“Which way for Sandwich?”
... a modern look at a historic town ...

This report follows a period of study and consultation, March - August 2016

Project team

KCC & STC..............................................................
Rummey Design ....................................................
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Client
Masterplanning, Urban and Landscape Design
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... Charter of the Forest - one of the longest statutes in force in England ...
1 Executive summary
Section 1: Executive summary

1.1 Executive summary

Introduction

Sandwich is a special place, and much has been written about its wealth of listed buildings, its history and changing fortunes, and its relative ‘completeness’ as a medieval walled town.

Recently there has been a growing awareness that the town has not been performing as well as it might given its heritage and tourism attractions, its proximity to the former Pfizer site at Discovery Park, the HS1 rail service with rapid journey times to London, and changes to the regional economy. Perceived traffic speed and lack of pedestrian safety and comfort have become important issues giving rise to proposals, reports and information from local residents.

Brief

Rummey Design was commissioned in March 2016 with the brief;

- to use background information to assess the problems faced by the town centre and the wider area
- to engage with the community and create conceptual proposals ... to protect and showcase the historic environment ... to create pedestrian friendly links, encourage more business activity, potential as a tourist attraction and local market/shopping centre
- reduce the impact of traffic passing through Sandwich, improving traffic flow and parking capacity
- to support KCC in consultation and use feedback to create an agreed set of proposals

As part of this appointment, Phil Jones Associates, Transport Planning consultants, were appointed as sub-consultants to give specialist advice.

Consultation

After a period of town visits, assimilation of research already undertaken, and observation, initial proposals were made prior to the workshops and month long exhibition. This was accompanied by an online forum (Stickyworld) and an exhibition questionnaire. Final results from the consultation were received in early August. A number of meetings were undertaken with key stakeholders including the Town Council and the final presentation of findings, strategies and proposals was made in mid-August.

Analysis & strategies

Because transport issues cannot be separated from the other areas of concern in the brief the study has taken a broad urban design based analysis of the town; each issue (heritage, tourism, pedestrian comfort, transport, economy, development and change) is related to the others. The study has not been limited to the medieval town but has considered the links to south and north Sandwich, the river and to an extent the hinterland which includes many opportunities.

Broad strategies have been put forward as a vehicle for specific projects including some Areas of Opportunity. These could form the basis of Heritage Lottery bids, or bids to other organisations, such as the Coastal Communities Fund, the Arts Council, and Kent County Council. In the course of this work it was discovered that other funding bids are in preparation by Dover District Council and the Town Council, and these are incorporated. Indeed, the strategies and projects proposed endorse the approach taken so far, and aim to encourage it. The Strategic Park in particular has widespread strategic importance to the town with its linkages, improved environment, historic/archaeological and tourism potential. The Town Council’s refurbishment of the museum in the Guildhall underlines the key nature of that building and of the Magna Carta which it may soon display. It also highlights the heritage based tourism which could be encouraged.

The strategy and outline proposals will no doubt change over time but if followed would give the many smaller projects which will follow an important vision and objective. Consultation has shown that these are widely supported in the town.
Section 1: Executive summary

Projects
A number of specific projects are proposed; work to the Guildhall and the Square; experimental traffic works to No Name Street and Potter Street; work to Market Street and the Barbican; opportunity sites at the Quayside, Guildhall, and other places; a range of initiatives for the longer term but all within a five year programme, initially.

Next steps
Little can be achieved without funding, and this cannot be guaranteed. An initial bid will be made in September to improve the Guildhall and surroundings. A larger Townscape Heritage Bid could be submitted in September 2017, requiring a Conservation Area Appraisal to be completed as part of the documentation. The initiative requires a multi-agency Partnership approach, and it is vital that the process is given strong leadership with the successful consultation momentum maintained.

An initial view of potential funding and the application of funds is shown, but allowance should be made for resource to progress and process this broad initiative in the short term.

Building Appraisal Bid Framework

Conservation Area Appraisal
... Thomas Paine and the Bill of Rights, the Magna Carta and the Charter of the Forest, medieval history and European influences, maritime trade and water supply have all shaped Sandwich ...
2 Introduction and brief
Introduction

From the air the form of the town reveals itself clearly; it is possible to read the history of place through its original defensive location, its place on the trade route of the river, the coming of the railway, and more recent settlements of south Sandwich and the former Pfizer site (now Discovery Park).

