

5.8a. District Dashboard Medway

Medway Unitary Authority sits just above the mid-point for both holiday and business bed-nights in the county. It has a high proportion of group-ready establishments at 13% of the total for Kent – second only to Maidstone – but is in the bottom third in terms of MICE capacity. Medway comes in the top third of districts for 3*/budget and 4* accommodation provision. Airbnb provision is moderately low, but growing, and similar to Gravesham and Dartford, with a higher proportion of room only rentals, centered mainly around the Medway towns. The rental demand metric is in midway position when compared to other districts in Kent.

5/13 for **BUSINESS NIGHTS**: 193,700 bed-nights = 7.7% of total for Kent

6/13 for **HOLIDAY NIGHTS**: 836,800 bed-nights = 10.4% of total for Kent

6 **MICE-ready** accommodation establishments = 5.6% of county total

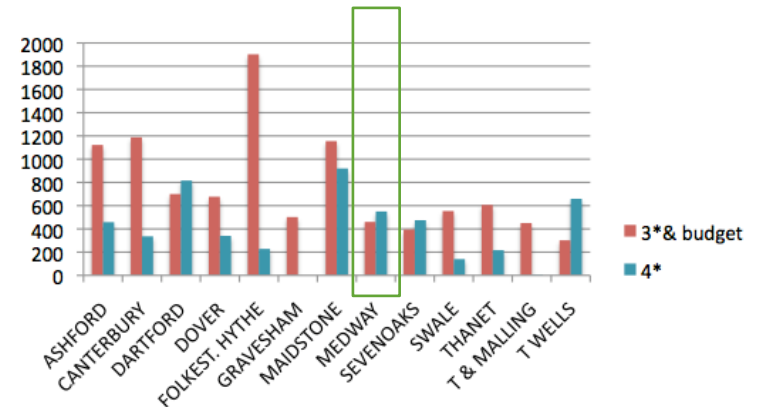
Total **MICE capacity**: 830 = 5.1% of county capacity within accommodation establishments

Largest single MICE venue capacity: 300

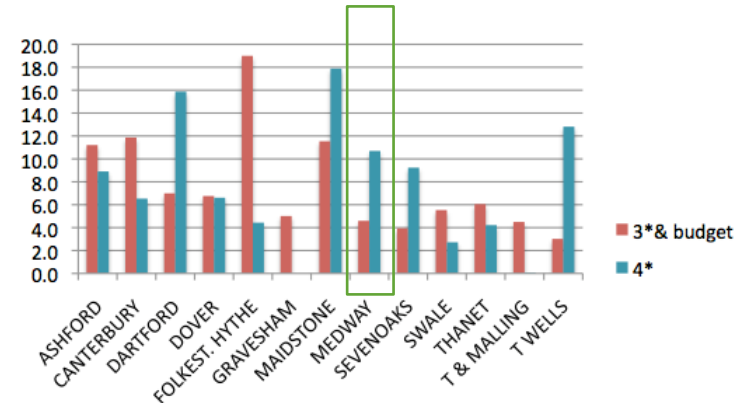


Group tour-ready establishments: 12 = 13% of Kent total

Airbnb: 252 **ACTIVE RENTALS** with a **rental growth** of **446%** between 2016 (Q2) and 2019 (Q2). **Rental demand** 73 (7th/13)



3* and 4* bed distribution by district



3* and 4* bed nos by district as percentage of county total

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).

5.8b. Medway (interview findings)

Visitor Offer

As a largely city-based destination, the visitor offer draws from a rich heritage, with Rochester Cathedral, Rochester and Upnor Castles, literary links with Dickens, and The Historic Dockyard Chatham. Over 30 days of free festivals and events draw visitation, and the waterfront location is being transformed through a variety of regeneration projects. The current bid being developed for *Medway UK City of Culture 2025* reflects the strong creative arts/cultural sector within the district. Visitation is largely dominated by day visitors, mostly drawn from Kent and the near London markets, together with the VFR market. There is a small number of overseas visitors. The aspiration is to continue to build Medway's positioning as a short break city destination.

