

Swale Borough Factsheet – Final DRAFT

The Experiential Offer focusing on the Kent Downs AONB – Opportunities & Gaps



The following factsheet will review:

- ✓ Key experience trends and research
- ✓ North Kent & Swale product strengths & opportunities
- ✓ Building on the current Kent Downs product for Swale
- ✓ Swale experience opportunities focusing on Kent Downs/ NDW
- ✓ National product case study examples
- ✓ Product Snapshot for AONB



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Key trends that resonate with the Swale Kent Downs offer

Swale has a diverse offering from heritage market towns to marshland, industrial heritage and seaside fun; Its offer breaks down into 4 key product areas – Coastal, Heritage, Countryside & Nature and Family. Areas of strength that are gaining recognition are wildlife and countryside, thanks to the experience offered by Elmley Nature Reserve. There are additional opportunities around the North Downs, as well as capitalising on the fruit and hop growing heritage in the borough, telling the full story from hop garden to beer garden.

The Kent Downs Area of the borough has great potential for the development of experience product, however it has the slight barrier of accessibility, specifically via public transport. Therefore, areas that offer set destination for circular walking and cycling activity combined with other experience activities will entice the visitor to explore the local area further.

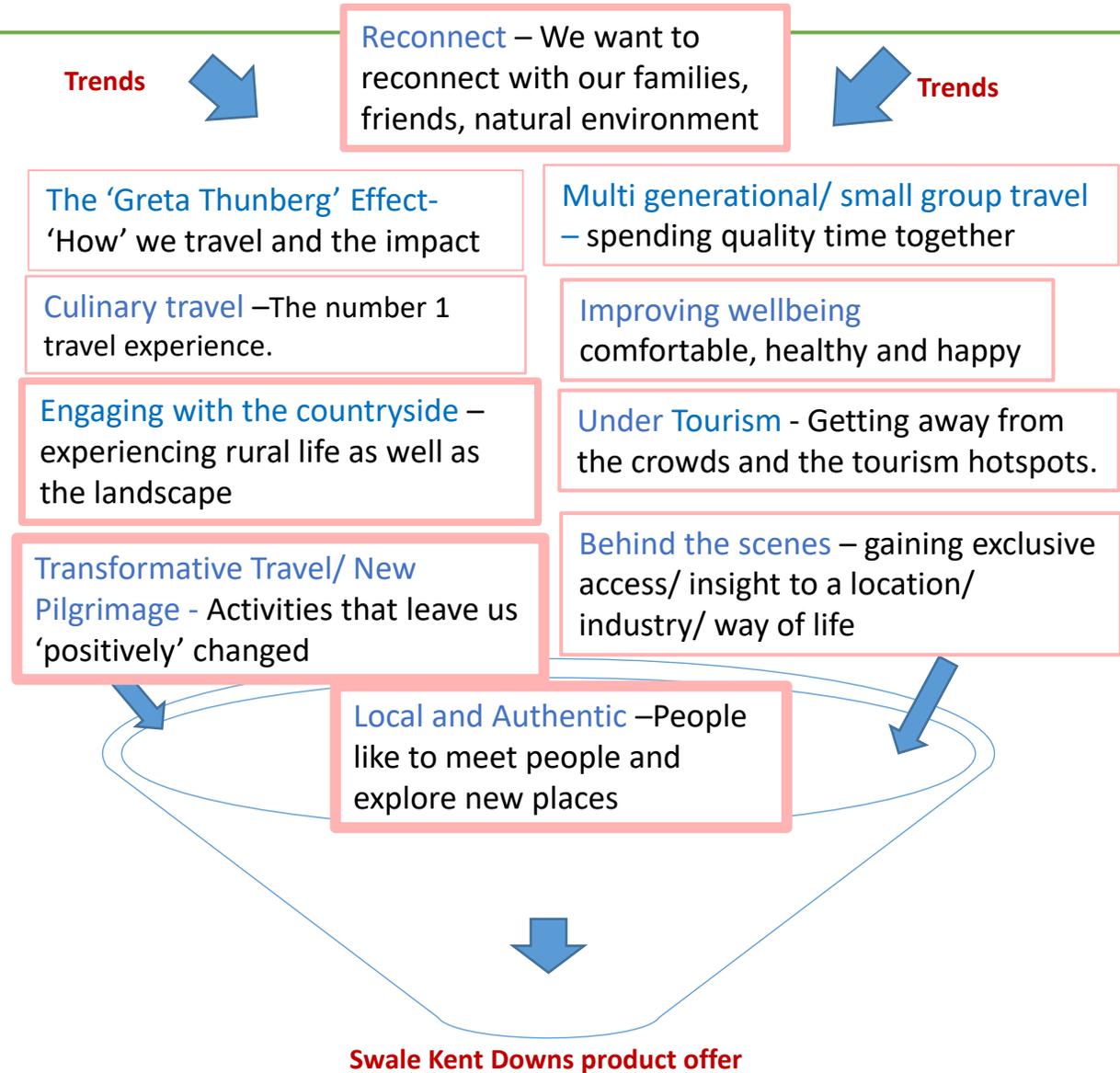
Key Trends:

