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# Canterbury City Centre Strategy

## 2026-2043



# Executive Summary

**This strategy outlines a transformational vision for Canterbury city centre. It proposes a clear and deliverable place-specific plan focusing on regeneration, investment and growth. The strategy will also align with the new Canterbury District Local Plan, ahead of forthcoming local government reorganisation (LGR). It has been developed in collaboration with community groups, businesses and other stakeholders to ensure it delivers on local priorities.**



The strategy seeks to reveal and reconnect Canterbury's layers of heritage. Image by Alex Hare ©



The strategy will support Canterbury's well valued cultural assets. Image by Alex Hare ©



The strategy will seek to strengthen enterprise and support high street vibrancy. Image by Alex Hare ©

## What is the vision?

**Canterbury will be a world-class visitor destination with a reputation for learning, literature and its unlocked historic treasures that are inviting, exciting and effortless to explore.**

**Canterbury will encourage visitors to stay longer, students to put down long-term roots and businesses to grow.**

**The city will be a hub for creativity, education and enterprise all year round.**

## What's in this strategy document?

This strategy sets out a long-term vision and a series of strategic principles to guide the future of Canterbury's city centre.

It provides a clear framework for how the city should evolve, responding to the opportunities and challenges identified through talking to people and gathering evidence from adopted and draft strategies, policies and plans which have also been shaped by public consultation.

Crucially, this document has been created with the community, local organisations, businesses, cultural partners and other key stakeholders. Their insights, lived experience and ambitions have directly shaped the priorities, themes and strategic direction set out here.

Because the strategy is rooted in this wide-ranging and collaborative engagement, we have confidence that what it articulates truly reflects the issues that matter most to the people who know and use the city every day.

This shared authorship provides a strong and credible foundation for future decision making and delivery.

### To achieve the vision, Canterbury should:

1. Be a city of warm welcomes and memorable first impressions
2. Ease transport pressure on the city's historic centre
3. Unlock Canterbury's spaces and regeneration potential
4. Further reveal and reconnect Canterbury's layers of heritage
5. Find new ways to tell Canterbury's story
6. Promote pilgrimage
7. Connect new parts of the city
8. Champion innovation and the power of learning



Image provided by Visit Canterbury © Alex Hare

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# 01

# Introduction

- Introduction and purpose
- City centre context
- Policy context
- Key challenges to address

**SHEPHERD NEAME**  
BRITAIN'S OLDEST BREW

EST ALES

MALT-  
HOPS  
ONLY.



**BISHOP'S  
FINGER**

*Shepherd Neame Since 1698*



# Foreword

The nature of our high streets and how we shop has changed. The historic growth of out-of-town shopping and, more recently, of online retail means high streets are increasingly places where people seek memorable experiences more than products. They are places for people to meet, work and interact with others.

The loss of familiar brands and services is unnerving for some, but the evolution of our high street also provides an opportunity for local needs to be met in different ways and for new uses to appear in under-used spaces.

Councils can support their communities by using public buildings and public services like libraries, health centres and community spaces in new ways to increase footfall and civic participation.

Changes to the high street can provide opportunities for the community to redefine what types of enterprise they want in their city.

Together, we can consider creative and innovative ways in which we can support local and community-owned businesses which ensure profits stay in the area and provide skills, training and jobs which resolve social as well as economic challenges.

The high street has the power to support happier, healthier and more prosperous communities. At a time of profound change, we bring our public spaces like our streets, gardens and parks, to life and help them play a powerful role in making people feel welcome and at home. They can ensure there are spaces and opportunities for communities to connect without money changing hands.

Private enterprise will always be at the heart of creativity and innovation in the high street but its vitality and viability lay in it engaging, understanding and responding to the needs of its communities and visitors.

We've worked with a lot of different people to create our city and town centre strategies to make sure they are a blueprint for coherent and place-specific visions for each of our three urban centres - Canterbury, Herne Bay and Whitstable - and their unique challenges.

It is our ambition that the clarity of this framework will unlock private investment, provide direction during local government reorganisation and continue to return civic pride to our district.

## Process

This document has been pulled together with the help of community groups, businesses, stakeholders, councillors and council officers.

Place-based assessments for each of the urban centres have been produced to gather evidence and understanding to support the strategies.

The strategy work has been undertaken to align with our new draft Local Plan, transport policies and other corporate strategies.

## Local Government Reorganisation context

In March 2025, Canterbury City Council, along with other district and county councils in Kent signalled their intention to accept the government's instruction to explore local government reorganisation and devolution.

While no decisions have been made, it is expected the council will dissolve in 2028 and join a larger unitary authority comprised of neighbouring districts in east Kent and parts of Kent County Council.

It is also expected that, eventually, the district will form part of a wider Kent Mayoral Strategic Authority.

## Purpose

Our council's corporate plan and key corporate strategies recognise the need to tackle national and international problems at a local level through its adoption of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs).

Our central ambition is to continue to return pride to our district, ensuring a greener, fairer, stronger and better future for all. We believe this wider lens is a good way of coming up with an ambition and achievable vision that can bridge an exciting period of change, kickstarted through LGR.

