

## 5.7a. District Dashboard Maidstone

**Maidstone** is one of the county's top performers for business bed-nights, coming second only to Canterbury, although it falls into the bottom 50% for holiday nights. Maidstone has the greatest number of group tour-ready establishments of the county, with 18.4% of the total for Kent, and is also one of the top districts for MICE capacity, alongside Sevenoaks. Maidstone is the top district for 4\* accommodation, with roughly 18% of the county's capacity, and in the top third for 3\*/budget accommodation, alongside Folkestone & Hythe (no. 1), Canterbury, and Ashford. Airbnb provision is moderate, with a predominance of entire home rentals widely distributed in Maidstone and across the rural areas of the district. The **rental demand** metric is the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest across the districts.

2/13 for **BUSINESS NIGHTS**: 301,000 bed-nights = 12% of total for Kent

9/13 for **HOLIDAY NIGHTS**: 392,000 bed-nights = 4.9% of total for Kent

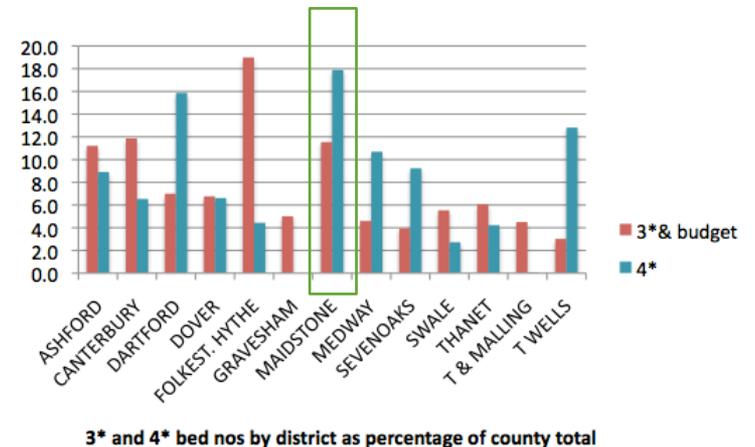
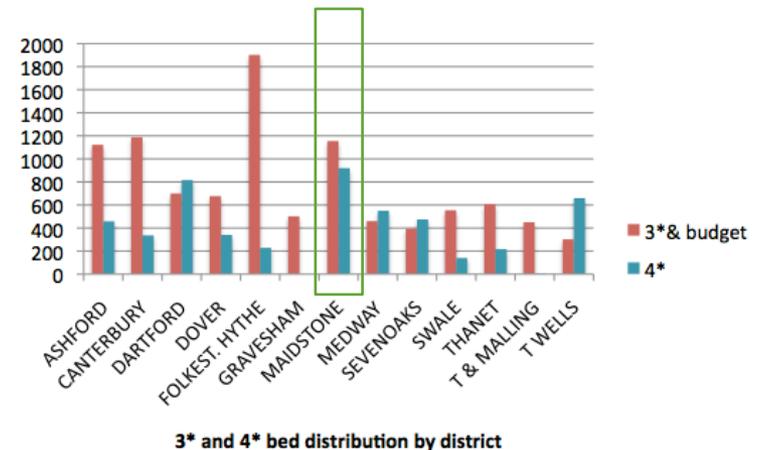
14 **MICE-ready** accommodation establishments = 13.1% of county total

Total **MICE capacity**: 2,311 = 14.3% of county capacity within accommodation establishments

**Largest single MICE venue capacity**: 600 

**Group** tour-ready establishments: 17 = 18.4% of Kent total

**Airbnb**: 352 **ACTIVE RENTALS** with a **rental growth** of **468%** between 2016 (Q2) and 2019 (Q2). **Rental demand** 87 (joint 3<sup>rd</sup>/13)



Sources of data for district dashboards: Extrapolated from Destination Research 2018, Visit Kent Business Barometers, CCCU Accommodation Database audit and Airdna webpages (subscription to district level data).

## 5.7b. Maidstone (interview findings)

### Visitor Offer

The Borough combines both the county town and a significant rural offer. With its central accessible location, business tourism drives the visitor economy, with large branded hotel provision, popular for MICE, but increasingly used to accommodate the visitors drawn to the events offer. Leeds Castle is a key flagship attraction and the county town's visitor offer includes its riverside location, Maidstone Museums and the Hazlitt Theatre, along with its retail and evening economy. The wider rural setting offers Kentish countryside. Parts of the Borough are situated within the Kent Downs AONB.

