



ANNUAL REVIEW

2020

A MESSAGE FROM BILL FERRIS OBE, CHAIRMAN VISIT KENT

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to Visit Kent's Annual Review for 2020.

Before you explore further, I wanted to start by sharing a few words looking back anecdotally over the past 12 months, my first as Chair having succeeded Jonathan Neame, who had led Visit Kent since 2014, a period of great change, growth, and success. I would like to thank Jonathan personally, especially for his support in the early stages of the Covid-19 crisis and thank him on behalf of the whole industry which has benefitted hugely from his national networks, business focus and innovation.

In truth, I suspect that there will be very few of us not happy to see the back of 2020 in some way or another. A year that started with such promise for our industry throughout the county; a calendar packed full of major events and significant anniversaries, a flourishing Kent visitor economy, exciting new campaigns to run. How quickly things had changed by spring! Survival soon became our key focus, rather than growth.

Demonstrating why Visit Kent is so well respected, and rightfully a sector leading organisation, our team's response to the unfolding crisis has been nothing less than resilient and powerful. Our shift to ever more digital has been accelerated, the way we communicate, how we work, where we work, and even when we work has had to quickly evolve to meet the ongoing challenges we have been presented. Our role in sector leadership, strategy development, business support, and government lobbying – be that at a national, regional, or local level - has been critical, and we hope to have done as much as possible to support you our partners in your own survival struggles.

This hasn't just happened and has come at a cost to the organisation in a number of different ways. Like many of you, we have had to reduce our scale and say goodbye to valued colleagues, we have had to endure the challenges of home working, the loss of companionship and of personal contact so central to our world. We've had to abandon cherished initiatives, adapting, and developing carefully pitched campaigns in increasingly reduced timeframes. At the heart of everything we do, and everything that our partners do, is people with a strong commitment to the highest standards of delivery.

Looking ahead to this year, with the vaccine roll-out underway and the Government's roadmap to recovery set out over the coming months, the Visit Kent team are continuing full steam ahead with our commitment to support and assist the rebooting and rebuilding of Kent's visitor economy in 2021 and beyond. I am particularly keen that we focus on the diversity of markets available to us as we proceed to recovery, and on positioning Kent as a leading sustainable destination in its widest sense. Great destinations are usually great places to live and work. Creating a thriving visitor industry in the 21st Century will require us to ensure a place-based focus in balance with the environment, the need to recognise the needs of residents, wider industry sectors such as agriculture and very importantly "places", our great villages, towns, and urban areas such as my home of Medway; a city in all but name!

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you, our partners, for your unwavering support and constructive engagement over this past, most difficult, of years. We are extremely fortunate to have a strong and supportive network of allies who recognise that whether it's facing challenges or maximising on opportunities – collaboration really is the key to success. Your ongoing support as an investor in the year ahead will be critical in helping us to leverage external funding, and to deliver an exciting and ambitious programme of activity to rebuild consumer confidence and drive footfall throughout our county. The road to recovery won't be easy, but we will get there far quicker if we do so together.

Finally, my thanks to your board, personally, and on behalf of you all. One of Visit Kent's strengths is its professional and highly experienced board, dedicated to using its talents to support and grow the wider industry, recognising that within the visitor economy, strength and growth come from working together and sharing skills.

On behalf of my fellow Board Directors, and all of the team at Visit Kent, I would like to wish you and your colleagues a safe and successful year ahead.



BILL FERRIS OBE

CHAIRMAN

A MESSAGE FROM DEIRDRE WELLS OBE CHIEF EXECUTIVE VISIT KENT

After months of uncertainty, and the most challenging year that our industry has faced, the Government's announcement of the Roadmap out of Lockdown has finally given our sector the clarity we needed to plan our recovery. Whilst we may not be able to open quite as early as we would have wanted, nor got everything on our budget wish list, the way is clear for us to welcome back our visitors and to capitalise on the pent-up demand for Kent's amazing tourism offer.

Over the coming months, our focus will be to support you in rebuilding consumer confidence and driving footfall. As one of the county's biggest employers and the life and soul of our high streets, we know how vital it is for both communities and tourists alike to get Kent's visitor economy back up and running as soon as possible. We are delighted therefore to be working with partners across the county and the wider South East region on a series of exciting projects to support this recovery.

