

Local Visitor
Economy
Partnership

Recognised by



VisitEngland



Upnor Castle, Chatham

ANNUAL REVIEW

2023

A MESSAGE FROM DOUG BANNISTER, CHAIRMAN VISIT KENT



It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to Visit Kent's Annual Review for 2023 and my first as Chair of Visit Kent. I am sure you will join with me in thanking my predecessor Bill Ferris CBE for his many years of service and support.

After an extremely challenging few years, it feels like our industry is finally starting to turn a corner and our most recent figures on the visitor economy in Kent support this.

I am delighted that our tourism and hospitality industry appears to be back on track with the number of jobs supported by the visitor economy almost at the levels seen before the pandemic. There are still many challenges facing our sector, not least the cost of living crisis which continues to impact consumer behaviour, but it has been fantastic to see the return in force of our international visitors – particularly those from the United States and the lifting of restrictions for our Chinese visitors. I am also delighted that the Government have improved the ability for school groups from France to enter the UK using passports rather than ID cards, making a huge difference to many of our top attractions, destinations and language schools who rely heavily on this market. We will of course continue to press the case with the Government to allow schoolchildren from other EU countries access to the UK on the same basis.

One issue that I have spent a lot of time on last year and will continue to do so this year both in my role as the Chief Executive of The Port of Dover and as Chair of Visit Kent is the looming prospect of the EU's new Entry Exit System this Autumn, followed by the introduction of their new visa for all non-EU residents. We are doing everything we can to ensure that the introduction of the new system will have a minimal impact on those travelling to the Continent, local residents and the wider county of Kent. It is critical, not only for the visitor economy but also the rest of the UK that our domestic and international visitors (and freight) can continue to enter and leave the UK as quickly and as seamlessly as possible.

But – on a more positive note - it is important to remind ourselves how lucky we are to be able to live and work in a fantastic county that is world-leading in so many ways and has so much potential. This was no doubt recognised by the team at VisitEngland in April, awarding Visit Kent the new accolade of Local Visitor Economy Partnership – one of only 15 destination management organisations to be awarded this status in the first cohort.

Last year also saw the launch of Visit Kent's excellent new sustainability strategy setting out our ambition to be a leading green destination. Supporting the growth of our industry whilst minimising the impact on the environment will continue to be a key priority for Visit Kent as we develop our new three year strategy.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Visit Kent team who as always are committed to supporting and assisting Kent's visitor economy and of course our partners for your unwavering support and constructive engagement over the last 12 months. We are also very grateful to our long term strategic and funding partner, Kent County Council, Medway Council, our district councils and all our private sector partners whose collaboration ensures a "Team Kent" approach to support our vital industry.

Finally, my thanks to my fellow board members. I am very grateful for their professionalism, experience and their support to me especially in my first year as Chair. On behalf of my fellow Board Directors, and all the team at Visit Kent, I would like to wish you and your colleagues a successful year ahead.

DOUG BANNISTER OBE

CHAIRMAN

A MESSAGE FROM DEIRDRE WELLS OBE, CHIEF EXECUTIVE VISIT KENT



I am delighted to share our 2023 Annual Review.

Over the past year, we have seen demand for our stunning destination continue to grow with visits and spend already back to over 90% of pre-pandemic levels. It's particularly exciting to see our overseas market bounce back, with a significant rise in US visitors, and the recent reintroduction of the recognition of ID cards for French school groups has seen a much welcome boost to that extremely important market. We were delighted to be part of the Visit Britain delegation to China, an exciting and fast growing market.

We were also particularly gratified to see a glowing piece about our Kent vineyards in none other than Le Figaro! When the French are starting to shout about our wine tourism, I think we can safely say that we are doing something right! We continue to work hard to make Kent the destination of choice for visitors from both near and far, and were proud that our work with travel trade was recognised at the 2023 UKinbound awards, with Visit Kent scooping Destination Management Organisation of the Year.

Our major campaign, "It's in our Nature..." celebrated our amazing landscape, world-class heritage and delicious food and drink, and also enabled us to highlight the warm welcome which it's in our nature to provide. The eagle-eyed among you may have spotted our adverts at Gatwick Airport - capturing both the inbound and outbound market, and we look forward to building on this success with partners again for our 2024 campaign.

