

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
DRAFT REVIEW REPORT**



LEISURE AND TOURISM

Report date:	12 October 2016
Lead reviewer(s):	Councillor Mike Henderson (review coordinator) and Councillors Mike Baldock, Ken Ingleton and Ben Stokes
O&S support officer:	Bob Pullen, Policy and Performance Officer
Service liaison officer(s):	Lyn Newton, Economy and Community Services Manager Martin Goodhew, Project Officer
Head(s) of service:	Charlotte Hudson, Interim Head of Economy and Communities

1 Report summary

1.1 This draft report outlines the findings of the Task and Finish Group which was established to review whether the Council was making the most of Swale’s leisure and tourism offer in order to encourage people to visit the Borough.

2 List of recommendations

2.1 The Task and Finish Group recommends:

a) Promotion and marketing:

- i) to commit approximately £25,000 to the tourism base budget to allow for substantial marketing and promotion of Swale as a tourist destination;*
- ii) to agree an objective of growing Swale tourism by 5 – 10% over the next four years;*
- iii) to consider as part of the future tourism plans the best form of branding of Swale.*

b) Visitors and local infrastructure:

- i) SBC should identify and provide sufficient coach parking in convenient locations to meet the demands of all visitors to Swale;*
- ii): SBC should work closely with tourist attractions to ensure the Borough has a comprehensive coverage of up to date “brown tourist signs”;*

iii): consideration given to whether the funding of these signs could be supported by SBC, either through a new fund, Member grants, Section 106 grants or a combination of these;

iv): provision of more local signs;

v): SBC should make sustained efforts to influence KCC Highways and Highways England to fulfil their responsibilities to keep roads clean, and do the same with Network Rail in relation to the approaches to local stations.

c): Working with the local tourism sector:

i):that SBC facilitates the establishment of collaborative groups;

ii) that SBC establishes a challenge fund of £3,000 to support new activities or events.

d): Research and intelligence:

i) to conduct a full economic assessment of tourism in Swale. It is understood that this has been arranged to cover 2015 using “Destination Research”. This should be repeated strictly every two years which has not recently been met;

ii) additionally extra information should be sought from useful reports available on the tourism market;

iii) to make contact with several other similar Boroughs to develop a benchmarking programme to seek the best ways of increasing the economic and cultural effects of tourism. £2,000 pa should be set aside for research.

e): Financial and other support to the sector:

i) SBC to proactively assist local tourist organisations to find and bid for grants to increase tourism;

ii) consider the creation and promotion of a challenge fund worth around £5,000 which local tourism businesses could bid for;

iii) that SBC increases the availability of officer time to ensure the best possible potential achievement of all the recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee.

3 The review

3.1 The Task and Finish Group (TFG) was established to:

- review whether the Council was making the most of Swale’s leisure and tourism offer in order to encourage people to visit the Borough; and

- as necessary, to make recommendations to Cabinet.
- 3.1.1 The review was instigated by the Scrutiny Committee and the review plan was agreed by the Committee on 17 March 2016 and is at Appendix I.
- 3.1.2 The review was conducted principally through a number of meetings between the TFG and people from the local tourism sector and officers at Swale Borough Council. A schedule of who we met is at Appendix II.
- 3.1.3 The TFG would like to thank all those who agreed to meet with us to answer questions, responded to questionnaires and provided information. The TFG would also like to thank the service liaison officers for their input who are listed above for their assistance.
- 3.1.4 The review was led by Councillor Mike Henderson and the other Task and Finish Group members are Councillors Mike Baldock, Ken Ingleton and Ben Stokes. The TFG were supported by Bob Pullen, Policy and Performance Officer, as overview and scrutiny support officer.

4 Background

- 4.1 One of the Council's high-level objectives under the Corporate Plan priority theme 'A borough to be proud of' is to 'enhance the borough's economic and tourism offer'.
- 4.2 Swale offers a range of leisure and tourism facilities which attract people from outside the borough. These include:
- the holiday parks on the Isle of Sheppey;
 - self-catering, B&B and hotel accommodation;
 - walking, cycling and horse-riding, particularly in the more rural and coastal areas;
 - rural villages and wetlands;
 - specific events such as festivals and carnivals;
 - history and heritage landmarks and events;
 - shopping, eating and drinking establishments;
 - coast and water-based leisure; and
 - sports venues.
- 4.3 The purpose of the review was to understand whether the Council and its partners are making the most of Swale's assets in order to encourage people to visit the Borough and help sustain local businesses and facilities.

