

3.3 Despite the variety and strengths of Gravesham's heritage, qualities and assets, as things stand, Gravesham is lacking a concentrated cluster of commercial visitor and heritage attractions which would help develop the visitor economy further.

3.4 The operation of heritage sites in the Borough rely heavily on volunteers and most of these open seasonally and often only for a couple a days a week or as with Gad's Hill Place and Cobham Hall during school holidays.

3.5 Gravesham has a series of strong heritage themes which can create an attractive offer for visitors, but it will be those visitor attractions which are open throughout the year, especially within the expanding 'experiential' sector, together with additional visitor accommodation, which will contribute to a growing visitor economy.

3.6 Part of Gravesham's draw to visitors is the town centre, its independent/distinctive businesses and its strengthening arts and cultural offer, including the Woodville theatre/cinema programme.

3.7 Given the disparate nature of Gravesham's offer, supporting data as to why people visit, needs to be collated more effectively.

3.8 Clarity as to why people are visiting and how that might change, can be strengthened through the undertaking of some branding work to define the Borough's messaging and marketing going forward.



4 PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK TOURISM & HERITAGE

4.1 The Gravesham Local Plan, as the development framework for the future of the Borough, recognises the role that tourism and heritage have to the Gravesham economy, specifically Town Centre regeneration and sustainable rural diversification.

4.2 Policy CS09 – Culture & Tourism – applies a sequential approach to the provision of new tourist facilities appropriate to their location and accessibility; supports proposals which meet the diversity of Gravesham as a multi-cultural community; and, supports sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments that benefit rural businesses, communities and visitors, compatible to countryside protection policies.

4.3 The Local Plan also encourages a positive approach to the Borough's historic environment to ensure that the historic character and distinctiveness of the Borough is conserved and enhanced, especially within an area of significant change, investment and development.

The Borough's key heritage assets are recognised as including:

4.3.1 300 plus Listed Buildings of which a significant number are of local historic and/or architectural value.

4.3.2 23 Conservation Areas

4.3.3 9 Scheduled Monuments

4.3.4 Historic landscapes, landscape features, parks and gardens

4.3.5 Known archaeological sites and areas of archaeological significance

4.4 Policy CS20 – Heritage and the Built Environment – gives high priority towards the preservation, protection and enhancement of its heritage and historic environment. This is especially so where their interpretation contributes to the distinct identity of the Borough.



5 OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPAND THE VISITOR ECONOMY

5.1 Gravesham is responding constructively to the opportunities that are coming forward to expand the local visitor economy:

Plans to extend fast river services to and from Central London, provision for visiting leisure craft and growing numbers of visitors from the International Cruise Terminal – these have the potential to renew the contribution that the River can make to bringing visitors into the area and reinforce what is considered to be Gravesham’s unique selling point.

New rail and road infrastructure, including the potential extension of Crossrail and the Lower Thames crossing.

The Council’s plans for regeneration of Gravesend Town Centre will revitalise and create a broader mix of entertainment, leisure and restaurants in the Town, together with additional hotel development.

The Council’s arts and cultural strategy highlights and strengthens the Borough’s cultural offer, creating new performance,

gallery spaces, and creative workspaces and hosting artistic commissions in support of the major arts festivals – England’s Creative Coast and Estuary 2021.

Ebbsfleet Garden City on the western edge of the Borough is bringing more people to live and work in the area, stimulating new business opportunities and visitor growth. Proposals for the London Resort entertainment resort is a ‘game changer’ in attracting visitor numbers and expanding visitor accommodation in the area. The challenge will be to attract visitor spend beyond the Resort.

New cycling and walking routes connecting countryside, villages and the urban area, enabling visitors to explore in a more sustainable and environmentally friendly way - “The Last Mile”.

5.2 Together, these add considerable confidence to Gravesham’s ability to grow tourism as part of its overall ambition for a vibrant and productive economy.