Local & Authentic – The visitor is looking for an authentic experience, where they can feel less like a tourist and more like a local. In the search for authenticity, the most popular experience is one that takes them behind the scenes to gain an insight into a different way of life/ culture or industry.

Behind the Scenes - Gaining exclusive access to behind the scenes tours of heritage sites or access to closed door industries has featured as part of the experience tourism mix for the past 10 years, however this has predominantly been via city locations and larger attractions, the opportunity is to bring this trend into the countryside offer

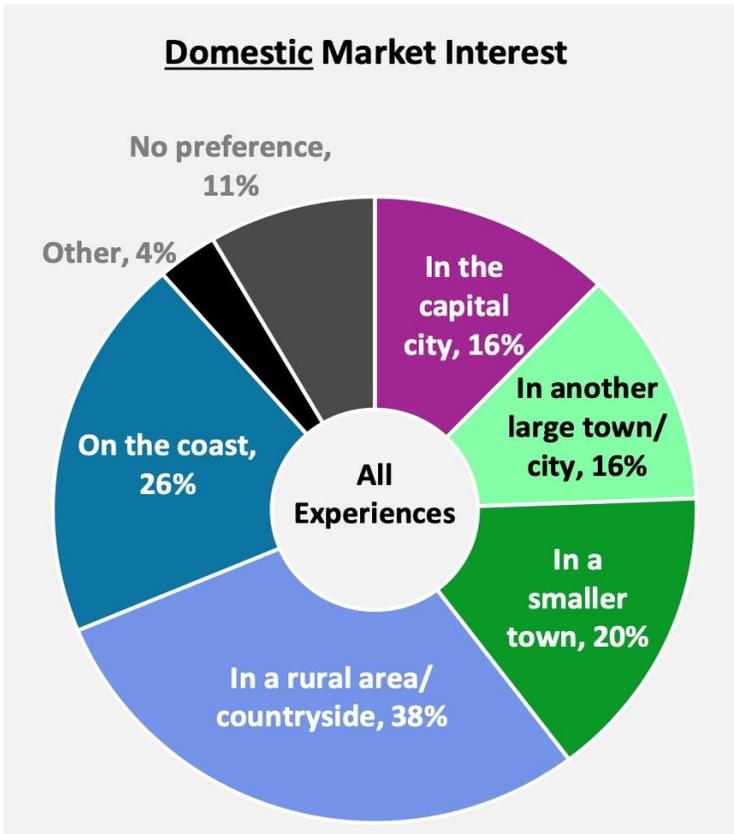
Transformative Travel – Is an experience that leaves us ‘positively’ changed, this can be through education, wellbeing & Mindfulness, or by gaining a deeper insight and understanding.

Engaging with the countryside – accentuated by lockdown, there is an increased desire to get out into the countryside. Although walking and cycling are key activities, when this is combined with other interests such as food & drink or heritage, the consumers interest increases significantly.



