



Leisure and Tourism Performance 2010-2011

Worth £3.2bn to the local economy, the tourism and leisure industries continues to be one of Kent's major employers, supporting 63,000 jobs, equivalent to one in every 14 people employed in the county.

Investment in the industry has also been strong with tourism developments playing a central role in the regeneration of the county. The last 12 months have seen new attractions opening, new transport routes and new hotels.

Attractions and venues

Opened in April the long awaited Turner Contemporary Gallery in Margate has attracted 100,000 visits in its first 5 weeks. Designed by the multi award-winning David Chipperfield Architects, the gallery includes double-height entrance hall window, ground floor events space with external terrace, first floor Clore learning studio and 3 gallery spaces. The Gallery will have three major exhibitions a year and is open all year round.

Plans to create a new Dreamland Heritage Amusement Park continue apace and it is hoped that the Park will open during 2013. The new Hornby Hobbies visitor centre in Margate is expanding to include a café, and African lodge inspired accommodation at Quex Estate is also in the pipeline.

Dover Castle, one of English Heritage's flagship attractions, continues to receive investment. A major new visitor experience recreating the drama of the Dunkirk evacuation, where the desperate rescue mission - codenamed Operation Dynamo - was masterminded. It includes 60 metres of underground wartime tunnels which have been transformed into the skies and seas of May to June 1940. Visitors will now have the chance to see, hear and feel, as never before, the danger and high stakes of the evacuation.

The new look Dover Esplanade, entitled 'Lifting Wave, Resting Wave, Lighting Wave', was completed in Autumn 2010. The work on Dover Esplanade was undertaken on behalf of Kent County Council, Dover Harbour Board, Dover District Council, SEEDA and English Heritage. Part funded by Sea Change, the Esplanade is one of six exceptional structures across the South East to win a Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) 2011 Award.

Later this year Dover's Visitor Information Centre (VIC) will relocate to a new, larger entrance area in Dover Museum. Extending the current museum frontage to create a new combined VIC/Museum entrance, joint shop and information area, and relocating the current disabled access are among the proposals.

Folkestone Harbour has welcomed the new Mark Sargeant restaurant 'Rocksalt', designed by Kent-based Guy Holloway Architects, which opened in June 2011 coinciding with the second Folkestone Triennial. The Triennial is part of the Creative Foundation's strategy to develop the town's creative quarter.

One of Canterbury's most distinctive landmarks, the medieval Westgate Towers has been given a new lease of life when it re-launched in May 2011. Revealing for the first time in 150 years the prisoner's entrance and route to the City's gaol, the attraction combines the former City Gaol with a brand new café.

The new Marlowe Theatre in Canterbury, designed by Keith Williams Architects, will open in September 2011. The £25.5 million project will include a new and bigger 1,200 auditorium, ensuring it becomes a flagship centre for performing arts in the region and a national touring venue for major production.

Work has also begun on the plans to transform the 19th Century Beaneys Museum and Library in Canterbury. The brand new extension will provide much improved access and greater space for services, displays and books. Maidstone regeneration projects include a £2 million lottery grant to develop Maidstone Museum's east wing project, which will enable new displays.

A £14 million investment has transformed the Smitheries at the Historic Dockyard in Chatham and created a National Museum and international exhibition touring venue. For the first time national maritime treasures will be gathered together in this 3,000m² historic industrial building. This joint venture between the Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust, the National Maritime Museum and the Imperial War Museum will complete the physical regeneration of The Historic Dockyard.

Ashford has also welcomed investment. The new £7.56 million Ashford Gateway Plus opened in July 2011 and is home to a diverse range of public services, including the new Ashford Tourist Information Service and café.

Work has also been completed on a £1.7 million investment in St Mary's Church, creating a modern, comfortable and flexible town centre venue - Arts at St Mary's - for worship, community events, arts and exhibitions. Stour Valley Arts, a key body funded by the Arts Council England, has opened a new permanent gallery in Elwick Road, Ashford,.

Knole, the National Trust property in Sevenoaks, has seen the former Orangery restored. A new visitor centre has opened, which is the first new public space since the property came under National Trust ownership in 1946. The new centre contains a 3D model of Knole, as well as a comprehensive timeline, interactive interpretation, a visitor reception, with disability access, and a video room.