6 THE IMPORTANCE OF TOURISM ON THE GRAVESHAM ECONOMY

6.1 Nationally, tourism and heritage are important drivers of economic growth and regeneration; they have the potential to attract other investment and to support a variety of work, volunteering and skills development opportunities. The tourism sector is the fifth largest contributor to the national economy.

6.2 The most recent research undertaken in 2019 (Source: Cambridge Model) concluded that the volume and value of tourism activity in the Gravesham economy can be summarised as follows:

£124m generated by tourism activity for local businesses.

2793 jobs supported.

2.1 million visits per year; made up of 186,000 staying trips and 1.9 million day trips.

Out of the 186,000 staying trips, 79% were domestic visitors and 21% were overseas visitors.

The main visitor expenditure is on retail, food and drink and transport.

6.3 Day visits overwhelmingly dominate the pattern of trips for Gravesham. Short stays represent around 10% of visits, predominantly social and friends and family stays, with some business stays and visits to London. The priority is to increase the volume of stays and to expand overnight stays, raising the area's profile for visits from further afield, including international visits.

6.4 Visitor figures demonstrate that Gravesham has the smallest visitor economy within Kent and attracts a disproportionate low share (approximately 4%) of Kent's visitors, their expenditure and derived employment. Given the size of the local economy relative to other Kent Districts, Gravesham ought to be looking to increase the value of tourism to at least 6% of Kent's visitors. From these figures, it is clear that the full capability of Gravesham to contribute more to Kent's visitor economy has yet to be realised.

6.5 The aim of this strategy is therefore to take steps to expand this part of the economy. The key priorities being to expand visitor accommodation and add more to its attractions, especially where they support local investment and expenditure.

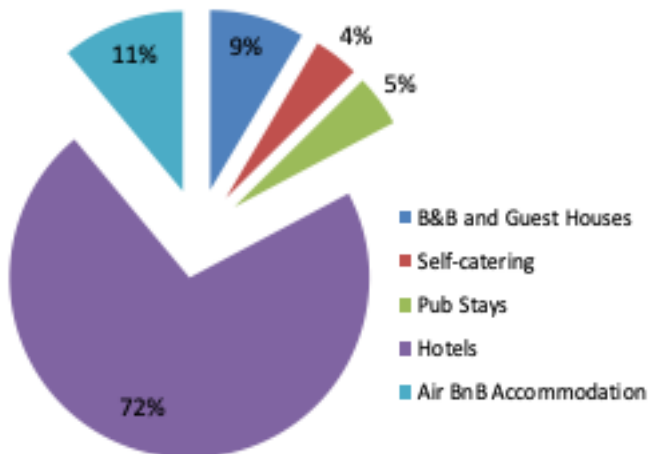


7 VISITOR ACCOMMODATION

7.1 The current stock of visitor accommodation in Gravesham is as made up of the following:

Accommodation Type	Total Bedrooms
Hotels	370
B&B, Guest Houses	44
Pubs & Inns	24
Self-Catering (inc AirBnB = 57 as at Aug 2020)	78
Total	516

Gravesham Visitor Accommodation % Age



7.2 Recent trends have shown the decline in national standard grading schemes, with their replacement by customer online reviews; additional hotel development with an expansion of the Premier Inn at Woodlands Park and a new Travelodge at Coldharbour Road (61 bedrooms) which opened in 2019. The rise of AirBnB accommodation has seen the introduction of approximately 57 bedrooms in Gravesham, with 50% of those being single rooms as opposed to multi-bedroom properties.

7.3 The changes taking place and greater options on offer when it comes to bookable visitor accommodation are having a dramatic impact on visitor preferences and behaviour and in some circumstances visitor experiences are being promoted alongside accommodation bookings.

7.4 There has also been growth in visitor accommodation surrounding the Borough, notably with the new Spring River Ebbsfleet (Marstons – 104 bedrooms).

The Ebbsfleet Garden City is accommodating some additional visitor accommodation adjoining the Borough to the west, currently in the form of pub/hotels. The Implementation Plan (<https://ebbsfleetdc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Ebbsfleet-Implementation-Framework.pdf>) identifies 45,750 sqm of hotel development over the duration of the plan.