The Value of the Kent Downs Product

Tapping into countryside taster walks would be a great way for Swale to capitalise on the Kent Downs offer – Themed around the appeal to engage with rural life, this area offers visiting privately owned estates, walking through Kent’s major fruit growing area and the opportunity to engage with the landscape via creative courses. Swale’s proximity to London and to the Medway towns, offers an extensive consumer base in the less than 1 hours journey time, there is the opportunity to really raise the profile of privately owned attractions such as Belmont and suggest a combined walk and visit for a day trip.



- ❖ The Discover England Experiences research (June 2019) highlights the potential to develop product in the rural area, capturing the following insights for shaping new experiences:
- ❖ There is a high interest in engaging with a rural product for the domestic audience with 39% stating their preference for the countryside, rural area. International preference was less, however is still represented 29%.
- ❖ Both Domestic and International visitors highlighted journey time to an experience was a factor with 85% will travel up to 1 hour, any longer saw a dramatic drop.

They want the experience to be:

- ✓ Authentic & unique
- ✓ Create a distinctive memory
- ✓ Deliver cultural or historical immersion
- ✓ Provide a challenge that they don’t have access to at home

The North Downs Way & Kent Downs AONB deliver against all these consumer requirements. Accessible in less than 30 minutes – 1 hour journey time; offering an authentic rural and historical experience that complements the heritage town and coastal offer, so encourages extension of stay.

The Swale Opportunity

- Extend visitor stay to engage with the countryside
- Kent Downs Estate walks linking to the house and garden attractions
- Visitors are generally older; travelling from SE & London
- Pub walks – circular walks from country pubs – The Plough, Stalisfield

Swale needs it’s visitors to:

- Stay longer & spend more
- Extend to overnight stays to explore the heritage & Countryside
- Visit out of core season

Tapping into current trends

- Transformative & wellbeing experiences are a growth area
- Under tourism – visitors wanting to get away from the hot spots
- Behind the scenes – Huge interest to the visitor – an opportunity for country house estates



The added value of the Kent Downs AONB:

- Pilgrims Way is an established historical route that runs close to the Swale border
- Proximity of the AONB landscape so close to the arterial driving routes of M2 and M20
- This product can be self guided or guide led
- Walking and cycling product developed in the Kent Downs can support rural accommodation providers
- This product is a sustainable offer to the consumer

What makes a good walking experience?

- ✓ Landscape/ views/ architectural vistas
- ✓ historical or cultural insight often delivered as insider knowledge
- ✓ A chance to relax, unwind and recharge – linking to the well-being and mindfulness trend.

Engaging the visitor with the landscape

Experience products: E.g. Food & Drink – Hidden Heritage – Literary – Agricultural - health – Pilgrimage

How do visitors engage with outdoor activities ?

Engaging with the North Downs Way/ AONB Walking / Cycling/Nature

Local
Day visitor
Leisure walker/ group tour
Families
outdoor activity is not the main reason for travel
Local/ Domestic/ group international

Product; 1-2 hours walking combined with other attractions - often circular routes to car park with other products
Barriers: Concern about getting lost, accessing the countryside, weather

85% of visitors that want to engage with the countryside are casual walkers

Casual/ leisure walker

Casual / moderate walker / cyclist with limited time

1-2 day options combined with other product
Repeat visitor
Walking/ cycling as 'part of' not main reason
Domestic 1-2 hour journey time/ rural retreaters/ active

Product: 1/2 day - 2 days - regular walkers, time poor - mid - higher range accommodation/ Unique Airbnb/ looking to combine other experiences
Barriers: Time, need to relax, competition from other activities, weather

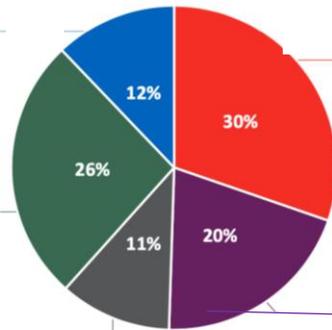
Long distance walker/ hiker/cyclist

Solo traveller/ couples/groups
Hikers / mountain biker/ route cyclist
Trail collectors
Domestic & International
Product - self guided/ looking for planning and local knowledge assistance to assist own planning - camping, Airbnb ,B&B
Barriers: appeal of other trails, baggage carrying service/ lack of

Who are the lead segments?