Support for the UN SDG framework exists at a national, countywide and local government level.

We believe the synergy which comes with aligning our ambitions with the SDGs and a future new unitary council's responsibility for adult social care, public health and youth services, can ensure our town centres are both great places to live, as well being great places to visit.

Whatever changes lie ahead, we believe our success will be judged by residents who will see our proposals as authentic answers to the problems they see in their everyday lives.

These city and town centre strategies are designed to:

- Recognise the key assets and positive attributes that make our high streets vibrant and the qualities that will help drive their future growth.
- Summarise key market trends and how they will change our high streets in the future.
- In the place-based assessments, map out the here and now outlining current and planned investment.
- Identifying good things that are already happening in our urban areas.
- Summarise the key challenges to our towns and city
- Outline a vision and strategic ambition for each area, summarising the things we need to get right.

## An overarching framework for our centres

While our district has three distinctive centres each with their different needs, opportunities and identities, we have developed singular overarching framework for our high streets.

We want to see our high streets succeed in a way which retains and builds the wealth, skills and opportunities for the benefit of people living, working and studying here.

Private investment will always be at the heart of our high streets but we believe targeted public sector investment can complement and strengthen it – creating an effective ecosystem which encourages entrepreneurial behaviour.

We will target our investment on projects of real public impact. Projects that provide social, environmental, commercial and economic value.

Our aim is to build city and town centres which:

1. Are accessible, attractive and enjoyable places to spend time.
2. Are safe spaces with easy, well-signposted walking routes between the places people need to reach.
3. Encourage people to use sustainable transport, to get to, and travel around them.
4. Increase the biodiversity of our town and city centre spaces, with more planting, green landscaping and scoping of opportunities for future 'pocket parks' for public realm enhancement.
5. Allow spaces to be used in different ways and set up flexible arrangements for how they're occupied or managed, so the city and town centres can adapt when the economy changes.
6. Foster variety where household names and cherished independents sit side by side ensuring our high streets are intriguing, vibrant and resilient.

# City centre context

## Introduction

**Canterbury is one of England's most historic and culturally significant cities, renowned for its rich heritage, medieval architecture and cultural significance as the centre of the Church of England.**

It is a medieval city with Canterbury Cathedral inside the ring of its historic city walls, forming the historic centre. It is among the most complete historic walled cities in the UK, with walls that represent one of the earliest surviving examples of urban defence and enclose a street pattern that preserves elements of the city's pre-medieval origins. Of the defensive structures, a section of the medieval walls remains to the south, near Canterbury Castle, while to the northwest, the Westgate survives as the Westgate Towers museum.

Immediately outside the Westgate is the River Stour which crosses the city from southwest to northeast. Its origins date back to prehistoric times, but it rose to prominence during the Roman period.

The city became a major centre of Christianity after the arrival of St Augustine in 597 AD, who established a monastery that would evolve into Canterbury Cathedral – a place of pilgrimage for centuries.

Today, the cathedral - part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site alongside St Augustine's Abbey and St Martin's Church - continues to dominate the skyline and remains the seat of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

With Canterbury having a key role in the story and history of England it has developed into a major tourist destination. Despite this it has retained a strong community and cultural identity.