5 Findings

Promotion and marketing of Swale as place to visit

Key findings

- 5.1 There is very wide acceptance from respondents in tourism businesses to interviews and questionnaires that there needs to be much more marketing and promotion of Swale and its various parts to stimulate tourism, visits to Swale, greater use of Swale's excellent tourism assets, and through this, growth in the Swale economy. In the last assessment of the value of tourism in Swale in 2012 the total value was estimated at £194m with employment at 4,700 being 7% of total employment in Swale. This clearly identifies the major importance of tourism to the economy of Swale. Just a 5% growth from this 2012 figures would see almost £10m added to Swale's economy.
- 5.2 It is widely considered that both printed and web based marketing materials are needed to stimulate tourism with each type of promotion backing up the other. It is considered by many respondents that a wide range of high quality photographic work is needed for promotion. The Culture and Place Team within SBC's Economy and Communities Service also considers that "pop up" displays are needed for exhibitions and that the extensive use of post cards to lead people to the "Visit Swale" web site would be valuable.
- 5.3 There are a number of tourism operators who consider that the "Visit Swale" website needs substantial improvement for example with top quality and up to date photos, and with easier layout and access. Furthermore, SBC's own website lacked a 'What's on' scrolling tickertape showing key events that councils such as Medway and Canterbury City had on their front pages.
- 5.4 It is thought by many Swale tourist based businesses that marketing should be widened to include London rail stations, to gain benefit from major Kent attractions such as Leeds Castle and major events such as the Sweeps and Dickens Festivals in Medway and Canterbury festivals by linking Swale's promotion to their own directly or through Visit Kent.. It would also be simple and low cost to promote into northern France.
- 5.5 Within the overall promotion of Swale consideration needs to be given to clear branding. It needs to be determined whether the best option is to brand Swale as a single destination or to separate into potentially four brands – Faversham, Sheppey, Sittingbourne, plus the villages and Downs AONB. Given the effort being put into tourism expansion into Faversham it may be considered worthwhile leading with Faversham and spreading the word to include the rest of Swale. The two authorities we visited in Essex took different approaches based on their local geography – Tendring tailoring their marketing to individual destinations and Maldon promoting their district as a whole as a destination.
- 5.6 It was noted that Maldon District Council, with half the population size of Swale and a revenue budget of £6.6m compared to Swale's £17.3m, devoted some £12,000 per annum to promotional publicity alone while Swale's overall budget for all tourism related activity was £14,309.
- 5.7 The TFG considers that Cabinet gives consideration to these findings and therefore recommends:

Recommendation:

a) Promotion and marketing:

- i) to commit approximately £25,000 to the tourism base budget to allow for***

substantial marketing and promotion of Swale as a tourist destination;
ii) to agree an objective of growing Swale tourism by 5 – 10% over the next 4 years;
iii) to consider as part of the future tourism plans the best form of branding of Swale.

Visitors to Swale and local infrastructure

Key findings

5.8 It is important to recognise and understand that, at present over 65% of visits to Swale arise from friends and family of people living in Swale. This indicates the importance of promoting attractions within Swale to residents as well as outsiders.

5.9 The 2012 analysis of visitors to Swale shows 375,000 staying visitor trips each with an average spend in Swale of £100. It also shows 4,440,000 day visits with an average spend in Swale of £30. It is important to recognise and work on the higher value of staying visits to seek to increase the number of these high value visits. We must however also recognise that there almost 12 times more day visits than staying visits and conclude these too are a very important contributor to the Swale economy.

5.10 There are clear and frequent complaints from many businesses connected with visitors to Swale that many visits are made by coach and that there needs to be sufficient convenient coach parking to meet all the demands of such visitors. It is considered that there is insufficient coach parking in all areas of Swale and much of what exists at present is not situated in locations for the convenience of visitors.