Building our reputation as a destination which has sustainability at its heart remains a key ambition. 2023 saw us launch our [Sustainability Action Plan](#) at the Kent Parliamentary Reception and working with key partners, we've developed an engaging, practical road-map to make Kent a leading sustainable destination. We're delighted that 26 businesses have now become Impact Heroes, showcasing how small changes to energy usage, supply chains and food waste can make a big impact. We're busy working on a partnership with Good Journey to encourage more of our visitors to travel in a sustainable way and we continue to promote our incredible food provenance to encourage more visitors and residents to shop local and enjoy the delights of the Garden of England.

Our commitment to best practice is at the heart of our strategy and we were proud, therefore, following a rigorous national process, to be one of the first English destinations to be awarded Local Visitor Economy Partnership status from Visit England. It is testament to the strong collaboration and support from a wide range of partners, aligned to our strategic and research-based approach, that Visit Kent was in the first cohort. This recognition has already reaped huge rewards, from inclusion in Visit Britain's major US campaign to presenting to the Visit England Board about our leading work on sustainability - all key to keeping Kent front and centre of the national debate.

A MESSAGE FROM DEIRDRE WELLS OBE, CHIEF EXECUTIVE VISIT KENT



Our riches as a destination are well known, but so are our challenges. We continue to lobby hard for support for Kent as an international gateway, including greater support for our port and road network, and the return of Eurostar to Ashford and Ebbsfleet.

As Chair of the Southern Water Tourism Group, we ensure that the environmental and economic impact of storm water overflows on our rivers and seas remain high on the agenda. Working with partners across the county, our “Team Kent” approach ensures that these vital issues are finally getting national recognition.

2024 looks set to be as busy, with the 30th anniversary of LeShuttle and the 40th anniversary of The Historic Dockyard Chatham being particular highlights. We look forward to working with you all to support our communities and businesses to have another prosperous year.

2023 saw our Chairman, Bill Ferris OBE, step down from the Visit Kent Board and I would like to put on record my huge appreciation for his support and dedication over many years.

We look forward to working with our new Chairman, Doug Bannister, to develop a new and exciting strategy to promote Kent as a leading destination to work, live and visit. My thanks to all our Board members for their continued support, and to my wonderful team who work so hard year round on your collective behalf. And finally, my thanks to you, our investors, for making all we do possible.

DEIRDRE WELLS OBE
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

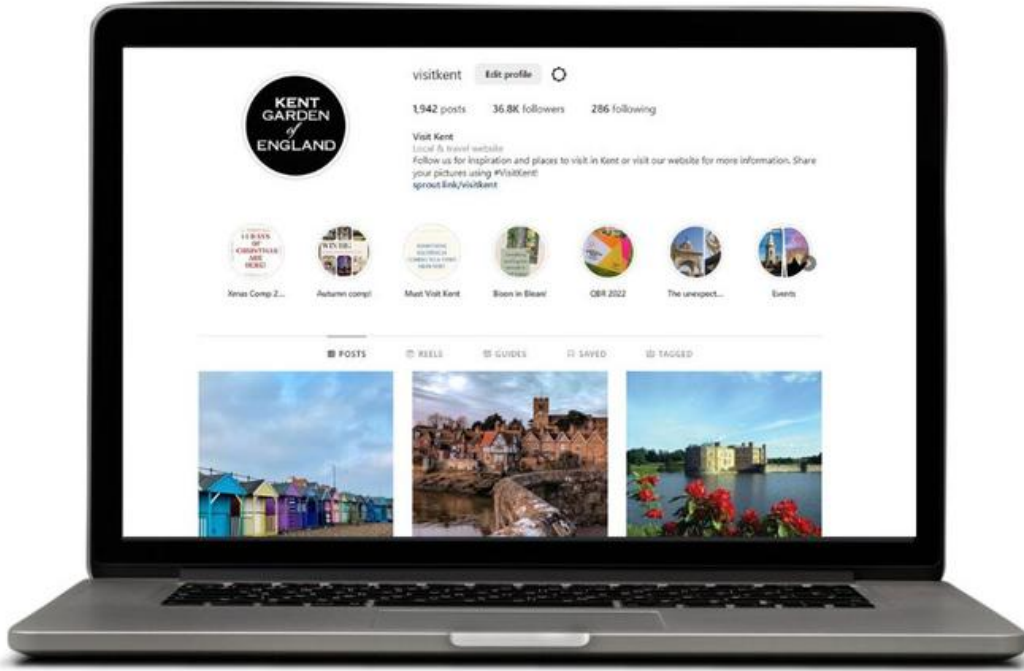
Visit Kent awarded the new enhanced status ‘Local Visitor Economy Partnership’ by VisitEngland - one of 15 destinations across the country forming part of the Government’s strategy to better support and grow the visitor economy in England