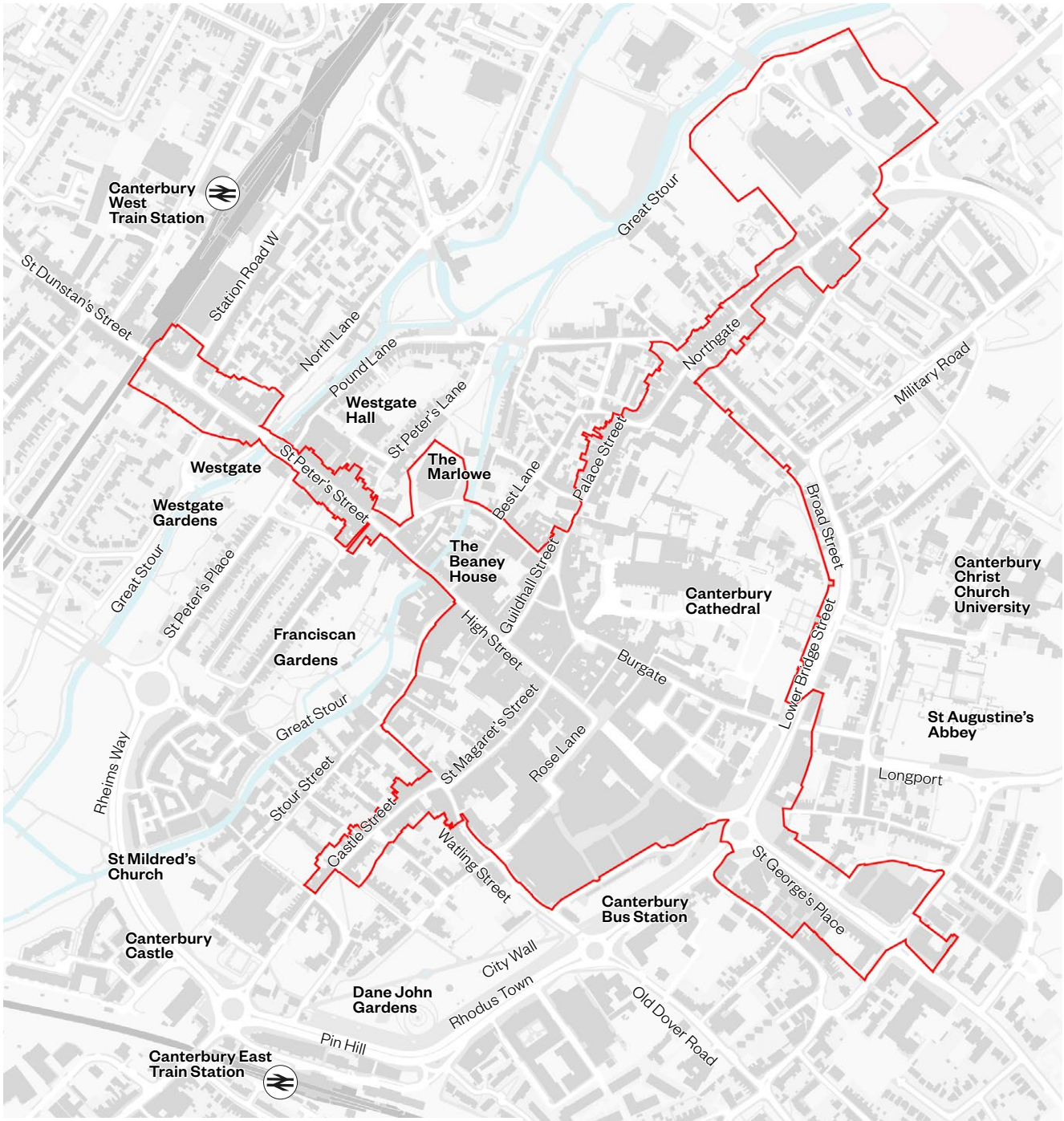
Canterbury thrives through an array of theatres, galleries, museums, events and creative businesses. This includes the award-winning Beaney House of Art & Knowledge, the Canterbury Roman Museum and the 1,200-seat Marlowe Theatre - Kent's largest creative employer.

The city also proudly hosts the Canterbury Festival and is home to the Institute of Cultural and Creative Industries (ICCI) which includes the Gulbenkian Arts Centre, which produces bOing! Kent's largest international family arts festival.

Writers such as Aphra Behn and Christopher Marlowe and artists like Thomas Sidney Cooper are part of a group of cultural icons that have shaped Canterbury's legacy.


Creative businesses and events across the city centre offer a diverse programme of activities, events and products including the Medieval Pageant in summer to the Christmas market in winter. These help keep the city alive with activities throughout the year and supporting its local economy.

Also a major UK centre for learning, Canterbury is home to a range of schools (including many language schools), colleges and three universities. These contribute to a vibrant student population and diverse cultural life. As a result, the city has one of the highest student-to-permanent resident ratios in the UK.



### Key takeaways

- There are large, high-profile empty properties in the city centre on the former Debenhams and Nason's sites
- Connectivity across the city is often seen as fragmented, disparate and unplanned, leaving many heritage and green spaces underused by the public.
- Since the pandemic, footfall, visitor numbers and levels of new business investment have recovered relatively well, but the city's retail core needs to be supported and accommodation offer enhanced.

 Town centre boundary (Local Plan)



### Where is the city centre?

The draft Local Plan 2042/43 sets out a revised and tighter city centre boundary.

Drawing a tighter boundary focuses development and investment in the core commercial area while reflecting the city centre's unique heritage.

This strategy considers the city as a whole and takes a high-level view of how future projects could impact Canterbury, rather than focusing solely on the defined boundary.

# City centre context

## Snapshot

### Heritage

Canterbury is renowned for its rich and varied heritage, dating from Roman time to the present day. Of particular note are the UNESCO World Heritage Sites which chart 1,400 years of Christianity within the city. Canterbury has played an important role in the story and history of England which is reflected in its heritage. This is underlined in the council's Levelling Up Fund programme.

Almost the entire city centre area is within one of six conservation areas. There are many significant listed buildings throughout the city centre, from the renowned Canterbury Cathedral to those with links to pilgrimage such as the Eastbridge and Poor Priests Hospital. Due to second world war bomb damage, the southern end of the high street is notable for its relative lack of listed buildings.

### Retail

The city centre includes a major shopping centre (Whitefriars) along with other primary shopping areas, spanning Watling Street to Burgate via Guildhall Street and the High Street,

extending through St Peter's Street and into the Palace Street 'King's Mile'.

The city comprises an array of independent shops, cafés and restaurants set amid its historical surroundings. Alongside the spend from residents and visitors the spend of employees based in the city centre also supports Canterbury's retail and hospitality sector.

