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TOURISM CHAMPIONS PLAN DICKENS OF A CELEBRATION

The tourism champions at Visit Kent have great expectations that Kent and Medway will be leading the way when it comes to celebrating the bicentenary of the birth of one of England's greatest journalists and writers – Charles Dickens.

Dickens did travel widely and many areas in the UK and overseas can claim connections, but his personal associations with Kent and Medway as a child and as an established author are among the strongest.

Dickens fever is expected to be gripping the nation and delighting visitors from around the world in 2012 and will be a key element in the Cultural Olympiad which is being organised to complement the London Games.

A Kent and Medway Dickens 2012 working party has been established. Visit Kent has joined forces with a range of organisations interested in celebrating the author's life. These include Medway Council, Kent County Council, Thanet District Council and Gravesham Borough Council, Kent Film Office, Dickens Fellowships and members of the Dickens family.

Plans currently underway include enhancing the popular Broadstairs and Medway Dickens Festivals; a major exhibition at the Guildhall Museum, Rochester; a Movie Map highlighting key locations used in films of Dickens'

novels; starting major restoration work at the Swiss Chalet and Eastgate Gardens, Rochester; and the opening of a Dickens Visitor Centre at Gad's Hill Place, Higham, where the famous Victorian made his home and died.

Sandra Matthews-Marsh, chief executive at Visit Kent, said: "We are working closely with Visit Britain for their international Dickens Bicentenary campaign as it is clear that Kent and Medway are central to his life and his novels.

"It is hard to think of anywhere in the county that has not influenced at least one of his novels in some way. Like all the best writers, Dickens drew his inspiration from his own life experiences, the places he had seen and the people he had encountered.

"Many Kent and Medway bicentenary projects are underway already and there are many more in the pipeline. This is another exciting opportunity for Kent and Medway to really showcase our county when we welcome our visitors in 2012.

"Furthermore, the projects are all being designed not only to deliver next year but to provide a lasting legacy to attract visitors in years to come and support our 3,000 tourism, leisure and hospitality businesses and the 63,000 jobs they sustain."

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Captions:

- Nancy – costumed tour guide Sarah Digby
- Sandra Matthews-Marsh, chief executive at Visit Kent
- Broadstairs Victorians

- Visit Kent Limited is a public/private sector partnership supported by Kent County Council, Medway Council, the district and borough councils, Tourism South East and the leading sector tourism businesses in Kent.

Visit Kent champions Kent's £3.2 billion tourism industry by targeting UK and overseas markets, improving quality and skills and growing investment in the tourism product.

- Celebrating Kent is part of the Kent Campaign for the 2012 Olympic Games, a partnership led and managed by Kent County Council to maximise the benefits and long term legacy to the County from the 2012 Games. The award winning Campaign primarily works across eight sectors, including tourism, sport, the arts, and education. Further details can be found at www.kentsport.org/london2012
<<http://www.kentsport.org/london2012>>

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