7.5 Proposals for London Resort – “A world-class, sustainable, next generation entertainment resort” - have become clearer through the recent consultation (August 2020) as part of the Development Planning Order process.

In matters of accommodation provision it comprises the following:

- Four hotels providing family, upmarket, luxury and themed accommodation totalling up to 3,550 suites.
- Up to 500 apartments for London Resort workers, typically consisting of 4-6 bedrooms and shared kitchen and lounge facilities.

7.6 Hotels report great variations in their occupancy, albeit figures are difficult to come by on a consistent basis.

7.7 Traditionally, hotel demand has been focused alongside the A2 corridor, but the prospect for this to change with greater interest in the Town Centre, including proposals for an 88 bed hotel in St George's Phase 2, benefitting from the connectivity that Highspeed 1 brings the Town.

7.8 Ensuring the quality of visitor accommodation in the Borough remains an issue with the decline in national grading systems. The Kent Charter was set-up in 2012 to create the opportunity for accommodation to sign-up to local standards, and whilst a number of Gravesham businesses have signed-up to this, it has not been widely adopted.

7.9 The following priority actions for visitor accommodation have been identified during the strategy period:

7.9.1 Participation in the Kent Hotel Accommodation Study being undertaken by CCCU, Visit Kent and Locate in Kent to identify the potential for visitor accommodation growth.

7.9.2 Support a mix of quality and affordable visitor accommodation as well as hotel development within the town centre. Seek to address gaps in other forms of visitor accommodation, including glamping, camping and caravanning, especially where that supports other ambitions within this strategy.

7.9.3 Work with local accommodation providers to encourage provision of quality visitor accommodation and where possible sign-up to the Kent Charter.

7.9.4 Assess the impacts that residential development and new hotel development in the Ebbsfleet Garden City and proposals for London Resort and understand how these will effect scope for investment in additional visitor accommodation in Gravesham.

7.9.5 Explore opportunities for business/conference tourism associated with Gravesham's enhanced connectivity.



8 VISITOR & HERITAGE ATTRACTIONS

8.1 Gravesham has a diverse range of heritage and visitor attractions within the following, at times overlapping 'themes':

8.1.1 Exceptional countryside and characterful villages, with extensive swathes of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the North Kent Marshes, including internationally important wetland areas; Kent's most visited Country Park at Shorne Woods and others at Trosley and Jeskyns.

8.1.2 Sport and activity based visits – Cyclopark (national multi-sports centre), walking, horse riding, cycling, long distance footpaths – Saxon Shore Way, North Downs Way, weald Way and cycleways/Sustrans; future and new leisure facilities in the borough.

8.1.3 Heritage properties - small cluster of National Trust properties including Cobham Mausoleum, Owletts and the Yeoman's House, Sole Street; .

8.1.4 Strong association with historic characters – Charles Dickens, living his last years at Gad's Hill Place, Higham (1856-1870) and his links with Cobham, Higham and countryside; Pocahontas and Gravesend's part in her story; General Charles Gordon and his influential time in Gravesend.

8.1.5 Faith based visits - The largest Sikh Gurdwara complex in Europe attracting visitors interested in the faith, the building, Sikh heritage and major festivals; historic church buildings, e.g. St George's, Gravesend, St Mary Magdalene, Cobham and its fine collection of medieval brasses; St Mary's Lower Higham now in the hands of the Churches Conservation Trust.

8.1.6 Defence related heritage attractions - telling a story of the defence of London and the River over many centuries, including New Tavern Fort and Milton Chantry Heritage Centre, Gravesend Blockhouse, Woodlands Park Cold War Bunker Shornemead Fort.

8.1.7 A new generation of visitor experiences - represented in Gravesend by The Panic Room – one of the first escape rooms in Kent and what is believed to be the largest cluster of rooms in the UK. Typically, registers as within the top 10 of fun and games attractions in Kent.