5.11 The TFG therefore recommends:

Recommendation:

b): Visitors to Swale and local infrastructure:

j): SBC should identify and provide sufficient coach parking in convenient locations to meet the demands of all visitors to Swale;

5.12 It is widely seen by tourism businesses that signposting to visitor attractions is inadequate. There are not enough of the nationally recognised “brown tourist signs” to adequately direct people to main visitor attractions and some of those which do exist are out of date. Additionally it is widely believed that far more opportunities exist for provision of local signage to specific visitor attractions and to the more attractive general locations in Swale.

5.13 SBC should make a concerted and continuing effort, working with tourist attractions in Swale to have more “brown signs” provided, and to update “brown signs” where appropriate and necessary while recognising the qualifying criteria set by central government and the financial arrangements imposed by contractor Jacob Baptie. Additionally it would be valuable to stimulate provision of more local signs where they will benefit specific locations and general attractive areas

of Swale. It is expected that individual visitor attractions will contribute to the provision of local signs together with perhaps a competitively organised contribution by SBC which is proposed to be £5,000 over a 2 year period and the encouragement of councillor grant contributions. S106 money could also be used to assist this work

5.14 The TFG therefore recommends:

Recommendation:

ii): SBC should work closely with tourist attractions to ensure the Borough has a comprehensive coverage of up to date “brown tourist signs”;

iii): consideration given to whether the funding of these signs could be supported by SBC, either through a new fund, Member grants, Section 106 grants or a combination of these;

iv): provision of more local signs.

5.15 Several of the entry points into Swale by both road and rail are considered by both councillors and tourist based businesses to be untidy and unattractive. Councils visited in Essex have encountered similar problems. It is believed that this is likely to discourage repeat visits to Swale. Particular mention has been made regarding A249 and A2 and Kemsley and Faversham stations.

Recommendation:

v): SBC should make sustained efforts to influence KCC Highways and Highways England to fulfil their responsibilities to keep roads clean, and do the same with Network Rail in relation to the approaches to local stations;

Working with the local tourism sector

Key findings

5.16 Councillors, Swale officers and local tourism businesses are almost unanimous in believing that there is a clear need for everyone to work together to increase and improve tourism in Swale. It is thought by the TFG working on this project very important to involve councillors in their community leadership role to be a part of this activity. It is recognised widely that mostly businesses and organisations in the tourism field do not work closely together although there are worthy exceptions to this such as the Swale Museums Group which is doing excellent work and has just secured a Heritage Lottery Start Up grant to become ‘Historic Swale’. The TFG and several tourism businesses consider however that teams would be best led by the private sector. It is also considered that the Culture and Place Team at SBC could create a strong link from tourism businesses to all other SBC departments in assisting tourism. This already works well for major events such as the Faversham Hop Festival where the Culture and Place Team leads on collaborative working with Licensing, Technical Department, Street Cleaning and others.

5.17 It will be valuable to improve and increase events throughout Swale. There is maximum economic advantage to be gained with events held across a two or three day weekend. This too will need volunteers, businesses, SBC officers and councillors to work together and potentially additionally town and parish councils. We should look at the potential of Sittingbourne events and work with the Sittingbourne Retail Association to expand existing events and develop new ones linked into the High Street and town centre

5.18 It is considered that a number of collaborative groups should be set up covering different sectors of tourism. These could include museums, other heritage, natural history, culture, events, restaurants and pubs and more widely food/drink, countryside/AONB/coast, maritime history/sailing and hotels/B&B/holiday lets. One or more councillor should be involved in each group and work will be needed by both councillors and SBC officers to set up these groups and support them. Again it is considered that groups should where possible be led by the private sector. A specific early group which could demonstrate the effectiveness of such work could cover the Natural History of Swale and include SBC, RSPB, KWT, Blean Woods, Perry Woods, Queendown Warren, Oare Gunpowder Works, Elmley nature reserve. There are SBC officers, councillors and volunteers already keen to be involved in such a project. A modest fund of around £3,000 pa should be set up by SBC to support the best 3 ideas for new activities or events.

5.19 The TFG recommends:

Recommendation:

c): Working with local tourism sector:

i) that SBC facilitates the establishment of collaborative groups, preferably led by the private sector;

ii) that SBC establishes a challenge fund of £3,000 to support new activities or events.