Our highly successful 'Big Weekend' will be back – bigger than ever – giving families across the county and the South East the opportunity to rediscover our fantastic attractions. As part of Visit England's 'Escape the Everyday' strategy, we will deliver a national campaign focussed on the amazing food, drink, and landscape of our stunning Garden of England. And our ongoing partnership with the Interreg EXPERIENCE programme means that we can support over 125 Kent businesses in developing new and exciting experiences to tempt our visitors when they are ready to return.

We are thrilled that Kent will be host to one of the UK's first major events to return following the pandemic. The 149th Open golf championship gives us a real opportunity to showcase the county to spectators both at the event and watching around the world. We look forward to working with partners across the county to deliver a strong message that Kent is back! Open for Business, Open for Tourism and Open for Investment.

Our role as a major cultural destination will also once again be in the spotlight. As lead partner for England's Creative Coast, we are delighted to be working with colleagues at the Turner Contemporary and across the South East on a series of cultural commissions which will be unveiled in April, providing an amazing opportunity to build on the phenomenal legacy of our hosting of the Turner Prize 2019. The Estuary Festival and Folkestone Triennial will see us welcome audiences from far and wide, firmly establishing Kent as one of the country's leading cultural destinations. And we look forward to building on this impressive cultural offer through our support for Medway's bid to be City of Culture 2025.

Throughout all of this exciting activity, we will continue to support our businesses, helping them to access support, to develop new products and take them to market. The pandemic has highlighted the hugely important role which Destination Management Organisations play in not only marketing their destinations but ensuring sustainable recovery and growth through high quality business support, market intelligence, product development and partnership.

This has been an extraordinarily challenging year for our sector. But the resilience, innovation and determination of our partners has been truly inspirational. My thanks to each and every one of you for all you have done to sustain our vital industry. My thanks too to my wonderful team who have worked tirelessly on your behalf, and to our Board of Directors whose wise counsel was never more essential than during this most challenging of years.

The pandemic has reminded us all of what's important – friends, family, community. Our industry is the heart and soul of our communities and we have been sorely missed. We look forward to working with you as we begin the slow road to recovery. No industry has been more affected by this terrible pandemic, but thanks to the incredible partnerships across the county, together we can build a vibrant, sustainable, and resilient industry for the future.



DEIRDRE WELLS OBE
CHIEF EXECUTIVE



BUILDING VALUE THROUGH OUR NETWORKS

Visit Kent brings together businesses to create collaborative opportunities for our partners as well as provide a strong sector voice. We support businesses to develop new products, promote and distribute them under a strong destination brand.

This level of collaboration will be critical in delivering a strong recovery for the sector. Everything we do is lead by insights and intelligence to ensure we are tapping into emerging industry trends and delivering activity that will have a positive impact on your business.

VISIT KENT

"I wanted to say how much I have appreciated the emails with the latest updates from government from VK. I have found them timely, accurate and much easier to read as you are picking out the most important details for the visitor sector."

Visit Kent investor partner

"Our thanks to everyone at Visit Kent for the online support, webinars and lobbying on our behalf. It hasn't gone unnoticed - I'm hugely grateful."

Visit Kent investor partner

"We've found the guidance and reports throughout 2020 really helpful. Many institutions will struggle to come out of this uncompromising period and all the support you're able to provide now will count double in the future."

Visit Kent investor partner

"Best Zoom Meeting of the Year!"

Visit Kent workshop attendee



LOBBYING

With a seat at the table on many national and international industry forums, our lobbying efforts have never been more critical.

Our CEO Deirdre Wells OBE has represented the Kent tourism and hospitality industry at high-level, industry-leading groups such as the Government's Tourism Industry Emergency Response Group (TIER) and DCMS Industry Recovery Groups.

Deirdre's media appearances across TV, radio and print provided a valuable platform for raising awareness of the impact of the ongoing pandemic on, and the support needed for our industry.