### Green and open spaces

There are important open and green spaces throughout the city centre and its immediate surroundings. Key green spaces are located along the River Stour and the periphery of the city wall. Talking to local people has demonstrated residents and visitors greatly enjoy and attach a high value to Canterbury's green spaces and parks.

### Development context

There are a number of draft Local Plan development allocations surrounding the city centre. However, there are only two allocations within the city centre boundary.

## Deprivation

The Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD 2025) scores and ranks all areas of England and Wales according to the level of social and economic deprivation they experience. The IMD reveals that most of the areas which make up Canterbury city centre (these sub-ward levels of geography are called Lower Super Output Areas or LSOAs) are ranked within the fourth to sixth deciles (or 40-60%) of local areas in national deprivation rankings. This means these areas experience moderate levels of deprivation. However, there are areas of higher deprivation to the north and south east of the city centre, in Northgate and Barton wards respectively. These areas fall within the first to second decile (or 10-20% most deprived) ranked areas in the country.

## Cultural and social infrastructure

Cultural infrastructure and assets are located across the city centre. Key cultural infrastructure includes:

- The Marlowe Theatre
- The Marlowe Kit

- The Beaney House of Art and Knowledge
- Canterbury Cathedral
- Canterbury Castle
- Westgate Hall

Beyond the immediate city centre, major heritage and cultural assets such as St Augustine's Abbey and St Martin's Church also play a key role in Canterbury's offer to residents and visitors, complemented by a number of valued sites within and just outside the centre, including Eastbridge Hospital and the Franciscan Gardens and Chapel.

Canterbury is home to three universities: Canterbury Christ Church University located directly to the east of the city centre boundary, University for the Creative Arts located in the south east and University of Kent located to the north west. These retain their own social and cultural assets such as theatres, studios, performance and rehearsal spaces and tech galleries as well as sports and leisure facilities. The city also hosts Canterbury College (part of the East Kent College Group) which is home to over 4,000 further, higher and vocational students.

## City centre context

### Snapshot (cont'd)

#### **Economic impact of tourism**

We regularly commission reports estimating the volume and value of tourism to the district. Annual data is sourced from Destination Research (2025).

Tourism is a hugely important sector in the city (and district) economy. Data for 2024 highlights that tourism supports 8,166 jobs in the city of Canterbury, up by 2% from 2023. This equates to 12% of all jobs in the district's economy

The total number of trips to the city of Canterbury in 2024 was 5,558,000 comprising 437,000 staying trips and 5,121,000 day trips.

Total visitor spend was £318,965,000, equating to £57.39 per visitor.

Compared to 2023, Canterbury had welcomed fewer visitors in total but these had spent more overall.

These reports also demonstrate the value of people staying in the city overnight.

In 2024, a staying visit generated, on average, seven times more spend than a day visit.

However, the overall number of overnight visits in 2024 were still down in Canterbury compared to 2019 (pre pandemic) levels.



Image provided by Visit Canterbury © Alex Hare

We Made That

Canterbury City Centre Place Strategy

# This Strategy and the Draft Local Plan

**Draft Policy C1 sets out the council's overarching approach to addressing the pressures and opportunities within Canterbury's city centre, emphasising the need for sensitive regeneration, a stronger visitor and cultural economy, improved public realm, heritage enhancement and the need for people to get around the city easily.**

This city centre strategy provides the narrative and structural framework required to support that policy direction, demonstrating how the city centre can evolve in a way that aligns with the draft Local Plan while responding to community needs, aspirations and long-term economic change. The draft Local Plan stresses the importance of adapting the city centre to shifts in retail, leisure and commercial activity.

This strategy supports that approach not by prescribing individual interventions but by establishing a guiding framework encouraging mixed-use development, flexible commercial space, cultural regeneration and the gradual reintroduction of activity into underused areas. By setting out the conditions and principles for how change should occur, the strategy ensures the city centre remains resilient and can diversify over time in line with the draft Local Plan's ambitions. Heritage protection and enhancement are also central to the draft Local Plan's expectations for Canterbury.

This strategy aligns with that direction by articulating how the historic environment can shape the city centre's identity, visitor experience and everyday life. It highlights the need for coherent routes, better connections between key historic areas and an improved public realm reflecting the significance of Canterbury's built heritage. It provides a clear commitment to strengthening the settings of heritage assets and enabling residents and visitors to engage more deeply with the city's historic character. Similarly, the draft Local Plan's emphasis on sustainable movement is carried through in this strategy by

outlining the importance of improving walking and cycling environments, reducing pressure on the historic core and ensuring that arrival points into the city offer a welcoming and legible experience. While the details of how those improvements will be delivered will sit within the separate project directory, this strategy explains the principles that will guide that work and the outcomes it seeks to achieve.

The draft Local Plan also recognises the value of economic development and the need to support a thriving mix of businesses, learning institutions, cultural organisations and community groups.