DESTINATION MARKETING

KENT
GARDEN *of* ENGLAND

visitkent.co.uk



WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA



1,889,433
Website page views

2,318,538
Total time spent on site by users (mins)

850,919
Website users



32,448
Facebook followers

5.03%
Facebook engagement rate

5,913,115
Facebook impressions



53,829
Twitter / x followers

929,814
Twitter impressions

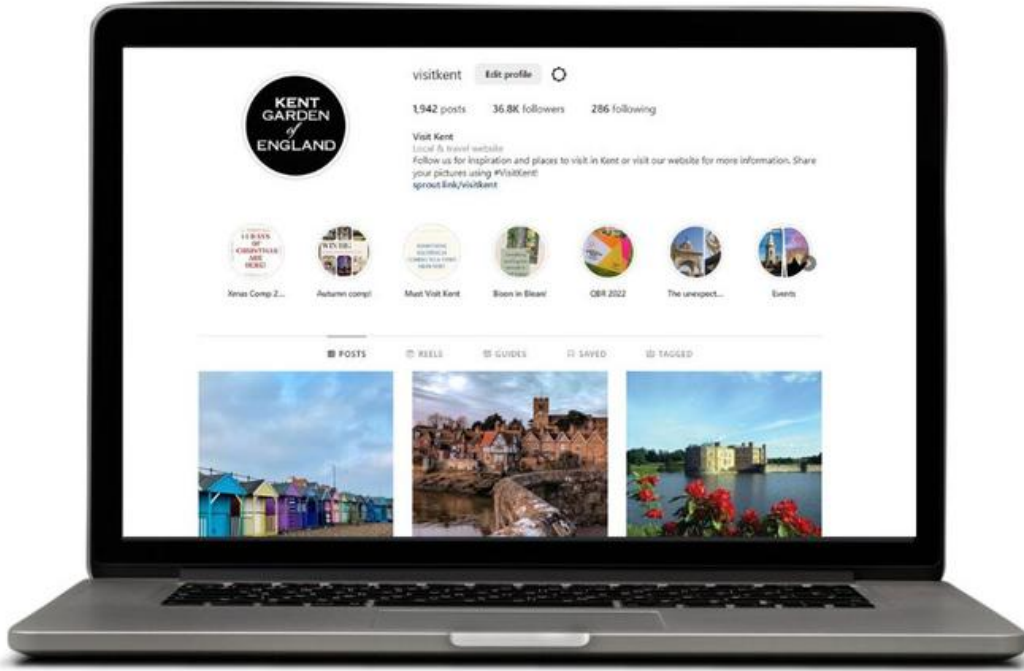


39,586
Instagram followers

2,589,157
Instagram impressions

5%
Instagram engagement rate

2,207
Organic social media posts in 2023



FEATURE CONTENT



93

features

00:56

Average
engagement time
(mins)



249,283

total page views

MOST POPULAR FEATURE WITH OVER 45K PAGE VIEWS!