16 speaking opportunities at high profile events

39 media appearances

18 COVID19-related lobbying meetings

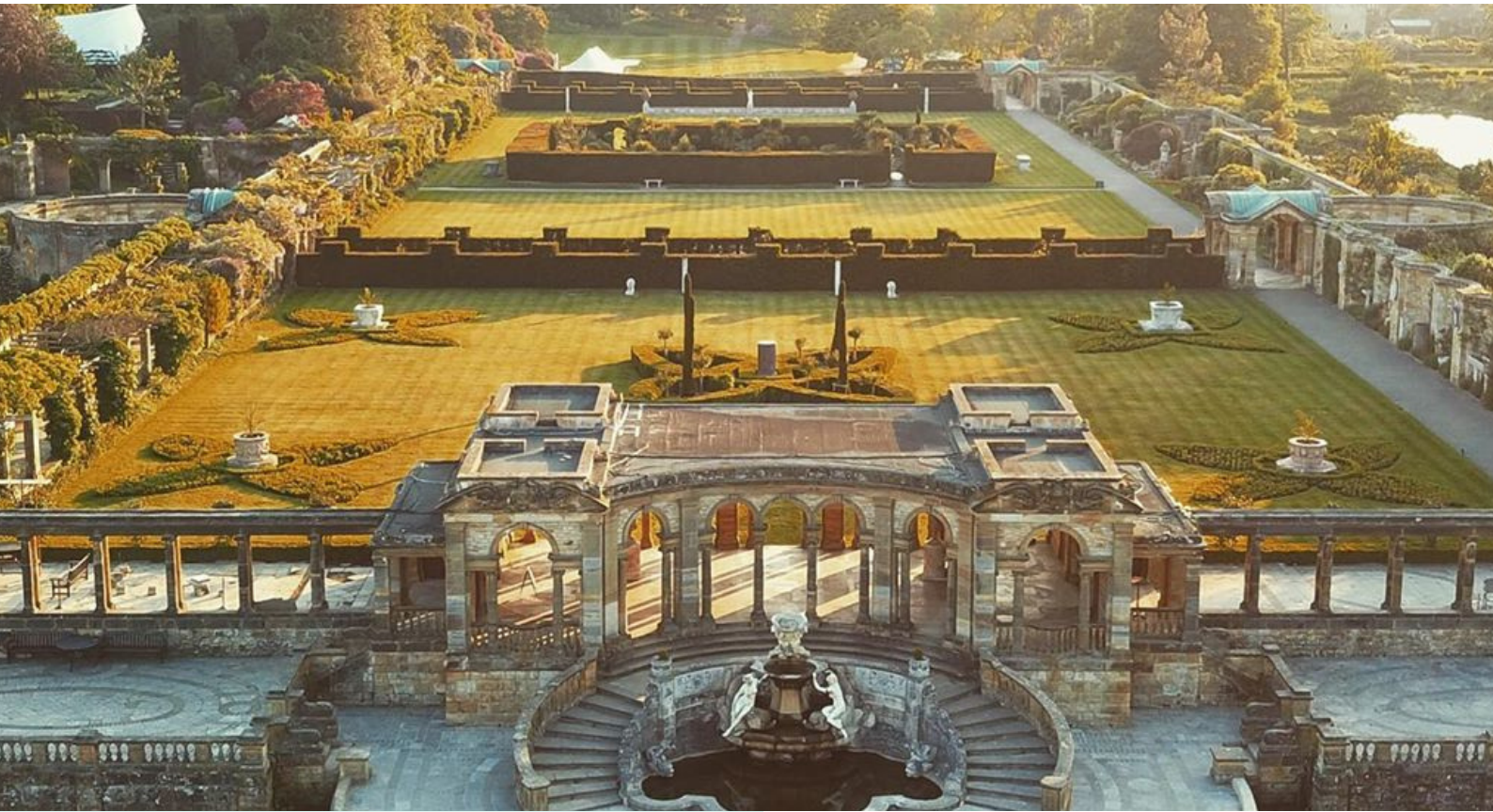
12 Brexit-related lobbying meetings

8 Tourism Society meetings

8 Tourism Alliance meetings

24 TIER Meetings

7 VisitBritain DMO Forums



BUSINESS SUPPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS

Our B2B communications strategy has dramatically evolved since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, ensuring that critical information on funding and guidance for the sector has been disseminated quickly and clearly.

We added a whole new section dedicated to the Covid-19 support and recovery on the Visit Kent Business website. And the team have fielded hundreds of questions from the businesses throughout the year, gaining clarity and raising concerns with government where necessary.

B2B website:

- Over 30,000 page views of our Covid-19 guidance pages
- 1m 44s average dwell time

Visit Kent Business Twitter:

- 15k impressions average a month

Dedicated Newsletters:

- 60 newsletters
- 1660 contacts

198 Members of the Visit Kent Tourism and Hospitality LinkedIn Group



BUSINESS TRAINING & EVENTS

Like so many of us last year, we quickly adapted to virtual platforms to ensure that our industry meetings and events could continue to provide critical support at a time when businesses needed it the most. Through regular industry updates, round tables, partnership meetings, business resilience training and workshops, we've managed to deliver more events than we would in a usual year. Though we can't wait until we can meet you all face to face again!