Key Drivers for the Visitor Economy

Regeneration is at the core of Medway's strategic growth plans, with the river at the heart of the vision capitalising on mixed-use waterfront regeneration sites. The visitor economy is an important employer and is considered integral to the achievement of the future ambitions set out in the *Medway 2035* report. This aspirational document reflects strategic priorities strongly dominated by regeneration and place-making, with a vision to become a *Waterfront University City* through the pursuit of six priorities: destination and place-making; inward investment; innovation; business accommodation and digital connectivity; sector growth; and improved employability.

Medway's connectivity and proximity to London are also considered key economic drivers, aided by high speed trains and considerable investment in local train stations, with a £26 million investment in the new train station in Rochester and improvements across all five stations. Capitalising on the river to create a vibrant waterfront economy is central to the transformation of Medway and a significant number of mixed-use regeneration sites are being developed along the river; a few of these have linked aspirations to include hotel development.

The Council is in the process of developing a new cultural strategy, and the ongoing work to develop a bid for *Medway City of Culture 2025* reflects the positioning of arts/culture within the future strategic development of the district. If successful, it is hoped this could be a game-changer and help to reposition Medway.

Drivers



Main:

Policy – regeneration is at the core of Medway's strategic growth plan.

Location – positioned at the heart of the Thames Gateway, with proximity to London.

Connectivity – aided by investment in train stations and high-speed trains (34 mins to London).

Supplementary:

Policy – creative & cultural sector is identified as a key sector, with a new cultural strategy in development and the evolving *Medway City of Culture Bid 2025*.

Knowledge economy – vision to become a *Waterfront University City*.

Potential/Emerging:

Visitor offer – *Medway City of Culture 2025 Bid*; London Resort.

Infrastructure – could be impacted by broader spheres of influence of nearby developments (Lower Thames Crossing, Ebbsfleet Garden City, Thames Estuary).

5.8b. Medway (interview findings)

Gaps in Provision

The current position reflects a cautious approach regarding the capacity of current demand to support more hotel development. Nevertheless, the aspiration and scale of regeneration is substantial, and a number of projects in the pipeline could provide a catalyst for increasing hotel demand in the future. In particular, the outcome of the *Medway City of Culture 2025 Bid* could be a game-changer in terms of the repositioning of Medway, and, if the London Resort goes ahead, Medway is well positioned to capitalise on increased visitor demand.

Recent additions to the hotel bed stock have been made in Rochester town centre and plans for a couple of the town's waterfront regeneration sites also have considerations for hotels as part of their development. Currently, when demand is high, visitors often rely on hotels in Maidstone, which allows visitors to combine Medway with visits to Leeds Castle and Bluewater.

The lack of MICE venues is recognised as a weakness of the visitor economy, but Council aspirations to develop additional larger hotels with conference facilities are at present cautious and would rely on a stronger evidence base to support the need for development in this aspect of provision.

Priority gaps

Aspirations are dependent on the longer-term impact of COVID, particularly on business tourism/the wider economy; the outcome of the *Medway City of Culture Bid for 2025*; and, the progress of other projects in the pipeline across Northern Kent.

Links to Key Planning and Policy Documents

- Medway Council (n.d.) **Medway 2035** [complements the Local Plan providing a structured road map to support policies and sets out future vision for growth] https://www.medway.gov.uk/downloads/file/3615/medway_2035
- The new **Local Plan, Future Medway**, is under development [with Stage Four publication of the draft plan due in Summer 2020] https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200149/planning_policy/519/new_medway_local_plan
- Medway Council (2018) **Development Strategy** https://www.medway.gov.uk/downloads/download/289/development_strategy
- **New Medway Local Plan Evidence Base** [access to key reports, including 2019 Town Centre Masterplans for Chatham, Gillingham & Strood] https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200149/planning_policy/519/new_medway_local_plan/2

Support for inward investment:



Enabling environment:

Medway Council often prepares sites for mixed-use development as part of regeneration schemes – e.g. purchase of land, and supporting improvements in public realm and highways access.