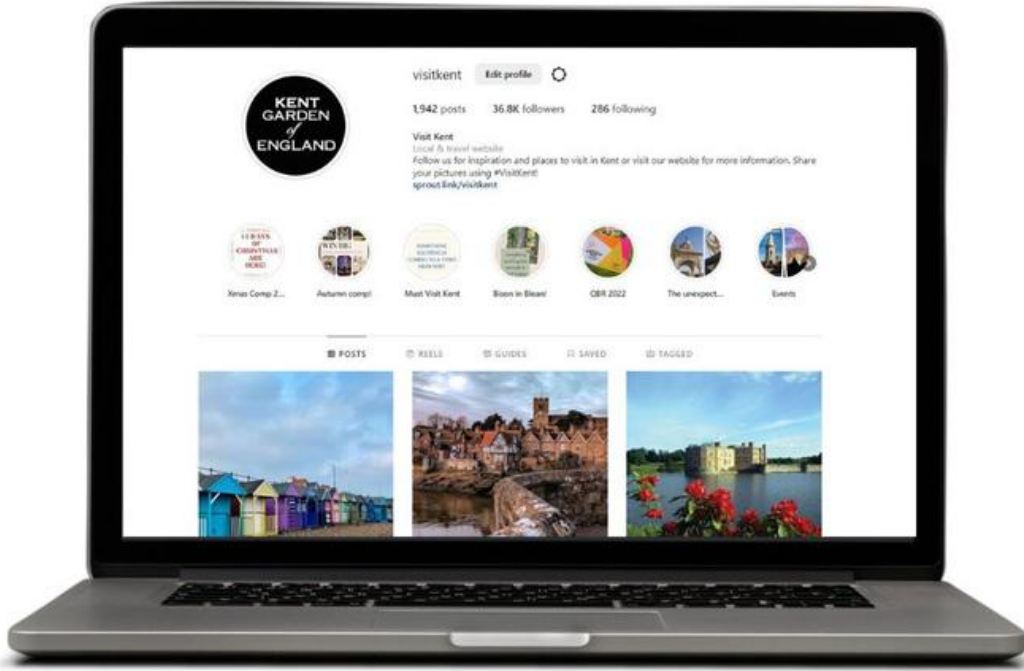
CHRISTMAS MARKETS IN KENT



24.55%
of all website
traffic



625
businesses
featured

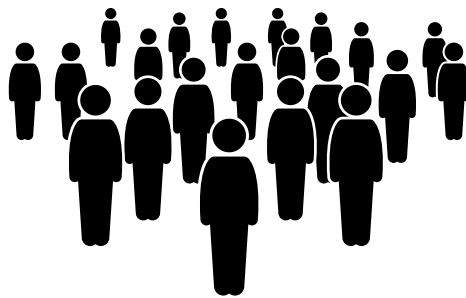


E-NEWSLETTERS

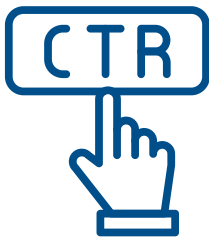


42
newsletters
sent to
consumers

33,898
consumers
on our database



333,814
total opens



5.80%
average
click-through-rate



28.40%
average
open rate



3%
increase
in subscribers



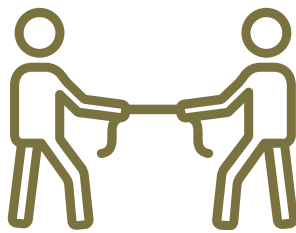
Mote Park, Maidstone

COMPETITIONS



4

competitions



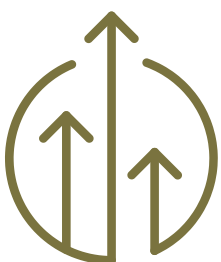
84,135

competition entries



46%

average opt in rate



125,316

total page views



616,696

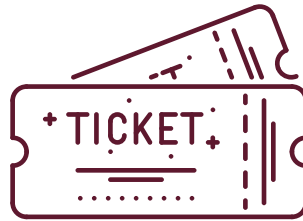
total impressions



KENT BIG WEEKEND

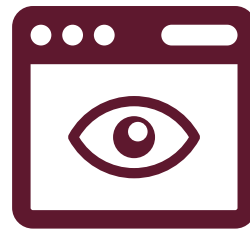


72
businesses
registered



3,428
tickets available

715,297
website page
views



49%
Data opt in rate



152,064
applications



It's in our Nature...

ITS IN OUR NATURE



12

new content features for partners



4

influencer trips



75+

German trade contacts on webinar



1,300

recipients of UKinbound campaign newsletter



1,263,505 impressions from VisitBritain US digital campaign



Stand at IFTM Top Resa trade show

A new, dedicated YouTube advert for one partner, which was served 624,000 times and viewed completely 11,551 times

Digital campaign running July 2023 until February 2024 achieving (as of early November 2023)

1.29 million impressions

28,759 clicks

A link CTR of 2.19% - the average CTR for travel campaigns is 0.90%

Reach of 517,000

Record-breaking competition, achieving 20,990 entries and newsletter opt-in of 48%,