The countryside appeals across all VisitEngland segments, however, the Heritage sites within the Swale Kent Downs area has a greater resonance with segments 1 & 2

1. COUNTRY-LOVING TRADITIONALISTS
2. FUN IN THE SUN
3. FUSS-FREE VALUE SEEKERS
4. FREE AND EASY MINI-BREAKERS
5. ASPIRATIONAL FAMILY FUN



1. COUNTRY-LOVING TRADITIONALISTS

Empty nesters with traditional values, they are likely to have recently taken a countryside break in England. Good quality, secure accommodation is a priority when booking a holiday.

2. FUN IN THE SUN

Typically parents looking for family-orientated summer holidays where beaches play a starring role. Tend to seek cheaper, more 'social' alternatives to hotel accommodation, such as caravans or holiday camps.



Eaton Manor » Complimentary Amenities » Explore the Estate



Example experience

Accommodation providers going the extra mile by offering guests a guided 'walk the estate experience'

Explore the Estate

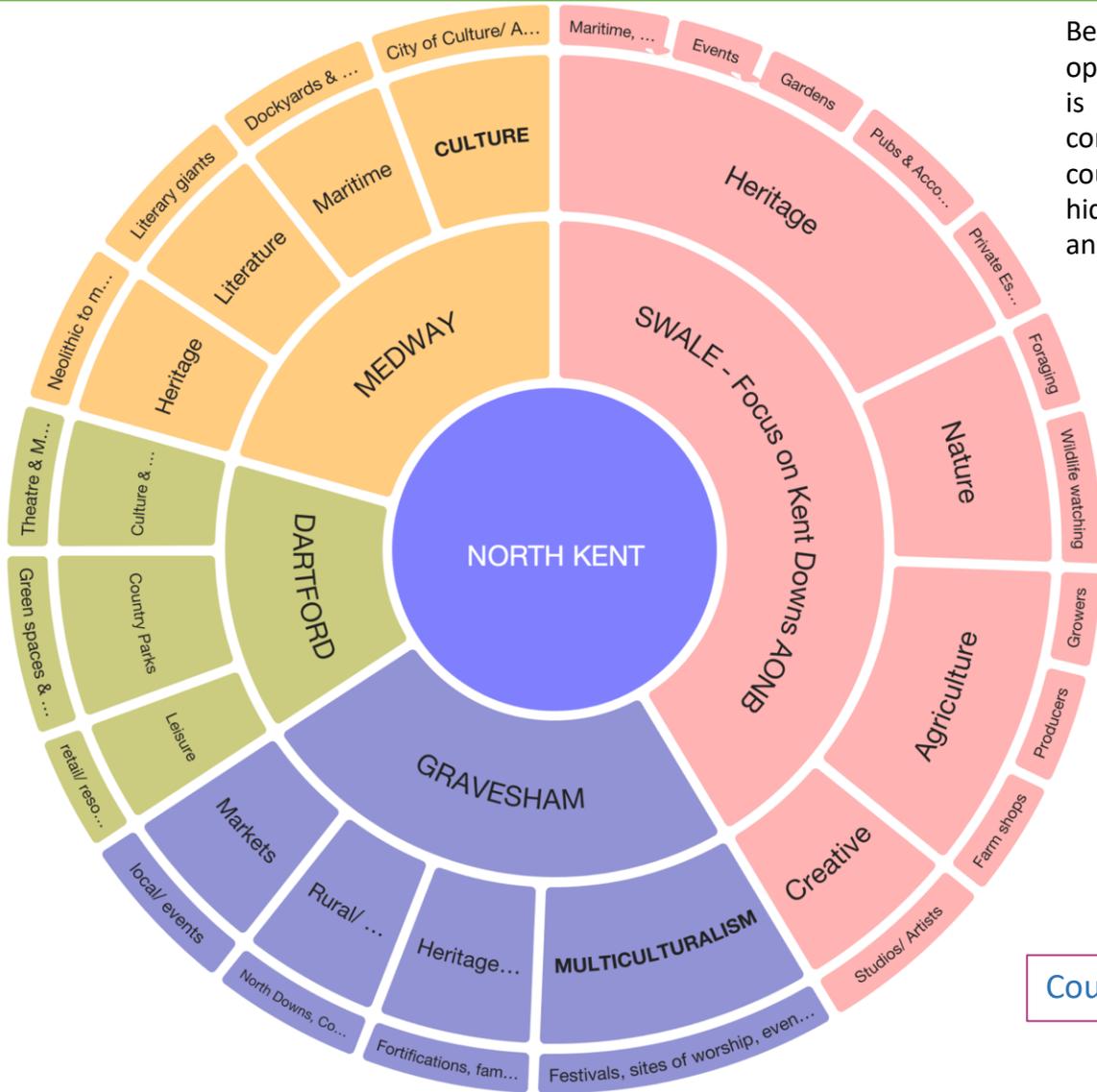
Make the most of our estate; have fun, enjoy private walks & stunning scenery.