1 face to face networking event held before lockdown, with 60 attendees

4 virtual industry update webinars with a total of 317 attendees

6 Business Resilience virtual training sessions with a total of 127 attendees

4 virtual Leaders' Meetings with private sector industry leaders

9 Recovery Working Groups covering food and drink, indoor attractions, accommodation and events

261 attendees across 8 EXPERIENCE Development Workshops



MICE

Visit Kent represents the county as a destination for MICE travel (meetings, incentive trips, conferences and events). With business events planners increasingly looking for destinations outside of the main city hubs and unique experiences for their clients, Kent is perfectly placed for this market.

In 2020 we attended the virtual events MeetGB in June and The Meetings Show in October helping to build awareness of our unique venues and experiences as well as developing relationships with key stakeholders including DMCs and business events planners.

MeetGB (17 & 24 June 2020):
388 attendees across two days
with 37 appointments

**The Meetings Show (19-21
October 2020):**
31 appointments



@THEAESTHETICWAYFARER

TRAVEL TRADE

Throughout 2020, our team has continued to maintain contact and provide support for leisure operators and trade partners.

Our ongoing delivery of the Interreg Experience project, in partnership with the Kent Downs AONB, has allowed detailed product testing to take place, ensuring contact and Kent messaging was maintained with major operators and ground handlers throughout the year.

Looking ahead, the team are working on delivering a proactive rebuilding campaign, working with domestic and international buyers and distributors.

Over 40 responses received in **Kent travel trade survey** including cruise ground handlers, coach operators and international DMCs

Visit Kent attended **3 face-to-face trade events**, and attended **2 virtual events, including the first ever virtual World Travel Market**

100+ French travel agents presented with Kent product at VisitBritain trade webinar

15+ new contacts from international student travel sector

100+ hours on virtual calls with operators throughout 2020



RESEARCH

Throughout a difficult year for the industry, access to timely insights and research has been a core ask from our businesses and a key requirement to support our lobbying efforts. Regular surveys and studies have captured the performance and challenges that our visitor economy has faced as well as opportunities which will shape our recovery.

6 Business Barometer Reports

2 Covid-19 & Brexit impact surveys with responses from **130 businesses**

1 Accommodation Study and 13 district dashboards

5 Interreg EXPERIENCE reports produced looking at business needs, residents' perceptions, post-pandemic requirements of the travel trade and MICE providers, and product opportunities and gaps analysis, with 8 district dashboards



VISITOR ECONOMIC IMPACT STUDY

2020 also marked the release of our latest Cambridge Model Economic Impact study, based on 2019 figures, which will give us the much needed benchmark to assess the impact of the pandemic in 2021.

The Cambridge Economic Impact Model is an industry respected tool for measuring the economic impact of tourism in a given area. Knowing the volume and value of tourism is an essential part of developing policies for managing tourism.

The county's visitor economy had **topped £4.1 billion** for the first time ever, welcoming a **record 66.5 million visitors** in 2019

£278 million was spent on average in the local economy each month in 2019, as a direct result of the county's tourism and hospitality industry

The number of tourism jobs across Kent **increased by 6% between 2017 and 2019**, to 81,458, accounting for **11% of total employment in Kent** last year.



BUILDING VALUE THROUGH MARKETING

Delivering the destination message across our digital channels, press and campaign activity during the unique conditions of 2020 was more challenging than ever.

We have had to be more creative, more considerate of tone, more responsive, more supportive and more resilient than ever before.

Engaging and inspiring our audience, encouraging them to stay safe whilst maintaining their connection to our businesses.



#RESPECT PROTECT ENJOY

We launched our #RespectProtectEnjoy messaging in May, which focussed on inspiring and educating local consumers to start enjoying our natural landscapes again, in a safe and responsible way. The success of this messaging was further built upon as part of both our participation in VisitEngland's Enjoy Summer Safely campaign, and our own Secret Garden of England activity later in the year.

The #RespectProtectEnjoy landing page received **1500+ page views**

The RPE landing page had an exceptional **dwell time of 2:39**



SECRET GARDEN OF ENGLAND CAMPAIGN

Building consumer confidence through carefully constructed campaign activity, with a particular emphasis on carefully curated content and paid activity that was sensitive to the current climate and worked effectively to restore consumer confidence.