This strategy provides the conceptual framework for that ambition, emphasising the importance of cultivating a distinctive city centre economy, strengthening the presence of creative and educational sectors and ensuring cultural activity is supported in a way that contributes positively to the centre's vitality. Again, the emphasis here is on direction rather than delivery, ensuring coherence with the draft Local Plan while leaving space for more detailed programmes to follow.

Finally, draft Policy C1 highlights the importance of improving the quality of public spaces and strengthening the overall experience of being in the city centre. This strategy reinforces that requirement by articulating a vision for a cleaner, greener, more coherent and more inclusive public realm.

A vision that supports everyday life, celebrates the city's identity and makes the centre more welcoming for residents, workers, students and visitors. The specific locations and interventions that will achieve this will come forward later, but the principles are embedded here. Overall, this strategy offers the interpretive layer that connects the draft Local Plan's high-level policy direction with the future programme of delivery.

It sets out the rationale, priorities and strategic conditions for action, ensuring when the forthcoming project directory and action plan are developed, they sit clearly within the draft Local Plan's intended approach and can be delivered with coherence, consistency and long term purpose.



THE  
CHAUCER  
BOOKSHOP  
EST. 1956

The  
Chaucer Bookshop

Come In  
WE'RE  
OPEN

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Image provided by Visit Canterbury © Alex Hare

# Key challenges



## A reviving retail and hospitality centre

Relative to other cities, the city centre is recovering from the pandemic well and total visits are now above pre-pandemic levels. The city has relatively low commercial vacancy rates, strong levels of pedestrian footfall and investment. However, businesses report footfall does not always translate into expected levels of trading.

The two privately-owned empty sites which were previously Debenhams and Nasons adversely impact people's perceptions and experience of the city centre. This is an issue that town and city centres across the country are tackling as larger department stores become vacant.

The commercial case for the regeneration or repurposing of these high-profile spaces has been damaged by planning restrictions on residential and mixed-use schemes imposed because of poor nutrient neutrality in the Stour catchment. In addition, other regional retail and hospitality centres in Canterbury's catchment area, including out-of-town shopping centres, have increased capacity and constantly seek to upgrade and assertively market their offers. As such the city centre's offer to shoppers and visitors also needs to continually diversify and improve to ensure Canterbury remains relevant, appealing and competitive to a range of users.

## Increased competition for visitors

Canterbury is part of a small group of historic UK destinations that attract international visitors, but competition with other cathedral cities is strong. Between 2010 and 2019, the city fell behind its peers, experiencing a 10% decline in international visitors while places like Bath and Durham saw major growth. During the same period, Visit England/Britain data showed Canterbury ranking within the lowest-performing English destinations for international visitor satisfaction. To address this historic decline, the council pursued a city-wide renewal programme funded through the Levelling Up Fund, focusing on revitalising the high street and key tourist areas to encourage longer stays, higher spend and improved visitor experiences.

Recent 2024 data indicates overseas visitor numbers have begun to rise again, though overnight stays and associated spend remain largely unchanged since 2019. Domestic overnight visits also continue to lag behind pre-pandemic levels. Despite being the most visited area in Kent and having a sizeable accommodation offer that performs strongly in peak seasons, Canterbury still lacks higher-end hotels and facilities capable of hosting major conferences or large events. This gap limits its ability to fully compete with other leading UK heritage destinations and to convert day visitors into longer-staying, higher-spending guests.



## Built heritage in a poor condition and underutilised

Prior to current LUF work, some nationally-important historical assets were visibly deteriorating and in need of urgent repairs. £22m has been invested in the scheme with major works to key sites including Poor Priests Hospital, Dane John Gardens, Canterbury Castle, the Westgate Towers area and other public gardens, due to complete in summer 2026.

There is potential to broaden public access to historical sites and there are plans in place for the Sidney Cooper building, which has seen a modest internal refurbishment in anticipation of interest from local community groups. At time of publication, one historical site was under the ownership of a charity and struggling to keep up with repairs.

Connectivity between heritage assets and green spaces could be improved to avoid them being underused by the public.



## Perceptions of the city centre

Feedback from the Local Plan consultation showed that while many people value Canterbury's historic character, green spaces and cultural offer, some felt that certain parts of the city centre would benefit from improvement.

Comments mentioned vacant units, the visibility of rough sleeping and concerns about antisocial behaviour, which are issues commonly experienced in many urban centres.

These views highlight the importance of continued investment in the public realm, support for vulnerable people and work to ensure the city centre feels welcoming and well cared for.

# Key challenges



## City centre congestion

Traffic congestion at peak times is a significant and persistent challenge for Canterbury's city centre, placing pressure on the medieval street network and affecting the experience of residents, workers and visitors.

Although improving, air quality is poorest on key radial routes in and out of the city such as towards Wincheap and Sturry which are closely associated with congestion and heavy traffic volumes.

The draft Local Plan says reducing congestion on the ring road and radial routes is a central priority, reinforcing the strategic importance of addressing transport pressures to support regeneration, improve accessibility and enhance the overall city centre environment.