Explore at Your Leisure

Added value offer – Accommodation providers can extend the appeal of their accommodation by providing guided walks material to guest or (in the case of Eaton Manor) they can offer to take guests on a guided walk of the estate so they can familiarise themselves with the local landscape.



Strengths & opportunities for North Kent and Swale Borough



Because **North Kent** is ‘known, yet not known’, developing experience-led product creates an opportunity to, challenge perceptions and reach new audiences. The consumers understanding of Swale is focused around its coastal and heritage town offer, product that also benefits from rail and road connectivity. The Kent Downs section sandwiched between the M20 and M2 is often overlooked by the county visitor, as it doesn’t hold a core tick off list destination. However it could be positioned as a hidden gem destination just 10 minutes from the Motorway , by linking experiences to the private estate and agricultural offer.





Building on the current product for SWALE Kent Downs

Hidden gem heritage – The Kent Downs ROW network links directly to a number of heritage attractions; visitors could be encouraged to extend their stay in the local area to link a walk, a pub lunch and a visit to house / garden attraction via guided or self guided product.

Private estates – There are a number of private estates that occupy a considerable percentage of the Kent Downs landscape – estates such as Ottenden Place which is currently managed by the educational foundation (The Wheeler Foundation) could be encouraged to offer educational walking experiences, linking the history of the estate.