The Secret Garden Campaign landing page received **34.5K page views**, with avg time on the page 1m29s

The supporting features received **10,686 page views**

2.2m impressions in paid activity reaching **1.45m unique users**

329,472 completed views of the Secret Garden Video

1,516 people that saw our ads also **visited a partner site**

This messaging was further promoted as part of our participation in VisitEngland's Enjoy Summer Safely campaign, which garnered **1.6 million impressions** across Facebook and Snapchat **and 2 million Facebook video views**



PAUL O'GRADY'S GREAT BRITISH ESCAPE

We were delighted by the success of Paul O'Grady's Great British Escape TV series which aired weekly over 6 weeks, starting mid-November. We capitalised on the exposure by creating an accompanying feature detailing Paul's travels, linking to the businesses involved and suggesting other partner businesses the viewer might enjoy. We then promoted this further with weekly Instagram stories recapping the episodes.

Our website saw a **350% increase in traffic while the show aired**

The landing page had an exceptionally high dwell time of **3 minutes 21 seconds**

Our Paul O'Grady content generated **42,889 impressions** across our social media channels

Instagram stories alone generated 17,860 of those impressions



@ETHANBASSO

COMPETITIONS

Our Canterbury Competition generated the second highest number of entries to date at Visit Kent with more than 9,000 in just three weeks. The campaign was an excellent way to drive interest as we targeted new audiences.

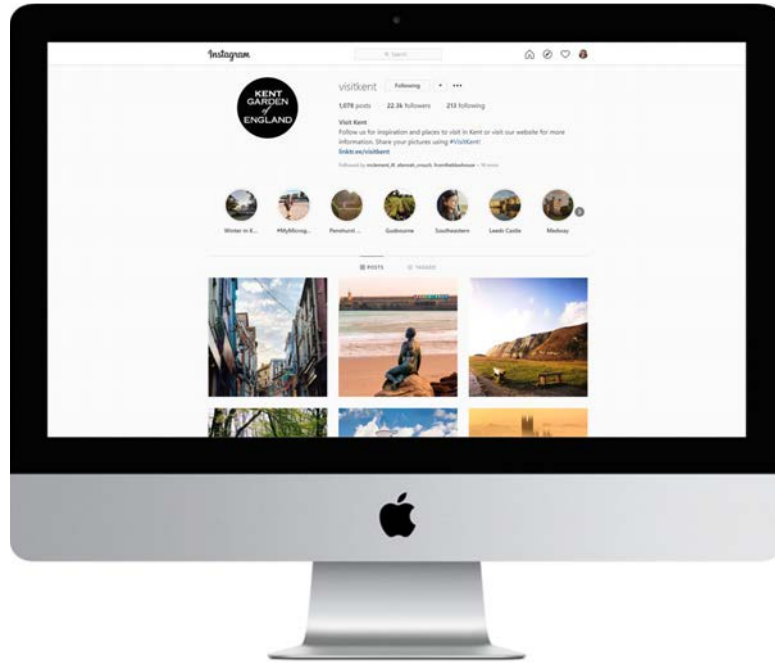
Under very different circumstances, our Christmas Competition created an engaging, positive news story to promote Kent and our partners whilst businesses remained closed in lockdown. It produced our highest ever newsletter opt-in rate for Visit Kent and the participating partners, securing engaged followers ready to receive news of reopenings in 2021.

Canterbury Competition:

14.4K page views
182.3K impressions
9.1K entries
48% opt in rate

Christmas Competition:

6.95K competition entries
129.5K impressions
68% e-news opt in rate



WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, consumer messaging across the Visit Kent digital channels swiftly changed in order to ensure content was in line with government guidelines, while still promoting Kent as a desirable destination for future and local visits.

Local food and drink, takeaways, outdoor exercise locations, inspirational imagery and virtual experiences all became key themes within the blog content. While overall website visits were understandably lower than previous years due to fewer visits to Kent being planned, the blog's share of page views rose from 15% to 21%.

Strong growth in the number of engagements vs 2019 across all three social media channels indicates just how important it was to maintain messaging across these accounts, even during the national lockdowns. While consumers may have been unable to visit Kent in person, our inspirational posts and continued engagement with them allowed us to keep the destination front of mind.

64 inspirational features

Facebook:

Total of 190 posts **818,837 impressions, 42,335 engagements**

Twitter:

Total of 330 posts **1,225,978 impressions, 35,683 engagements**

Instagram:

Total of 274 Posts **1,302,609 Impressions, 85,282 engagements**



PRESS

Proactive PR activity remains a key strength at Visit Kent. Nurturing both new and existing media relations in 2020 was of particular importance.