8.1.8 An emerging cluster of creative and performance spaces ranging from The Woodville to the new St George's creative space, St Andrew's and LV21 Light Vessel, with the potential to inspire the use of other spaces within Gravesend Borough Market and Gravesend Library for creative activity.

8.2 The majority of these are accessible on an infrequent basis, often seasonally, independently run, reliant on their operation by volunteers and predominantly non-commercial. Consequently, whilst they offer diverse interest to the visitor, they have a small scale economic impact on their own.

8.3 Greater gains to the visitor economy have taken place in recent years with the impact of additional more commercial attractions, such as the Panic Room and Cyclopark and those that by their sheer scale attract larger visitor numbers – Guru Nanak Durbar Gurdwara.

8.4 Ongoing challenge to collect visitor data from local businesses and organisations.

8.5 Greater co-ordination and promotion between these 'attractions' under specific



themes and through co-ordination of openings for small groups and itineraries helps to overcome issues of infrequent opening. Establishment of the Gravesham Accredited Tour Guides and development of guided tours creates additional opportunities for group visits to overcome some of the weaknesses in openings. More can be done to generate income, train volunteers and to add value to a visit.

8.6 The London Resort proposals comprise the following:

- **A Leisure Core, comprising a range of events spaces, themed rides and attractions, entertainment venues, theatres and cinemas, developed in landscaped settings in two phases.**
- **A 'Conferention' Centre (i.e. a combined conference and convention centre) with a floor area of up to 11,000 m2.**
- **A linked building hosting a range of eSports, video and computer gaming events, with a total floor space of up to 16,500 m2.**
- **A Back of House area accommodating many of the necessary supporting technical and logistical operations to enable the London Resort to function.**
- **This also includes a new access road from the A2 and arrival of visitors via the River. This Resort has the potential to dramatically change the nature of the visitor economy locally, subject to understanding the demand for staying 'beyond the park' and extending visits locally, if not only with friends and family in the area, which is an important aspect of visitors stays currently.**

8.7 The following priority actions for attraction development have been identified during the strategy period:

- 8.7.1 Continue to encourage the opening of Gad's Hill Place to visitors and steps being taken by the Charles Dickens Heritage Trust to open the building as a Heritage Centre.
- 8.7.2 Work with faith communities to provide hospitality and a welcome at the Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara, St George's Church, Gravesend and at other church and faith based venues.
- 8.7.3 Takes steps to enhance the interpretation of Pocahontas' story through working with St George's Church and the St George's Phase 2 town centre regeneration proposals.
- 8.7.4 Recognise the growth and attraction of 'experiential' visits with themed guided visits/tours, a focus on culture, food and drink, river trips, sports tourism, etc.
- 8.7.5 Promote greater access to Gravesham's riverside for walking and leisure use, where it is safe to do so.
- 8.7.6 Understand the implications of the London Resort proposals on the visitor economy and wider Gravesham economy.
- 8.7.7 Collection of data from local businesses and organisation in order to identify and understand our visitor markets better.



9 GRAVESHAM'S DIVERSE CULTURE, FESTIVALS & EVENTS

9.1 For a Borough of its size, Gravesham hosts a diverse variety of events and festivals. Many of these are community focused events, but a number have the potential to attract visitors from further afield, such as St George's Day Parade (April), Vaisakhi parade (April), Riverside Festival (July), the annual Fireworks display (November) and Christmas events.

9.2 Alongside these the council seeks to work with partners, including Visit Kent, to ensure a presence in the county wide visitor campaign - Big Kent Day Out (March), English Tourism Week (March) and Heritage Open Days (September).

9.3 The Borough is also well placed to figure in national cultural festivals which are designed to inspire creativity in the context of the coast and estuary – Estuary 2021 and England's Creative Coast.

9.4 Covid-19 safe responses are influencing the operation of Gravesham's attractions and it is events, festivals and activities, which are taking place outdoors, that will likely draw visitors at this point in time.