The bypass also has a decisive effect and may influence the development of the town as well as servicing Discovery Park. To the eastern side of Sandwich, to north and south are a number of sites of nature conservation interest which are discussed later.

1. Sandwich historic core and town centre
2. South Sandwich
3. North Sandwich
4. Discovery Park
5. A256 bypass
6. Sandwich Bay and flats
Section 2: Introduction and brief

2.1 Introduction

This expanded view of some key spaces within Sandwich typifies the problem. This is an unusual town in that there are very few examples left of walled medieval settlements in England. It is characterised by narrow street which give a strong sense of enclosure and heritage. You can read the history of the place by looking at the buildings but times change, land uses come and go, social pressures dictate new functions and transport has changed radically since the 14th century. The photograph shows key streets dominated by the traffic surface, of black top and road markings. New uses such as Costa Coffee have appeared but old uses need to be respected and where possible encouraged.

2.2 The purpose and method of the Study

2.3 First thoughts
Section 2: Introduction and brief

2.1 Introduction

"To design a range of realistic, yet ambitious proposals to improve Sandwich Town ... these will focus on traffic movement, pedestrian experience, increasing economic opportunity, improving parking capacity and enhancing the unique historic environment ... develop a holistic set of proposals and gain agreement with the residents of Sandwich."

2.2 The purpose and method of the Study

The purpose and method of the Study is to design a range of realistic, yet ambitious proposals to improve Sandwich Town ... these will focus on traffic movement, pedestrian experience, increasing economic opportunity, improving parking capacity and enhancing the unique historic environment ... develop a holistic set of proposals and gain agreement with the residents of Sandwich. The final part of the brief related to making a Heritage Lottery Fund bid for a project that remained to be specified.

2.3 First thoughts

Additional components of the brief related to school safety and access. It was decided by the client that this was requiring too much within the time scale and was deleted though it is included within the general aspiration for a better pedestrian experience within the town. The final part of the brief related to making a Heritage Lottery Fund bid for a project that remained to be specified.

... and the Heritage Lottery Fund

There are three core demands for securing HLF grant funding awards for any project:

1. Fundamentally the need to ensure there are outcomes for heritage
2. Outcomes for people and
3. Outcomes for communities.

Every aspect of the application must be focussed towards a comprehensive and collaborative amalgamation of these aspirations.

In developing the project to achieve such goals it is imperative to work closely with the HLF team (case officer and mentor in the first instance) and create a comprehensive consultancy team that brings together the widest range of integrated proposals individually tailored to the project in question. Key elements of this will be set out in the Activity plan, the Interpretation Plan and the Monitoring and Evaluation Plan - all of which will need to be thoroughly researched throughout the development phase and allowed to evolve and improve as the delivery phase is encountered. Ultimately, the success of the project will be determined by the long-term goals set out in a comprehensive and dynamic Management and Maintenance Plan.

Transport, pedestrian movement and the town’s future

The very act of studying Sandwich’s past and its current condition begs the question, ‘what is its future to be?’. Whilst accepting its current status as an attractive market town other futures could be envisaged.

- local shopping centre?
- hotels, pubs, bars and restaurants?
- cultural centre?
- a place to retire to?
- a vibrant place attracting younger people, drawing on Discovery Park and HS1?
- a museum place frozen in time?

All of these are legitimate aspirations and the answer is probably ‘some of these’. This highlights the need to understand the town thoroughly from a variety of perspectives, of which traffic and transport will be one. Much work has been done to study the traffic problem both by the Town Team and by Kent County Council. We stress that we are not transport engineers though we understand the importance of this subject to the town. For this reason we have used some subconsultancy time from Phil Jones Associates transport planning consultants. Referring to the brief two key elements should be clarified:

1. That the HGV town gate strategy is accepted and
2. That responsible and economically viable traffic management is needed within the town to allow the town to express itself and become what it wants; this must be the driving force, not traffic management in itself.

We must defer in our knowledge of the transport system to local people but we would hope to gain that knowledge in order to inform our views about what is possible. Armed with this knowledge and views on what the town might become over time we aimed to develop a vision which could inform a series of small scale initiatives which gradually build up into a substantial change over time. This has the advantage of allowing people to get used to incremental change and more significantly to show that some results can be obtained quickly.