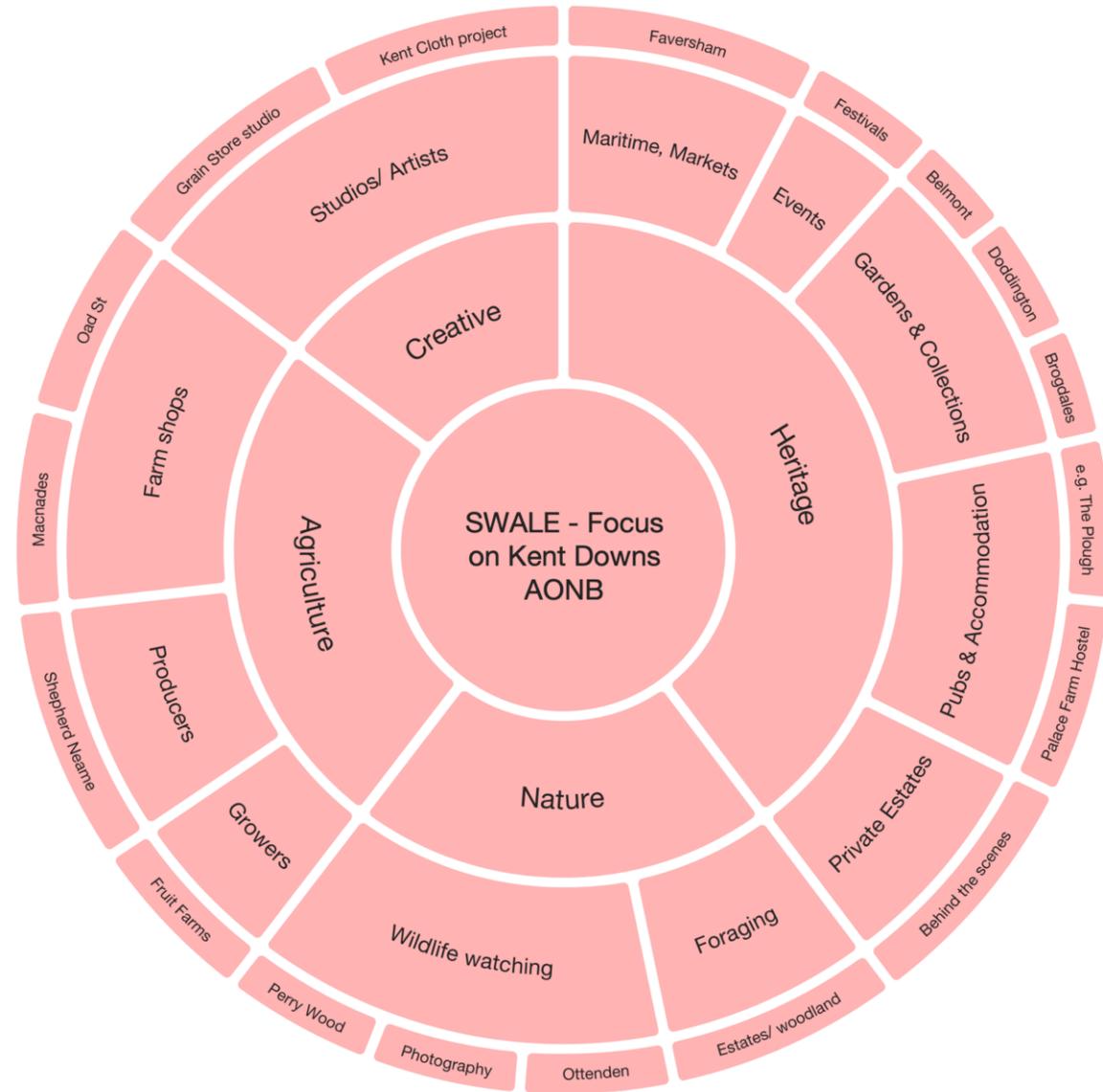
Creative inspiration from the landscape – Creative courses that either take their inspiration from the landscape or are delivered within the countryside environment, are popular niche products. Courses such as woodland watercolour, wood carving, bushcraft, charcoal making and sculpture have all proved popular via platforms like Airbnb experiences. There is an opportunity to link with artists in the local area.

Agriculture : fruit farming offers opportunities to develop hands on courses in pruning and grafting. Cider makers can offer both ‘how to’ courses as well as tours. Stock farmers can offer lambing experiences which align with an off season offer – quite often this can cross promote farm based accommodation as well for Dec – Mar.

Food & drink – Pubs and Farm shops/ cafes can directly benefit from linking with a promoted walking or cycling route. Walkers welcome pubs: Pubs can offer guides to walkers offering circular walks in the local area linking back to the pub for an early dinner booking. Where this is used effectively pubs offer a walkers discount for dinner bookings between 6 and 7pm weekdays – for areas where public transport access is difficult, walkers can then use the pub carpark when not in use mid week. Farm shops can offer a click and collect walkers takeaway lunch or snack bag... great for families – again with the offer of set walking guides in the local area.



Strengthened and enhanced via a sustainable commitment





Swale – Kent Downs experience product opportunities

Swale North Downs Product Strengths: Produce, Village Heritage, Festivals, Markets, Wildlife & Nature, Countryside, Gardens & Collections.

