

Ashford Borough Tourism Development Framework, 2006 -2011

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Tourism Development Framework

Introduction

- 1 The borough of Ashford sits in the centre of Kent countryside astride the main communications corridor between the UK and Continental Europe, the M20 and Channel Tunnel Rail Link. With the expanding town of Ashford at its heart, the borough extends from Chilham in the north to Wittersham in the south, and from Egerton in the west to Brabourne in the east. It represents an area covering 220 square miles and is the largest district in Kent.
- 2 Much of the northern part of the borough is in the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), dissected by the Stour Valley and traversed by the North Downs Way National Trail and a plethora of footpaths and bridleways. The Borough's southern tip also falls within the boundary of the High Weald AONB.
- 3 There are a host of reasons why visitors spend time and money in the Borough.
 - The town of Ashford's expanding economy attracts business people from other parts of the UK and from overseas. They attend meetings and conferences at the major hotels and at other, more unusual venues, as well as simply staying while on business or due to the ease of getting to other places from Ashford.
 - Families en route to and from Disneyland Paris and other continental destinations stay overnight, in striking distance of the International Passenger Station or other cross-Channel services.
 - Tenterden – "the Jewel of the Weald" and other quintessentially English villages – Chilham, Wye, Smarden, Pluckley, Biddenden and Charing, amongst others – attract day visitors and discerning short break takers alike. They browse for antiques and gifts, sample local wines and cider, admire the architecture and landscapes, fish in the Borough, ride the steam trains at Tenterden, discover secret gardens, view the wildlife, stride the Downs, play the golf courses, hunt for bargains at McArthur Glen, and take refreshment at restaurants, pubs and tea-rooms.
- 4 The Borough prospers from tourism. Visitors spend almost £194 million each year, supporting more than 4,663 actual jobs for local people. But could this considerable benefit be increased, and if so how?
- 5 This document sets out a framework aimed at increasing the Borough's future benefits from tourism without damaging the very assets that attract visitors in the first place. It aims to capitalise on the Borough's strengths and address its weaknesses from a tourism perspective. It also aims to be realistic, both in its analysis and its recommendations for future action. Ultimately we must evidence good use of council resources by demonstrating a strong tourism economy.

- 6 It is not just a framework for Ashford Borough Council. The framework will only come to fruition if tourism and related businesses throughout the Borough play their part. Similarly, the role and support of external partners - such as neighbouring local authorities in the Heart of Kent (HoK) partnership, the Kent Tourism Alliance (KTA), Tourism South East (TSE) and Ashford's Future – will also be important.
- 7 The framework document starts with an assessment of the Borough's current offer to visitors, identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in the process, comment is also provided on current partnerships. Analysis of the current position is then followed by recommended strategic objectives and priority actions. These strategic objectives link directly with the key themes of the council's corporate and cultural strategy 2005 –2011.

The Starting Point – Where are we now?

- 8 A useful starting point in the development of any framework is to analyse the current position. This means looking at the Borough's tourism infrastructure or product – the reasons why people visit or the 'attractors'. It also means identifying the types of visitors that currently stay in or visit the Borough on day visits, as well as the means by which visitors are attracted and provided with information both before and during their visit.

Visitor accommodation

- 9 Ashford Borough has almost 2,700 bed-spaces in just under 200 hotels, inns, B&B's, guesthouses, self-catering properties and group accommodation. This represents just under 9% of the total stock for the whole of Kent. Hotels account for just under two thirds of the Borough's total bed-stock, mostly concentrated in Ashford itself (almost 90% of the Borough's hotel rooms). There is a good mix of hotels across the star ratings, with planned expansions through adding rooms at the budget and luxury end of the market, as well as a proposed new 74-bed hotel and Brewster's Restaurant close to junction 9 of the M20 in Ashford.
- 10 Research carried out in 2003 indicated that average room occupancy and achieved room rate (the average cost paid for a room per night) were at or slightly below national averages for provincial hotels, **with budget hotels achieving the highest occupancy levels.**
- 11 While the split between leisure and business demand tends to be even in most areas of East Kent, business demand is generally higher in Ashford. The research also identified the potential for further budget hotel development in Ashford town and for adding rooms to country pubs in rural areas and market towns such as Tenterden.
- 12 The Borough has a lower percentage share of the Kent total of bed-spaces in B&B's and guesthouses, with just under 100 properties representing less than 7% of the Kent total. While such properties are generally well spread across the more rural parts of the Borough, there is a distinct shortage of B&B's and guesthouses in and around Ashford itself.