- harness potential as tourist attraction and shopping destination
- protect, restore and showcase the town’s heritage
- improve access for all, and pedestrian comfort
- improve traffic, and parking capacity
- lead consultation with feedback to finalise proposals
Section 2: Introduction and brief

2.1 Introduction

2.2 The purpose and method of the Study

2.3 First thoughts

First thoughts

Rummey Design sees its role as acting as a catalyst, ideas generator and communicator for the project.

Our initial thinking suggested that the Guildhall to Butchery sequence of spaces was of prime importance to the town, but further study expanded this idea.

To produce credible proposals we needed to understand not just the town’s problems, parking, transport conflicts, perceived lack of safety, empty shops etc, but also its potential and opportunities. First thoughts suggested that the river itself is an under-used asset and could provide the thread linking a series of spatial experiences through the town to complement the narrow streets.

Areas of land such as the quay side are obvious areas of opportunity with its new boat yard, car parking, several pubs and restaurants, river views and park, important entrances to the Town (Toll Bridge/Barbican and Fishergate), and the potential for a Magna Carta location.

An aim of the brief was to make funding bid(s) to the HLF or other funding bodies. During the course of the study the consultants discovered that there were already several bids in progress. Therefore, discussions with the HLF were partly aimed at providing a vision or strategy for all of these bids including any new ones.
Section 2: Introduction and brief

2.1 Introduction

An HGV free town centre would allow Sandwich to gradually move towards the sort of place it aspires to be without banning traffic, but civilising it and allowing pedestrians priority.

2.2 The purpose and method of the Study

No Name Street - important visual and pedestrian connection but does this have to be a trafficked street? No Name Street forms part of the sequence of views focused on Market Street.

Market Street - key shopping street leading to the Butchery and the river - but the road predominates.

The Guildhall - parking, important square, landmark building for the Town Centre - large land areas, could they work harder?

Does the land to the north east of the river give opportunities for car parking within 5 minutes walking time?
Nationally important listed buildings, the bridge, 3 pubs/restaurants, the picturesque High Street, marooned in sea of tarmac, allowing through traffic - surely an opportunity?

The river is part of the reason for Sandwich’s existence but nowadays it is an under-used asset. The flood defences start to rectify this but further north different treatments which could be green, informal, based on reed beds could be a delight and would disperse visitor pressure.

Quay side - a major opportunity; parking (inefficiently laid out), park and riverside walk, quay side buildings, potential Magna Carta, food and beverage, but the area has a ‘left-over’ feeling. This could be a new focus for tourism, relieving pressure on the Centre.
Section 2: Introduction and brief

2.1 Introduction

Our brief requires a holistic view. The form of the town was originally generated by pedestrian movement and small scale horse-drawn vehicles, and its future relates to this pedestrian scale. However, as we will hear later, towns people have poor perceptions of pedestrian safety.

- how can pedestrian movement be encouraged or manipulated to create commercial hot spots within the town to allow local shopping and speciality shopping to flourish?
- how can streets be calmed (without excluding traffic) to allow a presumption in favour of pedestrians without spoiling trade, and in fact encouraging it.
- how can the buildings and spaces be re-presented to encourage tourism interest and spend?
- are there opportunities to improve safety and minimise damage to buildings, particularly at Breezy Corner?
- could a more effective car parking strategy be suggested linking with all the above?
- can the town be made more attractive to younger people since we hear the demographic is predominantly older?

2.2 The purpose and method of the Study

Many of the streets combine to create interesting spaces and squares which are under-used at present. If more people are to use the town appropriately there needs to be a larger pedestrian domain so the design of the public realm will be crucial;

- should some minor linkage roads be closed, except for emergency vehicles?
- can the festivals and events within the town be used to enliven these spaces, enhancing the town’s reputation for street life, culture and events?
- could the buildings and important facades be highlighted by discrete public lighting, quality street scape, texture and art so that the town can be read as a sequence of spaces rather than a network of roads?

2.3 First thoughts

The Barbican - High Street / Ramsgate Road; an important public space overlooked by two pubs/hotels at the entrance to the town. The original buildings fronting this space were demolished in the early 20th century to provide more road space. Are other solutions possible?
3 Strategic Thinking
Section 3: Strategic Thinking

2.1 Movement

2.2 Economy

2.3 Tourism and Leisure

2.4 Environment

2.5 Community

2.6 Sandwich Town

Strategic thinking

Initial visits to the town suggested five subject areas to be explored as the basis for greater detail.