9.5 Festivals and events have the potential to add considerably to Gravesham's visitor appeal by being designed and promoted to attract a wider visitor audience.



9.6 The following priority actions for attraction development have been identified during the strategy period:

9.6.1 Review and confirmation of the Borough's events programming post Covid-19 to recognise the role that they may have in attracting more visitors to the Borough.

9.6.2 Capitalise on the large scale cultural events planned for the Thames Estuary and Creative Coast in the coming years.

9.6.3 Promote the Borough's strong cultural attraction through its events and supplement with other guided visits, trails and interpretation.



10 MARKETING & PROMOTION

10.1 A website presence and social media dominate the way in which Gravesham, as a visitor destination, is marketed and promoted. Opportunities will exist to promote even more effectively Gravesham's visitor offer as it strengthens and develops. Gravesham's visitor themes of riverside, countryside, activity and defence history are strong, but it is the exposure that the larger attractions, such as the Panic Room, Cyclopark and Gurdwara have to raise awareness of the area to the visitor.

10.2 Gravesham is a member of Kent's Destination Management Organisation (DMO), Visit Kent, which takes a lead in marketing Kent as a visitor destination with associated campaigns and promotional activity.

10.3 In respect of more local promotional activity:

10.3.1 The Visitor Information Point in Gravesend Borough Market is open 6 days a week and provides an excellent resource for information and advice and provides a welcome for visitors to the area. It is the hub of Visit Gravesend's social media activity.

10.3.2 Use is made of a variety of websites to promote local events, attractions and accommodation through Visit Gravesend www.visitgravesend.co.uk, Visit Kent, Tourism South East and Visit Britain websites.

10.3.3 Visit Gravesend has really developed its presence on social media and its engagement with the audience has proven a very positive promotional tool.

10.3.4 Itineraries, group tours and packages have been developed for the visitor and are promoted.

10.3.5 The council has a wide range of leaflets promoting local attractions and heritage, including their yearly Visit Gravesend Tourism Guide.

10.4 The council's tourism network of local visitor attractions and accommodation aims to co-operate in sharing information and promoting the local visitor economy more effectively. Engaging other partners in greater collaborative marketing efforts is key, e.g. Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), National Trust, Shorne Woods Country Park (Kent County Council), Jeskyns Farm (Forestry Commission), etc. but resources are limited.

10.5 Opportunities are taken through Gravesham's Town Twinning relationships to raise awareness of the Borough where possible and visits through its partners in Cambrai (France), Neumunster (Germany), Chesterfield (Virginia, USA) and Jalandhar (India).

10.6 The following priority actions have been identified:

10.6.1 Confirm Gravesham's key themes, especially those which attract larger visitor numbers such as Experience/Activity; Countryside; Faith/Gurdwara; Heritage. These can be honed further through the 'Gravesham Experiential' study undertaken recently. The findings will help identify and shape the council's activities and offers and capture key messaging for promoting the borough.

10.6.2 Expand the Gravesham tourism network, where appropriate, to strengthen co-operative working, especially in respect of co-ordination of marketing and openings.

10.6.3 Make the most of existing partnerships – Visit Kent partnership; twinning links.

11 TOURISM SECTOR SKILLS

11.1 Skills improvement is a key issue throughout the tourism sector and for any business that is providing a service to a visitor. There are excellent examples of the impact of good training and a range of initiatives and programmes, especially around transferable skills in customer care, hospitality and business development.

11.2 Developing the skills of volunteers and tour guides is a priority, with an aim of attracting younger generations to develop skills and experience in this area.

11.3 Key Priorities:

11.3.1 Work with partners to promote customer care and hospitality skills.

11.3.2 Volunteer skills and work experience opportunities for younger people.

12 SAFEGUARDING GRAVESHAM'S HERITAGE

12.1 There are various important archive and artefacts in various hands within the Borough – the Council, Gravesend Library (KCC), Gravesend Historical Society, Northfleet Historical Society and in private hands. Work needs to be undertaken to understand what is available and where and to fill some gaps in the archiving of material and identification of the most significant.