- 13 Self-catering accommodation is similarly spread across the rural parts of the Borough, with 60 or so properties in total, while group accommodation for more than 200 people is available out of term time at Imperial College in Wye.
- 14 It should be borne in mind that the number of accommodation units available at any one time fluctuates due to factors such as new business start-ups and retirements. There is also a mix of quality assessed and non- assessed properties in the borough and while it is possible to track the number of assessed properties through the official Quality in Tourism scheme, it is difficult to ascertain the exact number of businesses operating outside of the scheme.

Visitor attractions

- 15 With the exception of the McArthur Glen Designer Outlet Centre, which attracts 3.5 million visits a year, almost all the Borough's visitor attractions are outside of the town itself. While the Outlet Centre has been a success in terms of visits generated to the site since opening in 2000, the hoped for spin-off benefits of associated increased visits to Ashford town centre have largely failed to materialise. This is an issue that needs to be addressed.
- 16 The need to improve the physical layout and ambience of Ashford town centre has been recognised in the Ashford Future's study and exciting plans are being put in place. However Ashford town centre currently offers little to appeal to visitors, with the exception of the historic churchyard where the borough museum, parish church and Tourist Information Centre (TIC) are all located. Work is underway, however, to produce a planning framework for the Willesborough Dykes Wetland Park covering some 780 acres stretching from Asda close to the Town Centre through to proposed development at Chesseman's Green.
- 17 Tenterden on the other hand has a cluster of visitor attractions – the long established Kent and East Sussex Railway, Chapel Down Winery (Tenterden Vineyard) and Smallhythe Place – as well as a good selection of antiques and gift shops, a variety of places to eat and drink and an attractive streetscape. In short it is amongst the finest country towns in Kent, if not the south east.
- 18 Elsewhere Ashford's visitor attractions are based on its rural appeal - such as Biddenden Vineyards and the Rare Breeds Centre at Woodchurch – or on heritage and landscape – such as Godinton House and Gardens and Beech Court Gardens at Challock and the North Downs Way, Stour Valley Walk and Greensand Way.
- 19 While only the Kent and East Sussex Railway ranks (just) amongst Kent's top ten paid for visitor attractions, when combined with the Borough's 'string of pearls' of fine small towns and villages – Tenterden, Chilham, Wye, Smarden, Pluckley, Biddenden, Charing and Woodchurch – Ashford's 'out-of-town' attractiveness to visitors is significant. This is further enhanced by its quality landscapes, such as the Kent Downs and Stour Valley, with their associated opportunities for walking, cycling, horse-riding and wildlife appreciation.

Events, sports and the arts

- 20 There is an extensive programme of small-scale events across the Borough but few events or festivals offer the potential to attract visitors into the area in their own right. The Stour Music Festival in late June, the annual 'Wings 'n' Things' air show at Woodchurch at the beginning of August, the Tenterden Folk Festival at the beginning of October and the bi-annual Egerton Festival are perhaps the exception. However there is strong will among various arts and community organisations and the borough council to form an 'Ashford Presents' network to jointly promote the emerging July Summers Sound programme.
- 21 The Julie Rose Athletics Stadium in Ashford hosts regional and junior international events and, along with the developing water sports facilities at the adjoining Conningbrook Lakes, offers the potential to attract more major sports based tourism in future. There is also potential for a wider range of leisure and cultural events subject to the current limitations of planning conditions.
- 22 There is significant potential for tourism and sport related development at the Conningbrook site on land owned by Bretts and the Borough Council. This could offer development opportunities at the adjacent Julie Rose Athletics Stadium in partnership with the Stadium Trust Company. Planning the scope of any future development is now at an early stage and will be completed as part of the Local Development Framework process later in 2006.
- 23 **With the exception of arts based performances and events, however, the Borough's cultural appeal is sadly limited.** This limitation is acknowledged in the Cultural Chapter of the Greater Ashford Development Framework Master Plan, however the feasibility stage for work on a new local arts venue at St. Mary's Parish Church and for a potential major Conference and Events Centre is now underway.