Experience	Lead Opportunity underutilised at present	Product example
Food & drink heritage	<p>Brewery tours, National fruit collections, festivals and pop up food experiences are all strengths for Swale. What separates Swale’s offer from the other districts is the heritage behind these products; Macknades food hall was established in 1847, Shepherd Neame was founded 1698 and Brogdale is home to over 4000 varieties of fruit. All currently offer tours and open days, but it’s experiences that the visitors are after. Brogdale already offer an extensive range of courses throughout the year including non-fruit courses. There is an opportunity to tap into the interest surrounding the these attraction, encouraging visitors to extend their stay to explore the Kent Downs by tracing the food & drink story back to the orchard and hop garden.</p> <p>Hops and orchard walks are used as key themes by the High Weald AONB, however the Swale Downs and surrounding Faversham area are equally well known for this product and can capitalise on the Brogdale/ Shepherd Neame heritage.</p>	National Trust - Brockhampton Estate – Orchard walks
Nature experiences/ Photography	<p>Benefiting from areas like the Kent Downs AONB, the Elmley Nature Reserve and Shellness Beach, Swale can offer a fantastic seasonal wildlife experience. The key is to appeal to the Spring and Autumn Watch audience by offering them a guided experience to take them off the sofa and into nature. Combining this with rural based accommodation.</p> <p>There is also the opportunity to guide visitors to access areas to experience accessible nature watching/ photographic opportunities.</p>	Companies like www.spaysidewildlife.co.uk offer and extensive range of wildlife experiences from week long holidays to day trips.
Extending the attraction season	<p>There are several gardens that fall into the Swale Kent Downs area – e.g. Belmont House & Doddington Place Gardens, however their opening times are generally restricted to core season. There is an opportunity to encourage the gardens to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Extend their season at least to the Autumn half term/ Early November for general garden visits ✓ Foraging courses for the autumn season on Kent Downs/ Estate Land ✓ Country/ Christmas courses – walking and collecting as part of the creative experience – e.g. Wild Christmas wreath making ✓ Linking heritage – combining the desire to engage a short walk in the countryside with an additional interest such as a heritage visit. Due to the number of private estates located in this area of the Downs, heritage walking itineraries combining a garden visit could be developed. <p>There is also a great opportunity to tap into the gardening revival by running head gardener experience days during the spring and autumn period, rose pruning in February and garden design courses in the winter.</p>	<p>www.greatdixter.co.uk gardening courses</p> <p>Heritage Link walking examples www.footrails.co.uk linking heritage and points of interest via specialised walking itineraries.</p>
Getting creative	Tapping into the niche interest for the domestic market to undertake a creative course as part of their destination visit – these activities can take place in outdoor locations or at designated sites such as heritage attractions, farms or local art studios such as @grainstorestudio and @fableandbase both are locally based with the Swale/ Kent Downs area	www.harewoodhouse.org offer a Christmas creative experience programme.



Swale – Kent Downs experience – Case study examples

The following case studies all offer active examples of how experiences can engage the customer with the countryside by combining other interests. All of these examples have development potential for the Swale Kent Downs area.



ECKINGTON MANOR

GIFT VOUCHERS | BOOK STAY

Foraging courses



Eckington Manor is Back!

- ✓ We are open for Bed & Breakfast.
- ✓ Cookery School courses have resumed.

Example: **Extension of Accommodation and wedding venue offer**
 Grade II listed manor B&B now offers foraging masterclasses and creative writing courses inspired by the estate, offered to staying and day visitor guests.
 Location: **Worcestershire**
www.elkingtonmanor.co.uk

FARM EXPERIENCES

A true Wensleydale experience - life as a farmer on the Swinithwaite estate, home of the Thornton-Berry family since 1925.

Farming & Landscape experience



Example: **Farm diversification – behind the scenes tours**
 Offering hands on experience feeding and caring for the animals, walking the farm / moving stock/ enjoying the National park landscape. Learning about the importance of farming to the local economy – sampling ‘field to fork’ produce via the provision of breakfast and lunch.
 Location: **Yorkshire – Part of the English National Parks experience**
www.wensleydale-experience.com

Foot Trails™
 Custom made & crafted English Walking

Houses & Gardens inspired Foot Trails

English houses and gardens are a delight to explore on foot and so we have included some magnificent examples as we have created our Foot Trails. (We have created over 1000 miles across South West England).

Walks linking Heritage

enabling you to dive into the Elizabethan or Jacobean as you explore and with gardens created by some of the greatest names in English garden design such as Capability Brown.