Research and intelligence

Key findings

5.20 Research is considered vitally important to identify ways of increasing tourism and its economic impact and also to measure tourism regularly to judge the impact of SBC policy and activity on tourism in Swale. It appears that the most recent detailed assessment of tourism in Swale was in 2012. This should include at least a two yearly economic assessment of the effect of tourism in Swale together with seeking out other available research and working to benchmark the size and effectiveness of tourism against other comparable locations.

5.21 We heard that at both Tendring and Maldon District Councils they set great store by research and intelligence commissioned studies themselves every year in order to gauge the impact of measures to increase visitors.

5.22 The TFG recommends:

Recommendation:

d): **Research and intelligence:**

i): to conduct a full economic assessment of tourism in Swale. It is understood that this has been arranged to cover 2015 using “Destination Research”. This should be repeated strictly every two years which has not recently been met;

ii): additionally extra information should be sought from useful reports available on the tourism market;

iii): to make contact with several other similar Boroughs to develop a benchmarking programme to seek the best ways of increasing the economic and cultural effects of tourism. £2,000 pa should be set aside for research.

Financial and other support to the local tourism sector

Key findings

5.23 Tourism businesses need help to identify potential grant funding for tourism and then bid for such funding. It is understood that Swale Community and Voluntary Services may offer some help here but this is not widely known.

5.24 SBC should seek a way of providing direct help to organisations to seek out and bid for grants to increase tourism. It is understood that Swale CVS work to deliver a national scheme “Grant Finder” but this appears to be little known out in the tourism market and SBC needs to promote this extensively to tourism businesses. SBC also apparently uses a tourism advisor via Visit Kent which again is not widely known in the tourism marketplace and in the last year only committed £1,100 to assist local businesses. This whole activity would be much strengthened by the creation and strong promotion of a challenge fund within SBC which tourism businesses could bid for. It is suggested that a fund of £5,000 pa would have a significant impact

5.25 The TFG recommends:

Recommendation

e): **Financial and other support to the sector:**

i) SBC to proactively assist local tourist organisations to find and bid for grants to increase tourism;

ii) Consider the creation and promotion of a challenge fund worth around £5,000 which local tourism businesses could bid for;

5.26 The TFG recommends:

Recommendation

iii): *That SBC increases the availability of officer time to ensure the best possible potential achievement of all the recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee.*

Appendices

Appendix i Review plan

Appendix ii Review participants

O&S REVIEW PLAN: PERFORMANCE REVIEW



About performance reviews

The objective of a performance review is to examine the reasons for apparent under-performance of a council service, to assess prospects for improvement, and to make recommendations to Cabinet where appropriate. The output of a policy review is always a report to Cabinet. Typical questions for this type of review are:

- Is this service genuinely under-performing, and if so why?
- Are there plans and systems in place which will help it improve?
- What more needs to be done?

The review needs to be tightly focused on a single service area which appears to be under-performing against performance indicators, planned actions, customer satisfaction or budget management. A performance review could also be conducted on a service run by one of the council's partners, but in this case the committee will need to be clear that it has sufficient powers to review the service and make recommendations for improvements – if it does not, then the issue should be treated as an information item.

Part 1: Business Case

Subject:	Leisure and tourism in Swale
Proposed by:	Scrutiny Committee
Length:	Expected to take twelve months from start to finish.
Objective	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To review whether the Council is making the most of Swale's leisure and tourism offer in order to encourage people to visit the Borough; and • As necessary, to make recommendations to Cabinet. 	
Justification	
<p>One of the Council's high-level objectives under the 'Borough to be proud of' priority theme in the new Corporate Plan is to 'Enhance the Borough's economic and tourism offer'.</p> <p>Swale offers a range of leisure and tourism facilities which attract people from outside the Borough. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the holiday parks on the Isle of Sheppey; - self-catering, B&B and hotel accommodation; - walking, cycling and horse riding, particularly in the more rural and coastal areas; - rural villages and wetlands; - specific events such as festivals and carnivals; - history and heritage landmarks and events; - shopping, eating and drinking establishments; 	

- our coast and water-based leisure; and
- sports venues.

The purpose of the review is to understand whether the Council and its partners are making the most of Swale's assets in order to encourage people to visit the Borough and help sustain local businesses and facilities.