2 competitions

14 Kent features shared across NL and FR channels

International influencer trip to Kent in December





PRESS

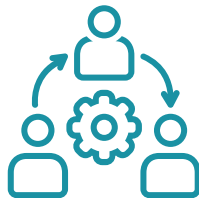
10

**Broadcast
interviews**



37

**press
assists**



5

**press
releases**



£456,398.05

PR AVE



10

**KENT LIFE
features**



68,335,887

PR reach



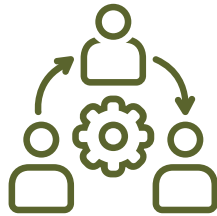


TRAVEL TRADE



465

subscribers to
trade newsletter



28
Kent
businesses
recommended



6
trade
newsletters
sent with **33%**
open rate



17
events
attended

4
familiarisation
trips

Visit Kent named Destination
Management Organisation of the Year
at UKinbound's Awards for Excellence





DISCOVER YOUR KENT EXPERIENCE

20

inbound tour operators on 3-day Kent trip

35

Kent businesses attending pre-event travel trade training

29

Kent businesses visited by operators across three days

16

Kent businesses had 121 meetings with operators



‘Enormously useful and superbly organised giving us the opportunity to see and experience a great variety of attractions that Kent has to offer in such a short space of time.

We will update our ‘Adventure Handbooks’ to include some more hidden gems and local secrets and are planning a Spotlight on Kent newsletter to our approx. 4000 mailing list.’
The Carter Company

Huge thank you to the VisitKent and UK Inbound team for the opportunity to take part in the ‘Discover your Kent Experience’ trade fam trip. The travel trade group visited the Cowshed Workshop on the Monday and by Friday we had an inbound group booking from Switzerland for late April, so amazing to get instant results.

**The Cowshed Workshop
Tenterden**



EUROPEAN UNION
European Regional Development Fund



EXPERIENCE
European Regional Development Fund

DEVELOPING THE DESTINATION

KENT
GARDEN *of* ENGLAND

visitkent.co.uk



22
research
reports
produced



60
Airdna district
reports

RESEARCH

Volume and value of
Kent tourism from the
2023

Cambridge Economic
Impact Model:
61 million trips
£3.7billion in value
74,462 jobs supported

2
resident
research reports



686
residents
engaged
in research



12
research
and insights
newsletters sent

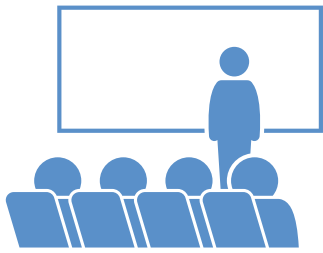


Sheppey

BUSINESS SUPPORT AND ENGAGEMENT



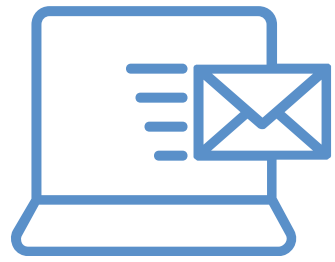
11 events /webinars



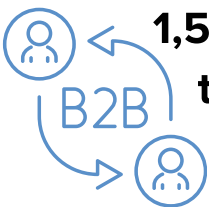
552 attendees at events



910 businesses supported



86 B2B newsletters



1,523 subscribers to newsletter

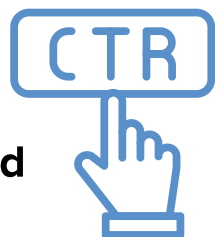
28.31% average open rate



20,217 B2B page views



14 partner forums hosted



6.23% average click through rate



3,695 LinkedIn followers

95,126 LinkedIn impressions



REPRESENTING THE SECTOR



5

meetings related to lobbying

Parliamentary reception at The House of Commons with The Port of Dover and LeShuttle

13

speaking opportunities for CEO

9

Tourism Alliance meetings



Attended 2023 Annual Hotel Conference



15

VisitEngland meetings

9

KCC meetings



SUSTAINABILITY

Launched new Sustainable Tourism Action Plan for Kent at Houses of Parliament



11

business toolkits
created



26

Kent businesses onboarded
as Impact Heroes

New sustainability hub launched on Kent Business website, with over 1000 + page views

New Act for Impact Tourism Working Group established with 3 meetings

New Visit Kent sustainability champions group (internal)



EUROPEAN UNION
European Regional
Development Fund



EXPERIENCE
European Regional Development Fund

Featured in the national County Council magazine as an exemplar of best practice



RECONNECT KENT



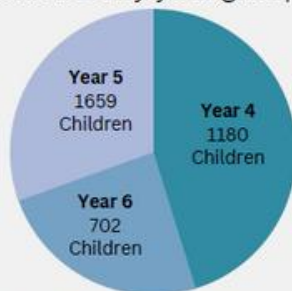
3,541 children participated in Reconnect activities