## Modern connections for a medieval city

Canterbury's historic layout continues to shape how people move into and around the city today. More than half of the original walled circuit still stands, enclosing a compact medieval core and a tightly-woven street network that was never designed for modern transport.

Key routes into the city funnel vehicles through narrow gateways and along constrained radial streets, creating natural pinch points.

These inherited constraints have been further compounded by the pressures of growth and a transport network largely planned in the postwar era, long before current levels of car use, visitor numbers and development activity emerged.

As new neighbourhoods come forward outside the city walls, these same medieval connections make it challenging to establish clear, direct and sustainable links back into the centre.

Together, the combination of a medieval walled city and a mid-20th century road system makes it difficult to traverse the centre efficiently, adds pressure to the ring road and radial routes and limits opportunities to introduce new movement patterns without careful, sensitive planning.



Image by Visit Canterbury © Alex Hare

We Made That

# 02

# Engagement Summary

- What have people said?
- Summary of public survey results
- Key things to get right



Image provided by Visit Canterbury © Alex Hare

## What have people said?

In 2025 a series of engagement activities and events were undertaken to inform the strategy, including:

- An in-person drop-in event and online survey
- Targeted meetings with key stakeholders, for example businesses and partner organisations
- In-person meetings with district and county councillors and local MPs



**A drop-in session was held outside The Beaney House on Thursday 21st August 2025.**

### Drop-in session summary

- Community safety and anti-social behaviour (ASB) is an issue, particularly at night
- High-profile high-street vacancy of the former Debenhams and Nasons sites continues to present a significant challenge
- Create opportunities for small businesses by subdividing vacant units and offering affordable rents
- Better promote planned events
- More greening, planting and less litter
- Accessibility can be poor for some people, particularly those with mobility issues, due to uneven surfaces and excessive street clutter
- Green spaces are extremely important to residents

## **Stakeholder meeting summary**

- There is strong and growing demand for the city’s cultural offer, but there is a bottleneck in terms of supply
- There is no clear template or ready-to-use guidance for hosting events in the city
- Banners over the high street that advertise events look good and make you feel like things are happening
- Need to develop a new sense of its history and traditions but it needs to come from the grassroots and not top-down
- Canterbury is seen as a good location for busking
  - it is an easy win to make space for busking that can be booked and managed
- New development should be expected to sustain or enhance the significance of historic street furniture, including features such as Biggleston Lampposts within the World Heritage Site buffer zone.

## **Local business meeting summary**

- The cost of parking adversely impacts visitor numbers and dwell time
- There is a clear need for wayfinding and signage from railway stations and around historical sites
- Address vacant and empty/inactive spaces in the city centre
- There is frustration with the short dwell time of tourists and interest in ways to incentivise longer stays
- Positive feelings about public transport including rail and buses
- Need more ways to attract more student spend in the city centre, including a presence of high street chains that appeal to young people
- Issues with parking for tour buses
- Traffic congestion remains a key issue in and out of the city centre

## What have people said?

### Public survey results

**148 people responded to the public survey.**

**Most people were over 35, with a range of responses across all age bracket above this.**

#### **Key findings:**

Addressing vacant properties and spaces was the top priority with heritage sites highly valued but seen as needing more support and a desire for a greater variety of retail experiences, activities and events

Canterbury has lovely heritage sites and gardens, theatre and lots of eating places.

The city centre is empty and dilapidated, there are loads of abandoned and badly neglected buildings

[Canterbury's strengths are] the heritage assets, the compact nature of the city centre, the variety of shops, cafes and restaurants, the ability to walk everywhere.

Terrible for cyclists with no cycle paths that are very usable to get across town.

### **Key priorities**

66% wanted to see fewer empty buildings

### **Activities**

Around half wanted to see a greater variety of shops (54%) and more markets (51%). More events and community spaces are also desired.

### **Location**

The high street was felt to most need improvement

### **Transport**

People are more likely to drive into the city (44%) than take public transport (25% for bus and train combined)

### **Workspace**

43% felt small scale industrial space (for makers/creators/innovators etc) is needed

### **Heritage sites**

47% want better public spaces, and 4 in 10 better signage and public access

### **Canterbury's strengths**

From the survey, the most commonly highlighted strengths of Canterbury were:

1. Canterbury's historic character
2. Attractive beautiful architecture
3. Different range of shops

## Key things to get right



### What's the context?

Canterbury's established retail and hospitality sector is recovering well but needs continued support.



### What's the context?

Bringing the currently vacant former Debenhams and Nasons sites back into active and/or productive use is essential for the success of the city centre. Increased provision of affordable space for small businesses.

### What needs to be done?

The commercial viability of regeneration schemes for Nasons and Debenhams need to be strengthened and secured as quickly as possible as solutions to the nutrient neutrality issues are brought forward, locally or via central government. Meanwhile uses such as pop-up shops or incubator spaces could help to bring vacant spaces and the areas immediately outside them alive in the short and medium term.

Creating opportunities for people to bring vacant units back into use at little risk to themselves could help breathe creativity and variety into the existing commercial offer.

