

## Digital Toolkit narrative: The Medway story

Following research, immersion in the place and stakeholder engagement a number of themes emerged which are chapters of the Medway visitor story and represent the forward-looking DNA of the place. The story reflects how the place is distinctive, its character and characteristics and what it should focus on to grow the visitor economy. Importantly, Medway needs to be viewed as the centre of a much wider experience that encompasses its five towns of Chatham, Rochester, Strood, Gillingham, Rainham and wider area but also links to Kent and London, so its story is led by its assets not artificial boundaries.

### themes of the Medway story

Medway's existence and role as a place has always been inextricably linked to water. It developed as a crossing point on the River Medway and grew from that with the significant construction of castles at Rochester and Upnor and Rochester Cathedral (the second oldest in England after Canterbury). The river has made the area of military importance which resulted in the development of Chatham Dockyards which covered 400 acres and was one of the Royal Navy's most important sites until it closed in 1984. Many of the UK's warships were built there including HMS Victory. There is now a visitor attraction which is the world's most complete dockyard of the age of sail. Apart from being an extremely popular place to visit it also has been the setting for TV and film e.g. The Crown and Call the Midwife. The area has other significant military sites; Fort Amherst which was constructed as a defence in Napoleonic times and offers a magnificent view of the river and towns, the Royal Engineers Museum which tells the story of the Corps of Royal Engineers and Upnor Castle which is an Elizabethan artillery fort built to protect warships at Chatham dockyards. For a totally different coastal experience the Hoo peninsula separates the estuaries of the Thames and Medway and has important protected marshlands. It is great for walking, cycling and bird watching. Wherever you are you feel a close association with water and the sea and understand why Medway has always been **making maritime history**.

From Castles to the Cathedral and Chatham Dockyard to our different communities we have lots of amazing stories to tell yet these aren't generally accessible to our visitors or our residents. Importantly, not all our stories are about going back in time, some are current or recent; for example there are still lots of people who remember working in Chatham Dockyards and many take their grandchildren to explain what they did. Medway is a young place with a rich historical context and it can best communicate this by telling its stories which will not only animate the towns and area but also provide an enhanced experience for visitors that will encourage them to move around the different attractions. A visit to the cathedral will come to life even more if you feel you are walking in the footsteps of pilgrims. The relationship with Dickens made real by seeing how his work was influenced by time in Rochester e.g. *'Then, as Mr. Micawber very properly said, the first step to be taken was to come and see the Medway — which we came and saw.'* This storytelling needs to guide interpretation, signage and the public realm to make the place more navigable, to link the assets and in itself add to the visitor experience of Medway. The aim is for Medway to become a place of storytellers and for it to highlight and bring to life its **living stories**.

Medway is the largest conurbation in the south east outside London and of city scale and importance. Within it are the five towns of Chatham, Rochester, Strood, Gillingham and Rainham which have different visitor gems scattered across them, it's important that these can be viewed as a package where each highlights the others making it easier for visitors to know what's on offer and where. Equally, London is an important aspect of the Medway story as many people visiting there may well be interested in what they can experience in Chatham, Rochester and along the Medway, especially as they are only a short train ride away. Kent is one of the best regarded visitor brands and extremely popular so linking its attractions to those in Medway is also critical; surely many people visiting the oldest cathedral in England at Canterbury will be just as keen to see the second oldest in Rochester! Apart from residents there are other audiences to connect with; Medway has five universities and the students are potential visitors to different parts of the area as are their friends and family. What's clear is that when considering Medway you need to be able to understand the connections and make the links thus **creating Medway's mosaic**.

Medway might be only 20 years young but it is a place of significance and that has largely been due to the river that gives it its name. It's important the river becomes a major and usable visitor and resident asset; it's potential is huge. Medway is a city with hidden gems and is set in an area that is interesting, attractive and a tremendous magnet for visitors, just think about the power of the London and Kent brands. We want many more people to discover

## Medway: a waterfront city

