributing to the rural economy through better support for local services such as shops, pubs, hotels, bed and breakfasts, equestrian and cycle businesses.

A report is currently being produced by Sheffield Hallam University for the LEP Coastal Group on the statistics of coastal towns within Essex, Kent and East Sussex. A key problem for the coastal towns is that their needs are obscured by the generally more positive statistics for the counties of which they form part. In some cases, the issues in coastal towns are further obscured because the towns are only one component part of a larger district.

Visit Kent are also producing an Event Impact Model which will be available to anyone who has organised an event, to monitor effectiveness, value for money etc.

Quality in Tourism workshop was held in April 2011 to encourage accommodation providers to sign up for grading. Visit Kent also exploring opportunity for Local Authority Assessment Scheme as an 'entry level' scheme to encourage businesses to improve on quality.