Current visitors

- 24 An indication of the number of visitors to the Borough and their contribution to the local economy, which is worth approximately £194 million per year, was obtained in 2003. The model used to measure the volume and value of tourism, the Cambridge Economic Impact Model, is used widely throughout the country. It employs a combination of regional and national statistics supplemented by local data, such as the amount of visitor accommodation, size of local population and numbers of visitors to local attractions.
- 25 In 2003, total visitor expenditure in the Borough amounted to £194 million, with 5.4 million day visitors contributing £138 million (approx 70%) and the remaining £56 million (approx 30%) resulting from 357,000 staying trips representing 1.1 million staying visitor nights. Equivalent total value figures for the adjoining Boroughs are £333 million for Canterbury (2003), £197 million for Maidstone (2003) and £194 million for Tunbridge Wells (2003). The number of day visitors to the Borough is particularly significant, with the McArthur Glen Outlet Centre a major contributor. Day visitors, however, are generally very important for the Borough's full range of visitor attractions.

A major new conference and events centre in or close to the town centre would generate upward of 1.5 million visitors further boosting the local economy.

- 26 In terms of the types of businesses receiving the greatest benefit from all visitor expenditure, the model estimated that catering sector businesses received the largest share of expenditure (£66 million / 35%), followed by the retail sector (£55 million / 29%), with expenditure on accommodation amounting to £19 million (10%). The proportion of expenditure on accommodation rises to a third when looking at staying visitors only.
- 27 This break-down is accounted for to a large extent by the fact that 50% of staying visitors stay at the homes of friends and relatives (known as the VFR market) in the Borough, with a further third staying in hotels and just 5% in the Borough's B&B's. Given the anticipated growth in Ashford's population, the resultant increase in the VFR market should be significant and represents a real opportunity for the Borough's visitor attractions and associated businesses as well as potential new attractions such as a Conference and Events Centre.
- 28 Six out of every seven staying visitors are from elsewhere in the UK. Although only one in seven visitors are therefore from overseas, they account for a quarter of total staying visitor spend. **Less of them come but those that do come spend more than UK visitors.**
- 29 Of the total spend by visitors staying in the Borough, 55% comes from holidaymakers, 25% from business tourism and 16% from visitors staying with friends and relatives. London and the greater southeast region are the most important source of UK visitors but many staying overnight travelling to or from the continent originate from further afield. **The near Continental countries – France, Germany and the Benelux countries – are the most important source markets for overseas visitors.**
- 30 Tourism also contributes to the local economy in terms of job creation. Just over 4,600 actual jobs are generated through tourism, which in the Ashford Borough represents approximately 8% of the active working population.

Marketing Ashford as a destination

- 31 Staying and day visitors are attracted to Ashford through the combined marketing activities of individual businesses, making up the private sector, and the public sector in the form of the Borough Council and other bodies. Key partnerships are the long-established Ashford and Tenterden Tourism Association (ATTA), the HoK marketing consortium, KTA and TSE.
- 32 The emerging Ashford's Future Brand – 'Ashford – Best Placed in Britain for..... Tourism (for instance)'- would appear to be an excellent brand position from a tourism perspective and one that should be tested out by the Borough Council and its tourism partners.

Ashford and Tenterden Tourism Association

- 33 Many of the Borough's tourism businesses are members of the Association, which works closely with the Borough Council to raise Ashford's profile as an area to visit. Much of ATTA's marketing is directed at encouraging day visits, both by individuals and groups, using the promotional message of "the best of traditional Kent". It is crucial to work with and support the Borough's tourism businesses through the tourism association.

Heart of Kent

- 34 The HoK is the destination brand established when four local authorities – Maidstone, Sevenoaks, Tonbridge & Malling and Tunbridge Wells – formed a destination marketing consortium in 1988. Ashford Borough Council, with the support and encouragement of ATTA and the portfolio holder for tourism, Cllr John Kemp, joined the HoK in 2002.
- 35 The premise for the HoK is that each of the partner areas offers similar product of interest to potential visitors and that it therefore makes sense to market the whole area as a single, much more attractive destination – the Heart of Kent. The HoK is also identified as being much more appealing as a destination brand than the alternatives of using individual town or borough names and brings with it better use of resources through economies of scale.
- 36 The consortium focuses on attracting staying visitors from within the UK and from selected overseas markets. The production, targeted advertising and distribution of an annual HoK destination guide, along with promotion of a dedicated HoK website and destination management system that enables online booking, are currently the consortium's principal activities.
- 37 However a recent review recommended a number of changes to the HoK's approach including the appointment of a dedicated part-time HoK tourism officer. This appointment has now taken place and the consortium is now looking at the other recommendations including a focus on product development and working closely with TSE; closer marketing partnership working with KTA and the two other sub-regional marketing consortia in Kent (Canterbury & Coastal Kent / Medway & Maritime Kent); making more of the HoK partners collective memberships of TSE and KTA; and freeing up resources for more innovative destination marketing activity.
- 38 **A new tourism strategy for the HoK is also currently being developed (2006 2011) and focus groups, to gain the views of HoK tourism businesses, took place in April 2006.**