### Supporting quotes from public survey

**Canterbury could learn from nearby examples like Faversham Market, which has successfully balanced heritage, independent trade, and community identity. Its mix of weekly produce, antiques, and craft stalls draws in both locals and tourists.**

**Making use of empty Debenhams and Nasons buildings — allowing independent makers or traders to have stalls there, maybe an emporium/Petticoat Lane style like in Ramsgate and Folkestone. Allow some creativity rather than just more chains.**



**What's the context?**

Evidence points to Canterbury as a visitor destination with challenges in competing with similar destinations for visitors, but closer engagement and collaboration between the city and the cathedral should continue to yield positive results (like the enhanced Christmas market offer).



**What's the context?**

Completion of the city's LUF programme of projects will help to reestablish the quality of some underused heritage assets which will improve Canterbury's overall offer to visitors.

**What needs to be done?**

Canterbury must retain the momentum developed through the delivery of the Levelling Up Fund programme and ensure further projects and measures which build on its strategic direction are implemented.

Capital investment in public spaces needs to be followed by support to bring them alive and counter negative perceptions of the city centre. Cleanliness of the public realm is also valued highly by residents.

Supporting quotes from public survey

**In 10 years, I want Canterbury to be a city that, from the Castle and Cathedral to overlooked stories in its suburbs, wears its history confidently.**

**My dream for Canterbury is that it rediscovers the confidence to lead — not just in heritage, but in how it treats its people, spaces, and future.**

## Key things to get right



### What's the context?

Significant development is planned in and around the city, totalling more than 6,000 new homes attracting new people and families in turn bringing new economic activity, skills and disposable spend.



### What's the context?

Potential development within the city centre is minimal, but there are draft Local Plan allocations identified at Castle Street and St George's Place.

### What needs to be done?

Car parks scheduled for disposal in Castle Street and Northgate could provide activities or uses which could help to connect new developments to the city centre via well-defined routes.

Supporting quotes from public survey

**Northgate is a nice road but has always been missed by visitors. If there was more focus there it might encourage people to also visit the Kingsmead development.**

**Further pedestrianisation of e.g. Castle Street, which is always chaos. Re-surfacing of Castle Street and other particularly bad stretches of street in the city centre.**



**What's the context?**

Canterbury's cultural and heritage assets remain strongly valued, with both major institutions and smaller historic features, such as traditional lampposts, contributing to the city's distinctive identity.



**What's the context?**

Engagement showed that some cultural experiences feel less accessible, with concerns about the cost and availability of theatre, live music and affordable venues for grassroots activity. People also highlighted a need for more performance opportunities in the public realm.

**What needs to be done?**

Future work should protect and enhance the city's heritage and cultural character, while widening access to cultural activity across the city centre.

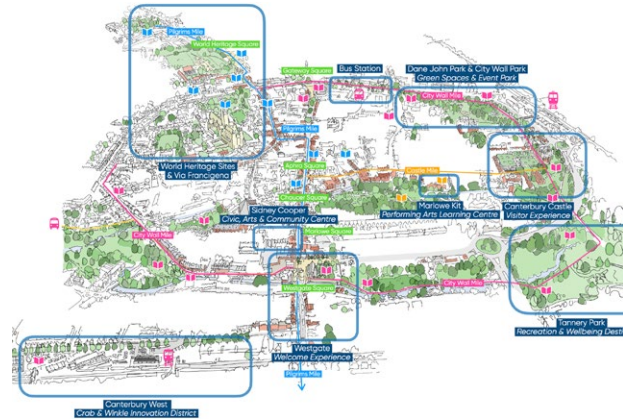
This includes safeguarding important historic features and improving opportunities for performances and events by creating affordable, flexible spaces and practical additions in public spaces that make it easier to host live music and community performances.

Supporting quotes from public survey

**I'd like to see a thriving city that has an integrated modern and heritage that is sophisticated and flows well for all demographics and cultures.**

**The city has internationally significant historical sights, It used to be a shopping destination but this is not as strong as it was, I regularly attend shows at the Marlowe, excellent range of restaurants and bars.**

# Key things to get right



**What's the context?**  
There are areas of high deprivation to the north east and south east of the city centre. Engagement also revealed concerns around connectivity and wayfinding in these areas.

**What's the context?**  
A masterplan/vision prepared by the city's Canterbury Tales of England group demonstrates a strong desire to build on the success of projects delivered through the LUF programme.

**What needs to be done?**  
Opportunities to improve how clear and easy to navigate the routes around Northgate could be explored as the Northgate car park site comes forward or is redeveloped.

**What needs to be done?**  
Further strategic work developed through this commission could act as an overlay of its existing vision.