### Drivers for the Visitor Economy

Maidstone's strategic location and accessibility are considered key drivers for economic growth, and this has had a significant impact on its development as a business tourism hub for the county. Business and conference tourism are expected to continue to be a central plank of the visitor economy, although the COVID pandemic creates increasing uncertainty. Time is needed to understand its full implications for business and conference events, and the degree to which business hotels and venues will need to adapt their business models in the future. Wider developments, such as the Kent Medical Campus, have also added to the strength of the district as a provider of business tourism accommodation.

The visitor economy has also been shaped by the strategic focus on events and the vision to grow the Borough's larger events, with the Kent Showground, Leeds Castle and Mote Park delivering key elements of the events calendar. The *Maidstone DMP Action Plan for 2019* also reinforces the need to ensure the Local Plan recognises the value of local distinctiveness to tourism, identifying food and drink and the arts as paths to grow this for the Borough.

The visitor economy, whilst not central to the strategic focus set out in the *Maidstone Strategic Plan (2019-2045)*, forms part of the vision for Maidstone as 'a thriving place' and positions Maidstone as the 'Business Capital of Kent.' The positioning of Maidstone as the county town is being considered as part of the *Local Plan Review*, with a view to elevating its offer in keeping with this status. The visitor economy is important both to this, and to the revitalisation of the town centre.

### Drivers



#### Main:

**Location** - central location within Kent.

**Connectivity** – ease of access from the M20.

Centrality and ease of access means the Borough's hotels serve not only visitors to the district, but also visitors to neighbouring districts.

**Policy** – Maidstone's Strategic Plan (2019-2045) positions Maidstone as the 'Business Capital of Kent.'

#### Supplementary:

**Policy**- a growing events strategy with a vision to grow the number and length of events.

**Visitor offer**- Large scale events at the Kent Showground, Leeds Castle and Mote Park in Maidstone, contribute to a growing events calendar, placing significant demand on accommodation at key points of the year.

## 5.7b. Maidstone (interview findings)

### Gaps in Provision

The high demand for hotel accommodation in the Borough, due to centrality and ease of access to the M20 corridor, its position as a hub for business tourism within the county, together with its growing events strategy, means that larger hotels can reach capacity at key times. Lack of capacity is now regarded as a barrier to growth, with implications such as the loss of visitors to other districts, constrained dwell time/spend in the local area, and loss of ticket sales when visitors cannot find anywhere to stay nearby. Demand is also high when clashes in events across the county create additional peaks in demand – for example, in 2020 the Open Golf would have clashed with the Rambling Man Rock Festival in Mote Park. As the Borough has seen significant hotel development in recent years with Travelodge and Premier Inn, a **key identified gap** is for:

- **another large hotel (mid-range 3\*)** to accommodate growing events audiences, but with business space to meet year-round demand. A town centre location would also feed into the Borough's agenda to increase public transport use.

Supplementary needs are identified linking to:

- **Additional town centre accommodation (3\* or above)**, as provision is limited in Maidstone. Trends leading to diversification away from retail in town centres, which may be accelerated due to COVID, are opening the way for more mixed-use development, which could include a hotel and expanded visitor offer.
- The increasing trend for experience-based offers and desire for 'easily accessible rural locations' could be capitalised upon by the Borough's rural locations with **higher quality smaller establishments** which match the high end offer of attractions such as Leeds Castle and the vineyards. There is limited '5-star feel' boutique accommodation to meet the needs of these target markets.

### Links to key planning and policy documents

Current adopted **Local Plan** (2017):

[https://www.maidstone.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/171149/Local-Plan-v2-November-2017.pdf](https://www.maidstone.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/171149/Local-Plan-v2-November-2017.pdf)

**Local Plan Review** – The time horizon for adoption of a new Local Plan is 2022, with the next phase of consultation in October 2020, which will set out spatial approaches to accommodating growth in the Borough

<https://localplan.maidstone.gov.uk/home/local-plan-review>

**Town centre opportunity sites guidance 2019:** <https://www.maidstone.gov.uk/home/primary-services/planning-and-building/additional-areas/planning-guidelines-for-opportunity-sites>

Current **Economic Development Strategy 2015-31:**

[https://www.maidstone.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/164657/Economic-Development-Strategy-2015.pdf](https://www.maidstone.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/164657/Economic-Development-Strategy-2015.pdf)

### Priority gaps

Large mid-range 3\* hotel

Town centre hotel (3\* or above)

Boutique smaller establishments to match higher end offer

### Support for inward investment:



#### Enabling environment:

Borough supportive of tourism.

Visitor accommodation development is supported under general strategic objectives, particularly around the town centre.

Rural policies supportive of change of use of agricultural buildings for tourism economy uses.