Tourism South East

- 39 Tourism South East was established in April 2003 when the former South East England and Southern Tourist Boards merged to form a single, much larger regional tourist board with the same boundaries as the regional development agency (SEEDA).

40 TSE launched its first strategy for tourism in the South East in July 2004. The strategy identifies three key objectives:

- Promoting a 'must visit' region
- Providing an unrivalled experience for the visitor
- Establishing effective management and organisation

41 **The strategy also identifies that local authority support is vital for the future success of tourism in the region.**

42 The Board provides a variety of services to its members directed at fulfilling the key objectives. In terms of marketing, emphasis is placed on focusing on strong brands and destinations, and on the development of compelling themes. The Board's product development priorities are concerned with improving product and service quality, promoting excellence and innovation, and making places more appealing and inviting. Ashford Borough Council and many individual businesses and ATTA members are members of TSE.

Sub-regional structure / Kent Tourism Council

43 To assist the Board's work locally, the region has been divided into six sub- regions, each of which is provided with some resources to pursue agreed priorities. Kent is one of the sub-regions and a private / public sector partnership, the Kent Tourism Council (KTC) has been established as the sub-regional delivery agency.

44 On behalf of the KTC, Kent Tourism (KCC) has produced a partnership framework for Tourism in Kent & Medway for 2004-2014. This sets out a new structure for tourism development and support in Kent, overseen by the KTC and focused on four key activities, each driven by a dedicated partnership group or board:

- Supply and demand research; Kent Tourism Research Board
- Product development and investment; Kent Tourism Development Board
- Quality, education and skills; Kent Tourism Academy Board
- Marketing and branding; Kent Tourism Alliance Board

45 The partnership framework summarises the priorities of each partnership group. In addition, separate partnership action plans have been drafted by the first three groups, while the KTA's marketing strategy is currently under review.

Kent Tourism Alliance

46 The Kent Tourism Alliance (KTA) was established in 2002 as a public private sector partnership aimed at increasing significantly Kent's profile as a visitor destination.

47 Major tourism businesses and local authorities, including Ashford and the other HoK consortium partners, have invested in KTA to provide dedicated staffing and funding for a marketing programme targeting potential visitors from within the UK and overseas.

The KTA's marketing activities, although Kent wide, provide direct benefits to the Borough as a whole in terms of increasing the profile of the area and its attractions.

Tourist Information Centres

- 48 The marketing work of individual tourism businesses, ATTA, the Borough Council and its partners are largely concerned with attracting visitors to the Borough and providing them with information in advance of their visit. Tourist Information Centres (TICs) at Ashford and Tenterden support such marketing activity through acting as principal points of contact for visitors. However, they also provide an invaluable service in turning uncommitted enquirers, including local residents, into actual visitors.
- 49 The importance of TICs is also endorsed in the strategy for tourism in the South East which identifies the need to "support local authority / industry partners in maintaining an efficient and effective TIC network."
- 50 **As a result of a recent Borough Council Service Development Strategy Review for tourism it was agreed that the management culture be changed in order to drive a commercial income generation service. This will see the introduction of a three-year business plan and trading account for the TICs. In addition a rationalisation of the opening seasons, opening hours and staff conditions at both TICs will be introduced from April 2006.**

Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

- 51 Having summarised the various products that combine to form Ashford's overall offer to visitors, along with the ways in which the offer is currently presented to potential visitors, the Boroughs strengths and weaknesses as a visitor destination are now presented. These are followed by summaries of the opportunities Ashford has to grow the economic benefits gained from tourism and the potential threats to this being achieved.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Location and accessibility * The international Passenger Station & Eurostar service * Good range of visitor accommodation * Tenterden and its cluster of visitor attractions * High quality and accessible countryside * Established and effective partnerships, particularly ATTA and the HoK * TICs at Ashford and Tenterden * Quality of much accommodation and attractions is high * 'String of pearl' quintessentially English villages * Viewed as a touring base/centre for tourism (opposed to a tourism centre) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Lack of appeal of Ashford Town to visitors * No strong destination brand or identity * Borough Council resources are limited * Lack of B&B/guesthouse accommodation in Ashford town and urban area * No major visitor attraction in Ashford itself * Limited events to raise profile and attract visitors * Many potential visitors pass through (in transit) rather than stop * Limited cultural facilities, especially in Ashford town and urban area
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Ashford expansion- more business and VFR (Visiting Friends & Relations) tourism * Link with Ashford's Future delivery team/establishment of Ashford's brand image * Ashford town centre redevelopment/improvements to the public realm including Town centre improvements, public art, traffic calming a local arts centre * Make more of Ashford IPS and MG Outlet Centre * Develop sports & leisure tourism product based around Julie Rose Stadium/Conningbrook * Potential for major visitor attraction as part of Ashford expansion – Major conference and events centre * Make more of rural/village/green tourism offer * Willesborough Dykes Wetland Park 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Increasing pressure on Borough Council resources * 'Growth area' publicity has negative impact on potential visitors' perception * Impact of terrorism on international travel, SARS, Food & Mouth, Currency Exchange Fluctuations etc * Increasing competition for visitor spend * Partners such as TSE, KTC, KTA and HoK fail to deliver expected levels of support

52 Plans to build on the Borough's strengths as a tourism destination and capitalise on real opportunities are now presented.

The Goal – Where do we want to be and how do we get there?

- 53 Analysis has shown that as a tourism destination, the Borough of Ashford has a solid base on which to build. The Borough Council recognises the value of tourism and provides direct support to the sector, albeit with limited resources. Tourism's importance is endorsed further in the Council's cultural strategy and the Ashford's Future Priorities for Growth Economic Development Action Plan as well as being the subject of the Council's State of the Borough Debate in 2004. The announcement that Kent and the Ashford Borough is once again due to host the Tour de France in July 2007 and that London is to be the venue of the 2012 Olympics, is proof that tourism continues to be high on both the local, regional and national agenda.
- 54 The resources provided directly by the Council are supplemented by the support work of key partners such as ATTA, the HOK, KTA and TSE. Providing such partnerships continue to work effectively and can be proven to demonstrate clear value for money, it makes sense for partnership to continue to be a cornerstone of future efforts to increase the Borough's benefits from tourism.
- 55 As an industry, tourism is subject to many influences and trends. Increasing leisure expenditure, low-cost airlines, the switch from main holidays to short breaks and ever increasing use of the Internet to source information are just some of the changes that have impacted on tourism patterns in recent years. New trends and influences, each with varying impacts, are likely to emerge in the next few years, making it sensible to take a relatively cautious approach to setting a time horizon for tourism framework purposes.
- 56 Nevertheless, given the Borough's current performance and identified strengths, Ashford is in a position to be fairly bullish about its future prospects as a tourism destination. Given that action is taken to pursue the specified objectives through sustained actions led by the Borough Council, by 2011 the following ambitions for tourism's contribution to the Borough's development could well be achieved:
- Annual visitor expenditure of between £275 and £300 million (possibly challenging Canterbury's current performance), with almost 6,000 jobs supported by this expenditure.
 - Tourism in the town of Ashford itself increases significantly, fuelled by improvements to the layout of the town centre, enhanced sporting and cultural facilities, and increased exploitation of the town's strategic location as both a business and touring base, and as a 'cross-Channel' stopping-off point.
 - Tenterden and the Borough's other 'string of pearls' villages receive significant publicity as a short-break destination option, with demonstrable benefits for village / rural based businesses and facilities, such as pubs, B&B's and local shops.
 - The industry is widely recognised as a key contributor to the local economy throughout the Borough, with broad public recognition of tourism's value and importance