12.2 Key to this is understanding how these relate to the telling of Gravesham's story/stories. The Council is not best placed to host historic artefacts, due to the availability of resources and expertise, but can influence and help to co-ordinate this area of work, looking to draw upon knowledge, enthusiasm and expertise within the community and local history groups. It can seek advice as to what steps to take and how best to interpret these stories in the 21st Century, using digital media and other technology available today to engage younger generations, new and wider audiences,ng younger generations and new audiences.

12.3 The council is committed to the maintenance, repair and interpretation of those heritage properties within its care, subject to a programme of capital works,

funded where possible with the help of external heritage funding. These include the listed buildings, parks and gardens at New Tavern Fort/Milton Chantry, Gravesend Blockhouse, St Andrew's Church, Gravesend Cold War Bunker and Gravesend Cemetery. The Council will support where possible the contribution that can be made by other heritage assets in the Borough to telling of Gravesham's story.

12.4 Gravesham has an online 'archive' through its Discover Gravesham – archiving of information and artefacts.

12.5 The following priority actions are as follows:

12.5.1 Building blocks within a plan to make more of Gravesham's archive and artefacts, etc. secure some resource to undertake that work, leading to advice on how best to secure their future and to interpret and display them.

12.5.2 Reshape Discover Gravesham and progress with the digitalisation of the borough's artefacts.

12.5.3 Progress repairs and interpretation of Gravesham's heritage assets, including a review and updating of our audio tours.

13 RESOURCES

13.1 Gravesham is a partner in two Interreg European projects, both of which have a strong focus on the visitor economy:

13.1.1 The 'Experience' Interreg Project - the project is looking to increase visitor footfall during the off peak seasons and support recovery of the tourism sector post-pandemic, offering product development opportunities, including 1 to 1 business consultation.

13.1.2 The European Channel Manche Interreg project "Go Trade" - to revitalise Gravesend Borough Market and make it a destination.



14 OVERALL OBJECTIVES

14.1 The following objectives have been identified:

14.1.1 Encourage more day visits and longer stays.

14.1.2 Increase the stock, quality and breadth of visitor accommodation.

14.1.3 Strengthen Gravesham's visitor offer through supporting the opening of existing and new visitor attractions and developing 'experiential' tourism.

14.1.4 Enable the programme of festivals and cultural activity to appeal to visitors from beyond the Borough.

14.1.5 To extend the effectiveness of Gravesham's visitor information and promotion.

14.1.6 Strengthen local partnership working between tourism and hospitality businesses and organisations.

14.1.7 Develop skills and work experience opportunities within the local tourism and hospitality sector.

14.1.8 Value and co-ordinate the expertise, archiving and interpretation of Gravesham's heritage towards a telling of Gravesham's story.

14.1.9 promoting and protecting where possible our diverse history and heritage for future generations

14.2 The Tourism and Heritage strategy needs to complement the council's Arts and Cultural Strategy and is consistent with the Council's Corporate Plan ambitions.



15 ACTION PLAN & RESOURCES

15.1 An action plan incorporating the objectives will be worked on and provided. Progress will be monitored through the council's performance key indicators.

15.2 On the whole this action plan can be achieved through the council's current levels of budgetary provision. This will be reviewed on an annual basis and therefore may change. Some of the key areas that will require additional funding, could be partially funded, possibly through partnership working.

16 CONSULTATION

16.1 Tourism organisations, local businesses and residents were consulted with on a draft strategy December 2020/ January 2021 requesting feedback via the council's website, the tourism Facebook and Twitter pages, and via email databases.

16.2 This is an opportunity to promote what Gravesham is doing to attract and welcome visitors, but the underlying issue is what actions in the medium term will have the greatest economic impact and provide a legacy for further growth in this sector. The various studies and surveys which have been undertaken alongside the strategy are helping to prioritise actions and overall objectives and will shape our action plan for delivery.



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Delivering a Gravesham to be proud of