In Gravesham, Europe's largest Sikh Gurdwara temple has opened and is proving to be a unique draw for visitors of all religions. Gravesend's riverside has become more accessible to visiting craft with a new pontoon at the end of the historic Town Pier and new moorings off St Andrew's Gardens adding to the revitalisation of this part of the Thames Gateway.

Also in the borough work is underway on the Cyclopark, which will create first-class cycling, running and extreme sports facilities when it opens in Spring 2012. Offering an exciting range of activities for everyone, the Cyclopark will be one of the leading multi sport centres in the south of England bringing regional and national events to Kent.

Transport

With an investment of €360 million, P&O Ferries welcomed the first of two ships, Spirit of Britain into service in January, with its sister ship, Spirit of France, joining it on the Dover and Calais route in September. Each weighing 49,000 tonnes, they will be the largest ships ever to operate on the cross-Channel run and are able to carry 180 articulated lorries, a further 200 cars and 1,750 passengers.

A master plan proposed by the Dover Harbour Board master plan would increase capacity with the construction of four additional Ro-Ro ferry berths in the Western Docks of the harbour. The new investment will also see the creation of a new marina with facilities for up to 370 berths. As part of the £300m proposed development of Dover Waterfront and Terminal 2, Dover Harbour Board will be submitting a revision order in the autumn.

Southeastern Trains is to start a 70 minute High Speed train service, running three trains a morning and three every evening between Deal and Sandwich and London St Pancras, from October this year.

Sustrans' Connect2 was the winner of The People's £50 Million Lottery Giveaway which is to invest in walking and cycling networks. There are now three Kent schemes in the final Connect2 list, one at Whitstable and another at Reculver on the Isle of Thanet and most recently Dover has been

accepted onto the programme. In addition two new cycle routes have been opened on the Isle of Sheppey - the Sheerness Way and Isle of Harty Trails.

Accommodation

Hotel developers continue to face financing challenges, but Kent has seen a wide range of accommodation developed in the county over the past year. The partnership of Visit Kent, Tourism South East and Locate in Kent has developed new Hotel Fact Files for key areas to encourage further investment for the county.

The Best Western Dover Marina Hotel & Spa, formerly known as The Churchill, has re-opened following a multi-million pound investment of the elegant Grade II listed Regency hotel by Leaf Hotels. The 81-bedroom hotel has created nearly 60 jobs.

Hotel development in Medway is gathering momentum with a new 120-bedroom hotel planned for Gillingham Waterfront and a 120-bedroom hotel being built at Medway Valley Leisure Park. There are also plans for a 150-bedroom hotel at Rochester Riverside with 790m² of conference space and a sunken courtyard containing the old city wall, providing a physical link between historic Rochester and the new development.

Travelodge has taken over the Chaucer in Canterbury and following a refurbishment the hotel re-opened in April 2011.

Thanet has welcomed the 68-bedroom Ramsgate Seafront Travelodge, which opened in June 2011, after the £2 million conversion of the former Kent International Hotel. The district will also benefit from a new 71-bedroom Premier Inn at Minster, close to Manston, Kent's international airport. The Premier Inn has a 204-seater restaurant and will create 50 new jobs. The Premier Inn alongside Margate Station will also be investing in a further 32 rooms. Other proposed investments for Margate include new hotels on the seafront adjacent to Turner Contemporary, and as part of the proposed Arlington redevelopment.

Shepherd Neame's boutique hotel The George at Cranbrook has enjoyed a £270,000 refurbishment including investment in the restaurant, accommodation and bar. Other Shepherd Neame properties that have also invested include the Millers Arms and Grove Ferry in Canterbury, William Caxton in Tenterden, and The Seaview in Birchington. June 2011 saw the opening of The Vaults , Shepherd Neame's old wine and spirit stores as an events and conference venue.

In 2011 Kent welcomed the Open Golf and has seen investment in accommodation for golfers. Prince's Golf Course, near Sandwich, has built dormitory accommodation for golfers wanting to stay in the area, and London Golf Club, near Brands Hatch, has secured planning permission for a 130-bedroom luxury hotel and leisure development.