- 57 In short, tourism is already important to the Borough's economy but with careful nurturing and support, its importance and value could and should increase further. Much excellent infrastructure planning has already been put in place, projects are being pursued and this now needs to be taken forward as part of a co-ordinated tourism effort.
- 58 The ambitions for tourism will be achieved if the Borough Council and its partners take action in pursuit of the following strategic objectives.
1. Improving the performance of existing tourism businesses, with strong emphasis on quality improvement and encouraging new tourism businesses.
 2. Capitalising on the predicted growth in VFR (Visiting Friends and Relations) tourism.
 3. Strengthening selectively the Borough's tourism offer, e.g. by bringing to fruition key projects such as a major Conference and Events Venue and developments at Conningbrook.
 4. Growing business and sport-led tourism
 5. Exploiting Ashford's location en route to / from the Continent and at the heart of the county, e.g. completing the Victoria Road development to include a new town centre hotel.
 6. Developing a special promotional focus on Tenterden and the 'String of Pearls' and supporting the Tenterden Health Check.
 7. Maximising the benefits of tourism partnerships through ensuring active participation.
 8. Consolidating the importance and commercial viability of TICs in Ashford and Tenterden through service and business planning improvements in line with established best practice.
 9. Addressing Ashford town's and urban area's poor visitor profile, working closely with the Ashford's Future core delivery team ensuring the LDF allocates prime central sites for tourism related projects.
 10. Working with councillors and partners to monitor the impact of all actions and feeding results back into the framework and action planning processes.

- 59 Annual action plans setting out priority actions and responsibilities will need to be produced. This process should be led by the Borough Council working in tandem with ATTA and in liaison with the HOK, KTA, TSE, Tenterden Town Council and the Ashford's Future Core Delivery Team. All actions should have clear targets and be monitored accordingly. Proposed actions are as follows:

Strategic Objectives and Priority Actions

- 60 **Subject to stakeholder consultation the following Actions will be set out in a "SMART" format to ensure they are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time based.**

- 1. Improving the performance of existing tourism businesses, with strong emphasis on quality improvement and encouraging new tourism businesses**

- Encourage & support tourism businesses to be part of quality initiatives such as the Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme (VAQAS) and the National Quality Assurance Accommodation Scheme
- Support and work with tourism businesses to take up training through the Kent Tourism Academy and Tourism South East
- In partnership with tourism businesses improve the extent and location of tourism signing in the borough
- Work with the Kent Museum Development Service to support all the borough's registered museums in the transition from Registered to Accredited museums and in other initiatives that build on their quality and performance such as Forward Planning and Emergency Planning
- Encourage and support tourism businesses to take part in business performance surveys such as TSE's Serviced Accommodation Occupancy Survey and Kent Tourism's Business Barometer
- Continue to support businesses by taking part in relevant targeted marketing campaigns both in the domestic and overseas markets with ATTA, HOK, KTA, TSE and VisitBritain
- To advise and support new tourism business ventures encouraging close co-operation with district and county officers to maximise opportunities

2. Capitalising on the predicted growth in Visiting Friends & Relations (VFR) tourism.

- Work with tourism businesses to build on the existing VFR marketing campaigns based around the concept of 'Great Local Days Out'
- Investigate and where possible implement a 'Residents Passport' to visitor attractions, accommodation, eating establishments & shops in the borough.
- Work with the town councils in Bad Munstereifel, Fougeres and Hopewell to increase the number of visitors from Ashford three twin towns
- In partnership with the council's marketing & communications section ensure that tourism businesses attract regular coverage and exposure in all council promotional vehicles
- Take part in KTA and TSE marketing campaigns that specifically target local residents and the VFR markets

3. Strengthening selectively the Borough's tourism offer.

- As part of the cultural master-planning process, support and commission feasibility studies and development plans for potential cultural tourism projects such as new visitor attractions, conference and events facilities, heritage and museum facilities including projects based around the Victoria Road redevelopment and the Conningbrook site
- Build upon and grow the range of events and festivals in the borough in terms of offer, venues, audience, funding and profile

- Continue to support and promote rural & sustainable tourism initiatives in the borough such as the Mid Kent Downs Rural Tourism Project
- Work with McArthurGlen to encourage visitors to the outlet centre to spend time in the town centre and rest of the borough
- Progress the Willesborough Dykes Wetland Park Project

4. Growing business and sport-led tourism

- Along with industry partners create brand awareness of Ashford as a business, conference and sport destination
- Investigate the feasibility of a conference and events centre linked to some other multi-use venue such as a town centre hotel or the proposed Conningbrook water sports centre
- Continue to work in partnership with Conference Kent and local conference venues to attract business and conference tourism to the borough
- Implement a campaign aimed at getting local companies to book business meetings and conferences in the borough
- To work with SEEDA, KCC, Sport England and other partners to support London 2012