Evidence and information to be gathered

- Evidence of how the Council promotes Swale's leisure and tourism facilities and how the effectiveness of this is evaluated;
- information on how the Council works with key partners (eg. Visit Kent, British Destinations Organisation etc) to promote Swale as a place to visit;
- how the Council works with businesses and others in the Swale leisure and tourism sector;
- the impact of infrastructure investment (eg. rail and cycling, lack of coach parking); and
- whether Swale is used as an overnight stopover point to other tourist destinations.

Sources of information and evidence

<i>Individual or organisation</i>	<i>Committee session</i>	<i>Task and finish panel, site visit, correspondence, or other method</i>	<i>To be decided</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cllr Mike Whiting, Cabinet Member for Localism, Culture, Heritage and Sport; • Cllr Mike Cosgrove, Cabinet Member for Regeneration; • Lyn Newton, Economy and Community Services Manager; • Len Mayatt, Leisure and Technical Services Manager. 	√	X	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local businesses and other organisations in the Swale leisure and tourism sector. 	X	Site visits and postal surveys	X
Organisation(s) to be reviewed	If partners' activities are to be reviewed, what powers or influence does the committee have?		
X SBC only.			
Partner organisation only.			
X SBC working in partnership.			

Timing constraints	None.
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Part 2: Review Plan	
Review team	
Lead review member:	Councillor Mike Henderson
Other review members:	Councillors Mark Baldock, Ken Ingleton and Ben Stokes
O&S support officer:	Bob Pullen, Policy and Performance Officer
SBC service liaison officer:	Lyn Newton, Economy and Community Services Manager
Key dates	
Date to begin evidence gathering:	January 2016
Date(s) of committee sessions (if any):	10 February 2016
Date for draft report to be presented to committee:	12 October 2016
Note: Dates of committee session(s) and for the report to be presented to committee must be added to the committee forward plan.	

Appendix II

Review participants

Date of meeting/visit	Name	Organisation
10 February 2016 (Scrutiny Committee meeting)	Councillor Mike Cosgrove, Cabinet Member for Regeneration	Swale Borough Council
“	Lyn Newton, Economy and Communities Manager	“
“	Martin Goodhew, Project Officer	“
1 April 2016	Hannah Tilley, Tourism Officer	Faversham Town Council
7 April 2016	Lyn Newton, Economy and Communities Manager	Swale Borough Council
“	Martin Goodhew, Project Officer	“
15 April 2016	Jenny Hurkett	Blue Town Heritage Centre
20 April 2016	Kimberly Champion, Operations Manager	Brogdale Collections
8 June 2016	Tim Bell	Queenborough Harbour Trust
10 June 2016	Mike Carran, Head of Sport and Leisure	Tendring District Council
10 June 2016	Councillor Ron Pratt	Maldon District Council
“	Councillor Andrew St Joseph	“
“	Ben Brown	“
“	Alexis Brown	“
10 May 2016	Maureen Wharton	White Horse Leisure Centres
“	Mary Culver	Leysdown Events Organisation
????	????	Edith May Thames Barge, Lower Halstow
????	????	Old Forge, East Street, Sittingbourne
????	????	Sittingbourne and Kemsley Light Railway
????	????	Sittingbourne Retailers Association
15 July 2016	Graham Osborne	Lower Halstow Yacht Club
“	John Webb	Hollowshore Cruising Club
“	Tim Bell	Sheppey Sailability
“	Stan Hampshire	Sheppey Sailability
“	Robert Telford	Faversham Creek Trust
“	Mark Robson	Isle of Sheppey Sailing Club
“	Dan Corpe	Isle of Sheppey Sailing Club

Date of meeting/visit	Name	Organisation
22 July 2016	Sarah Smith	Sunnyhill Glamping, Borden
3 August 2016	Harold Goodwin	Faversham Society

The following individuals and organisations kindly completed and returned questionnaires:

Monique Bonney;
 Jenny Hurkett, Blue Town Heritage Centre;
 Paul David, Friends of Milton Regis Court Hall;
 Georgina Fulton, Elmley Nature Reserve;
 Graham Hukins, Shepherd Neame Visitor Centre;
 Paul Weeks, The Sweet Hut Minster;
 Kimberly Campion, Brogdale Collections;
 Lena Crowderm Minster Gatehouse;
 John Webb, Hollowshore Cruising Club