This year saw us participate in more broadcast interviews than ever before, using these opportunities to strengthen our lobbying messages to government, whilst ensuring that the needs of our industry were heard by a wide range of audiences.

Whilst the restrictions in place in 2020 limited the number of journalists we were able to host in Kent throughout the year, significant emphasis was placed on responding quickly to incoming press enquiries, as well as actively pitching partners for a wide range of coverage opportunities, in order to ensure that the Garden of England remained front of mind ahead of the destination's recovery.

In 2020 press coverage generated by Visit Kent **reached 35.7 million people** and was **worth over £2 million**

Coverage generated had a monthly **average advertising value of over £172,000**

Visit Kent participated in **57 broadcast interviews**

17 press releases were issued to media contacts throughout 2020
Visit Kent assisted over **70 media contacts press recommendations and assistance**



INTERREG EXPERIENCE

Visit Kent is part of Interreg EXPERIENCE, a €23.3 million European funded project which aims to extend the tourism season through the development of off-season bookable experiences with an emphasis on overnight stays and sustainability.

This year Visit Kent launched the Experience Development Programme, which will support businesses to turn their new experiential product ideas from concept to reality and successfully take them to market. The package of support will help organisations to adapt and diversify their product, create new cross-sector partnerships, reach new audiences, develop an all year-round offer and build resilience against future challenges.

VISIT KENT

384 businesses proactively contacted

149 applications received

125 businesses recruited

75 1:1 business mentoring sessions

261 attendees across **8 Experience Development Workshops**

70 respondents to the business needs survey

1258 respondents to the residents survey

60 + respondents to the Trade and MICE surveys

5 reports with insights into product development opportunities and experiential tourism

Interreg 
 France (Channel) England
EXPERIENCE
 European Regional Development Fund


 EUROPEAN UNION
 European Regional
 Development Fund



@ANNIEKENTLIFE

PROJECTS CONNECTIONS

Connections is a Discover England Funded tourism project that continues to develop new bookable product, presented in the form of suggested itineraries, based on key themes that have appeal to visitors from North America and Canada.

These itineraries connect historical and cultural links by placing tour guides at the heart of the visitor experience.

A focussed domestic marketing campaign has been created to capture the audience's interest in key themes, destinations and products under the 'Reconnect' creative.

£158,000 amplification funding awarded to DEF Connections from VisitEngland

Activity delivered **from September 2020 - March 2021**



PARTNERSHIPS

PROMOTING KENT GROUP

Our involvement in the Promoting Kent Group working alongside organisations including Locate in Kent and Produced in Kent, are helping to shape the county as the place to live, work, study and invest. In 2020, we delivered a destination-led Study in Kent campaign in partnership with University of Kent and Canterbury Christ Church University as well as partnering with Produced in Kent on their successful Support Your Local campaign which encouraged residents to stand behind local producers and restaurants as well as make a pledge to be a #caringcustomer.

Study in Kent Campaign:

1.1 million impressions
200,000 reach
6 new pieces of content

Visit Kent Support Your Local paid promotion results:

1,600 link clicks
101,000 impressions
48,000 reach



FUNDING

Throughout the year Visit Kent have been proactively identifying and applying for funding which allows us to deliver more support to businesses and will help fund activity that will deliver a strong recovery in 2021. The success we have achieved in securing this funding, both individually and in collaboration with other UK destination, will mean that we can provide more benefit to investor partners in 2021 through inclusion in large-scale confidence building and destination promotion campaigns.

SELEP Sector Support Fund (2 projects)
£200,000 & £30,000

VisitBritain/ VisitEngland 'Escape the Everyday' campaign funding secured for 2021 **£80,000**

Cabinet Office 'Enjoy Summer Safely' Marketing Fund **£100,000**

Part of the Discover England Fund Domestic Adaptation Funds, 'Connections' which for the project as a whole totalled **£158,000**



LOOKING FORWARD

In an unprecedented year, Visit Kent has been focused on supporting businesses to navigate the challenges our industry has faced.

Now, with the vaccine roll-out underway and the Government's roadmap unveiled, we have our Respond, Reboot, Rebuild recovery strategy and would like to invite you to join us in an exciting and ambitious programme of activity to rebuild consumer confidence in 2021 - at no investor fee increase and no additional campaign costs.

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

Speak to your account manager about how to make the most of your partnership with Visit Kent.

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EXPERIENCE

European Regional Development Fund