5. Exploiting Ashford's location en route to/from the Continent and at the heart of the county.

- Create awareness of Ashford as a stop off destination/centre for tourism focusing on the ease of access and strength of accommodation offer – securing a town centre hotel as part of the Victoria Road Development
- Work with Eurostar, Eurotunnel and other cross channel carriers in promoting the benefits of Ashford as stop-off destination
- Work with the Kent Tourism Academy to promote Welcome Host/Pride in Kent training courses to tourism business
- Work with the Norton Knatchbull School as part of their language college status to promote language training for tourism, retail and hospitality businesses
- Support the provision of tourism-related training within the proposed town centre post-16 Learning Campus

6. Developing a special promotional focus on Tenterden and the 'String of Pearls', and supporting the Tenterden Health Check

- Develop a themed short breaks campaign that builds upon the appeal of Tenterden and its string of pearls – focussing for instance on antiques shopping, gourmet experiences, pampering breaks, golf and country pursuits
- Develop, where relevant, the tourism recommendations of the Tenterden Market Town Health Check and Tenterden Action Plan

- Work with the Tenterden Chamber of Commerce and the Ashford and Tenterden Tourism Association on specific marketing initiatives that combines the Tenterden and 'String of Pearls' offer
- Investigate the possibility of extending the focus to include Cranbrook and Rye and thereby adding complementary destinations to the Tenterden and 'String of Pearls' offer

7. Maximising the benefits of tourism partnerships through ensuring active participation.

- Ensure appropriate agreements such as service level agreements are put in place and review partnership outputs and effectiveness on a regular basis to promote best use of resources
- Establish ad hoc partnerships for specific projects, as and when needed
- Establish close working relationship with ATTA, HOK, KTA and TSE so that Ashford can benefit from their particular areas of expertise and avoid duplication of effort particularly in marketing
- Work with tourism partners on joint funding bids, where appropriate and mutually beneficial
- Work with tourism and other partners (TSE, Kent Tourism Research Board, Kent Tourism Development Board, Ashford Futures Economic Sub Group) on research and product development initiatives, where appropriate

8. Consolidating the importance of TICs in Ashford and Tenterden through service improvement in line with established best practice.

- Continue to keep the options open for the Ashford and Tenterden TICs to relocate to higher profile locations or to co-locate with a relevant partner.
- Continually review, and implement where feasible, the provision of tourist information services with other partners. For instance, in partnership with McArthurGlen at the Ashford Designer Outlet, with the Tenterden & District Museum in Tenterden and with other tourism-related businesses.
- Deliver the TICs three-year business plan and trading account
- As part of the Heart of Kent consortium continue to grow the number of online services that are available through the HoK Destination Management System whilst adhering to all EnglandNet criteria
- Continue to ensure, in partnership with TSE and the Kent Tourism Academy, that Tourist Information Centre staff are trained to industry standards
- Investigate and add, where appropriate quality and income generating services to the Tourist Information Centre offer
- Implement a mystery shopper campaign to ensure that the TICs offer a service that equals or exceeds the Visit Britain minimum service standards for TICs.

9. Addressing Ashford town's poor visitor profile, working closely with the Ashford's Future Core Delivery Team and ensuring the LDF allocates prime central sites for tourism related projects.

- Ensure tourism priorities and objectives are reflected in the cultural planning process of the Greater Ashford Development Framework and the Priorities for Growth Economic Development Action Plan. Working with and supporting members of the Ashford's Future Core Delivery Team on specific Priorities for Growth cultural, tourism and leisure related projects
- Work with the Ashford Town Centre Partnership to create a sense of place in the town through initiatives such as an enhanced events programme, guided heritage walks, participation in South East in Bloom
- Improve visitor signage in and around the town centre including signage to local hotels
- Work with the Kent Quality Programme to increase the number of assessed Bed & Breakfast establishments in the town centre and urban area
- Support the Local Development Framework process and Town Centre Development plans ensuring that tourism related developments are allocated appropriate sites in or close to the Town Centre

10. Working with Councillors and partners to monitor the impact of all actions and feeding results back into the framework and action planning process.

- Commission an Economic Impact Model to measure the volume and value of tourism in the borough in order to review performance of the tourism framework and to benchmark against other Kent districts
- Review and update on a regular basis the tourism development framework and associated action plans and work plans including timings and costs.
- Monitor the actions and outputs of other related strategies such as the Borough's Cultural Strategy, Heart of Kent's Tourism Strategy and Ashford's Future Priorities for Growth Economic Action Plan to ensure that the correct linkages are made between the strategic objectives and action plans of the tourism development framework and the strategic objectives and action plans of the other relevant strategies