6 Kent attractions took part in the project



150 entries into the project competition

Breakdown of participating children by year group



*Some schools did not specify what year groups took part

120

Engineer Assemble boxes sent to teachers





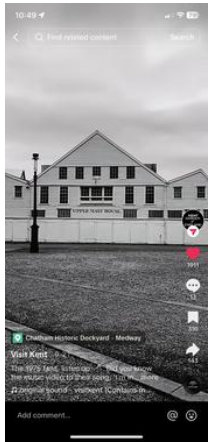
Maidstone

SCREEN TOURISM

14,000

views

**of Visit Kent Tik
Tok content on
1975 Music Video
location in Kent**



5

**new questions added
to monthly Kent
Business Barometer to
track screen tourism**

**New Domestic
Audience
Profiling audit
created**



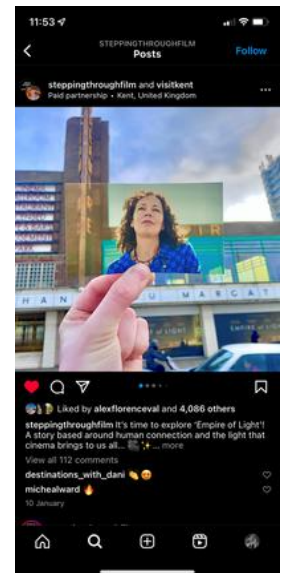
53K+

**views on
Searchlight's
featurette**

**Partnership with Searchlight Pictures Influencer trip to
Margate saw 4,200+ likes and 114 comments on
Instagram content**

5,000

**page views of
dedicated content on
Visit Kent website**





BEAUTIFUL SOUTH TOURISM AWARDS

18 Kent businesses win

Ethical, Responsible and Sustainable Tourism award sponsored by Visit Kent



- Large Hotel of the Year - The Cave Hotel**
- New Tourism Business - Boys Hall**
- Glamping Business of the Year - Kits Coty Glamping**
- Wedding Venue of the Year - Chapel House Estate**



- Ethical, Responsible and Sustainable Tourism award, sponsored by Visit Kent - Kent Wildlife Trust and Frasers**
- Experience of the Year category - Maidstone Distillery Tour and Tutored Tasting**
- Large Visitor Attraction of the Year - Leeds Castle**
- Visitor Information Service - White Cliffs Country Visitor Information Centre**
- Small Visitor Attraction of the Year - Maidstone Distillery**
- Glamping Business of the Year - Romney Marsh Shepherds Huts**
- Unsung Hero Award - Kevin Cockram from Bedgebury National Pinetum and Forest**



- Small Hotel of the Year' Frasers**
- Dog Friendly Business of the Year - Keeper's Cottages property Rogue's Cottage**
- Self Catering Accommodation of the Year - Coldharbour Log Cabin / Stable Oak Cottages**
- Unsung Hero Award - Emily Anderson from Powell-Cotton Museum**
- Wedding Venue of the Year - Frasers, Copper Rivet Distillery**
- Business Events Venue of the Year - Kent Event Centre**
- Tourism Event/Festival - Santa Specials at Kent & East Sussex Railway**
- Glamping Business of the Year - Rebel Farmer Tipi**



LOOKING FORWARD

Our team are committed to continuing to raise awareness of our incredible county, attracting new markets and encouraging our new and returning visitors to explore further.

As people make trade-offs on discretionary leisure spend, we'll need to work even harder to demonstrate the value of the experience we can offer collectively.

As a fully accredited Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP), we're excited to deliver a year-long programme of activity that will maximise exposure for our investor partners across the county, address challenges together, communicating a strong destination message in a joined-up way.

Your support will help us leverage external funding, create engaging campaigns that drive footfall to Kent and rebuild back better, together.

Contact our team:

Hollie Du Preez

Destination Development Director
hollie.dupreez@visitkent.co.uk

Louisa Mungall

Senior Destination Manager
louisa.mungall@visitkent.co.uk

Alanna Kite

Senior Destination Manager
alanna.kite@visitkent.co.uk

www.visitkent.co.uk

www.visitkentbusiness.co.uk