Example: **heritage trails combining visits to gardens with the ROW network.** Foottrails are an established walking tour operator who package hidden gem heritage with local walking trails and rural based accommodation. Focusing on the experience not the miles travelled providing bespoke walking guide and insider knowledge for customers.
 Location: **SW England**
www.foottrails.co.uk

Country Crafts



Exploring country crafts in the Shropshire Hills

Acton Scott Historic Working Farm encapsulates and reflects the best of working traditions in the area – little wonder then that this is such a great place to come to get the lowdown on old country crafts and to learn how to apply them in the 21st century.

Country skills courses

Example: **Creative courses offered in a farming/ landscape location**
 Full range of creative country craft courses from jam making and basket weaving to blacksmithing & Bee keeping
 Location: **Shropshire**
www.visitshropshirehills.co.uk
www.westhorpe.org.uk

Appendix 1. Strength, Opportunity and Gap analysis– Focusing on NDW and Kent Downs AONB area only

Please note This is not a definitive list of the county's tourism product, this listing relates to the AONB area only.

Strength (S) – The product is already established but could be more experiential/ season lengthened

Opportunity (O) – There is an opportunity to develop this product to raise the profile of the area through experience

Gap for development (G) – There is a consumer interest and potential for the destination to showcase this product

Seasonality Key for product delivery (Actual and Potential)

High	Potential for high product delivery in this quarter – This product may not be currently delivering in these months
Med	Potential for Medium level product delivery in this quarter due to - weather, product, availability of local support
Low	Low product delivery in this quarter due to – Reliance on weather, volunteer base, product availability

Product Grid	AONB INTERREG PROJECT PARTNERS										Seasonality			
	Kent Downs AONB	Dover NDW/AONB	Canterbury NDW/AONB	Ashford NDW/AONB	Gravesham NDW/AONB	Swale NDW/AONB	Folkestone & Hythe	Medway	Sevenoaks	Maidstone	Jan - Mar	Apr -June	July - Sept	Oct -Dec
	Walking & Cycling	S	O/G	O/G	S/O	O	O	O/G	O	O	O			
Wildlife	S	S/O	S/O	O	O	S	S/O	O	O	O				
Food & Drink	S/O	O	S/O	S/O	O/G	S	S/O	O	O/S	O/S				
Hidden Heritage/ Behind the scenes	S/O	O	S/O	S	S/O	O	S/O	S/O	S	S				
Foraging	S/O	O	O	O	O	O	O		O	O				
Agriculture	S/O	S/O	S/O	S	O	O/S	S/O		O/S	O/S				
Pilgrimage	S/O	S/O	S/O	O	O			O	O	S/O				
Wellbeing	S/O	O	O	O	O	S/O	O	O	O	S/O				
Photography	O/G	O/G	O/G	O	O	O	O/G	O	O	O				
Vineyards	O	O	O	S	O		O		O	O				

Product Grid	Kent Downs AONB	Dover NDW/AONB	Canterbury NDW/ AONB	Ashford NDW/AONB	Gravesham NDW/AONB	Swale NDW/AONB	Folkestone &Hythe	Medway	Sevenoaks	Maidstone	Seasonality			
											Jan - Mar	Apr -June	July - Sept	Oct -Dec
Horticulture/ Gardens	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		0	0				
Creative courses	0	0	0	0	0	0	S/O/G	0	0	O/S				
Outdoor pursuits	0	0	0			0	S		0	0				
Fossil Hunting	0	0					S/O							
Archaeology	0	O/G	O/G					0	0					
Military heritage	0	S	0	0	S/O		S/O	S						
Events	0	0	S/O	0	0	0	S/O	S/O	0	0				
Multicultural	0	0	0	0	S/O	0	0	0	0	0				
Lux escapes			0	0		0			0	0				
Maritime		0	0		S	O/S	0	S						
Cooking	0	0	0	S/O	0	0	S/O	0	0	0				
Family/ small group focus	0	0	S/O			S	0		S	0				
Bespoke tours	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0				
Seafood		0	0			0	S/O							
Fishing		0	0			0	0							

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