• movement
• economy
• environment
• community
• tourism and leisure

The following section summarises our initial thoughts, including issues and opportunities identified after our first site visit.

We have separated the issues into five categories to be explored and understood in greater detail as the project progresses.

Pedestrian movement

The town, its surroundings, and its exciting assets need to be discovered and connected up so that they have real meaning for the community. Developing and improving the pedestrian experience is key to achieving this goal.

The medieval street-scapes provide a challenge for some user groups, especially for those with limited mobility and young children.

We have also considered how pedestrian movement might be encouraged to allow local shopping and speciality shopping to flourish.

Vehicular movement

Much work has been done to study the traffic problem both by the Town Team, KCC and consultants. Many residents perceive traffic management to be the primary challenge facing Sandwich and affecting the future development of the town. But traffic is just one of the symptoms of a much wider challenge, which was addressed at the consultation stage.
Section 3: Strategic Thinking

2.1 Movement

2.3 Economy

2.3 Tourism and Leisure

2.4 Environment

2.5 Community

2.6 Sandwich Town

Economy

We have noted continuing loss of services and a feeling that the town’s unusually intact heritage is not fully appreciated in a regional or national tourism context. Shopping and banking patterns have changed in recent years and many former shops are now converted to residential uses. This report is not a retail viability study but as part of the overall strategy we have identified a number of opportunity sites which have the potential to unlock future growth and benefit the local economy.

Part of the process of enhancing the economy related to the connection between parking, retail, food and beverage outlets and the heritage and natural attractions of the town. If these connections could be improved there would be an overall benefit.

A fundamental aim of this study is to enable economic growth and appropriate change for the people and businesses of Sandwich. An economic and tourism impact study should be undertaken to test the economic returns from the strategy + proposals suggested here.

Tourism and Leisure

Dover District Council Heritage Strategy’s objectives are:

1. Dover District’s historic environment and its heritage assets play a proactive role in enabling and informing regeneration activities to secure better outcomes from sustainable growth.

2. Dover District realises the tourism and visitor potential and economic benefits of its historic environment and heritage assets.

3. Dover District’s heritage assets are sustained and enhanced so as to best meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to appreciate their significance.

4. Public understanding of, engagement with, access to and enjoyment of Dover District’s historic environment are increased.

Clearly there is scope for an improved tourism and leisure offer in Sandwich, with its wealth of heritage, natural and locational advantages. The town is well served by rail, road and even by boat. Parking is a key issue, not just for residents but for visitors.
Section 3: Strategic Thinking

Environment

Fundamentally a market town, this is one of the UK’s rare examples of a more-or-less intact thirteenth to seventeenth century town but with earlier origins. Whilst much of the town consists of listed buildings it is this very “completeness” which is its true value. The scale and intricacy of the medieval street pattern, the story of water in the town (the River Stour, the sea’s retreat, and numerous small streams including the Dell), the town walls and fortifications, and of course the trade which has been carried on have all left a very legible imprint.

The town has many sites of nature conservation interest nearby and the river, once a trade artery, is now recognised as a biodiversity and leisure attraction. Sandwich is favourably located near Pegwell Bay, a noted ornithological and marine habitat.
Section 3: Strategic Thinking

2.1 Movement
2.2 Economy
2.3 Tourism and Leisure
2.4 Environment
2.5 Community
2.6 Sandwich Town

Community
Sandwich consists of a vibrant community with diverse local groups, sports and leisure facilities, churches, a cinema and many local events, such as the weekend, festivals and farmers markets.
As relative strangers to the town, but after many visits and consultation events, it is clear that the problem that the consultants have been asked to comment on is a multilayered one, with different components being relatively important to different groups of people.

What is clear is that Sandwich is an unusual and special place, but it faces problems that are not unique on a European scale. All aspects of the ‘problem’ are of course interlinked, but we believe that the quality of this ‘place’ would be improved by considering all of these together.

The quality of the ‘place’, the distinctiveness peculiar to Sandwich, is owed to all of these factors, so a holistic approaches to analysis and problem solving is appropriate.