Supporting quotes from public survey

**Maps, wayfinding, and campaigns can help spread footfall. Canterbury thrives on tourism, but residents must feel equally welcome. More family events, community-focused festivals, and accessible pricing would help.**

**We do not have an 'identity' which can be straight away identified as Canterbury City. The street signs, colours used in street furniture. What is our 'identity'?**

# Lady PENELOPE'S



01227 780800

Adult Terrarium  
Workshop  
Friday 1st June 3.00pm - 4.00pm  
£25 per person  
01227780800



- Canterbury vision for 2043
- Canterbury strategy principles
- Links to UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs)



Image provided by Visit Canterbury © Alex Hare

## **Vision**

By 2043, Canterbury will be:

**A world-class visitor destination, with a reputation for learning, literature and its unlocked historic treasures that are inviting, exciting and effortless to explore.**

**Canterbury will encourage visitors to stay longer, students to put down long-term roots and businesses to grow.**

**The city will be a hub for creativity, education and enterprise all year round.**



**FALSTAFF**

**THE BISHOPS FINGER**  
COME IN & TRY  
*Our Famous*  
BURGERS,  
WINGS &

Image provided by Visit Canterbury © Alex Hare

We Made That

## Strategy Principles

To achieve the vision, Canterbury should:

1. **Be a city of warm welcomes and memorable first impressions**

Enhancing Canterbury's gateways and arrival points, ensuring visitors have a coherent and positive first impression of the city. Improving signage and connectivity between the historic core and growth areas, supporting business development and employment beyond the city walls.

2. **Ease transport pressure on the city's historic centre**

Ensuring traffic management and parking strategies support business activity, visitor comfort and pedestrian safety while respecting Canterbury's historic fabric. Park and Ride improvements and active travel corridors should help to reduce congestion and carbon emissions in the medieval centre.

3. **Unlock Canterbury's spaces and regeneration potential**

Developing clear pathways to bring key sites back into productive use. Changing the focus of underused spaces

towards community, cultural and creative uses, working with partners such as Canterbury BID, the universities and landowners. Promoting meanwhile and pop-up uses wherever feasible to give new and existing businesses room to test ideas, strengthen enterprise and support town centre vibrancy.

4. **Further reveal and reconnect Canterbury's layers of heritage**

Building on the legacy of Connected Canterbury: Unlocking Canterbury's Tales of England project by addressing the physical and psychological barriers preventing people from fully accessing and engaging with Canterbury's heritage and culture. Continuing to enhance public realm settings around key heritage sites and routes, protecting historic street furniture, using design and storytelling to further connect residents and visitors more deeply to the city's history.

## 5. **Finding new ways to tell Canterbury's story**

Completing the Levelling Up Fund projects, including the story gardens and events infrastructure. Building a critical mass of events and activities celebrating Canterbury's unique identity and character from festivals and performances to folklore traditions and civic celebrations. Positioning Canterbury as a leading destination for cultural experiences, helping residents and visitors spend more time in the city and strengthening civic pride.

## 6. **Promoting pilgrimage**

Improving the quality, coherence and safety of walking and cycling routes across the city centre. Supporting new routes such as those proposed through Canterbury Tales of England to connect cultural, educational and shopping destinations. Making active travel a key part of the Canterbury experience for residents, students and visitors. Enhancing the visibility and opportunities of the Via Francigena partnership and route.

## 7. **Connecting new parts of the city**

Improving the sense of belonging and community by creating pathways and spaces between different neighbourhoods. Facilitating sustainable and active movement to and between emerging neighbourhoods and growth areas outside the city walls.

## 8. **Champion innovation and the power of learning**

Partnering with universities and businesses to make Canterbury a regional hub for innovation, knowledge exchange and entrepreneurship. Providing a range of flexible workspaces and digital infrastructure to attract and retain start-ups and creative industries. Ensuring the growth of the city's conference venues, hotels and cultural sectors.

## Links to United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs)

**The council's corporate plan aims to build a fairer economy and not just a bigger one – we support the ambition in the UN SDGs to build sustainable, inclusive and equitable economic growth – balancing the social and economic needs of our communities.**

Our strategic aims match the goals in the following way:

### **1. Be a city of warm welcomes and memorable first impressions**

*SDG 8 – Decent work and economic growth*

Strong gateways, better first impressions and improved connectivity support economic activity and business development.

### **2. Ease transport pressure on the city's historic centre**

*SDG 11 – Sustainable cities and communities*

Reduced congestion and improved pedestrian safety contribute to inclusive, safe and sustainable urban environments.

### **3. Unlock Canterbury's spaces and regeneration potential**

*SDG 8 – Decent work and economic growth*

Reusing vacant sites and enabling meanwhile uses stimulate enterprise, job creation and economic vibrancy.

### **4. Further reveal and reconnect Canterbury's layers of heritage**

*SDG 4 – Quality education*

Engaging people with heritage through improved access, storytelling and learning directly aligns with cultural and educational enrichment.

### **5. Find new ways to tell Canterbury's story**

*SDG 4 – Quality education*

Events, storytelling and cultural programming broaden access to learning, identity and shared community knowledge.

### **6. Promote pilgrimage**

*SDG 9 – Industry, innovation and infrastructure*

Enhancing cycling/walking infrastructure and new cultural routes contributes to wider urban connectivity and innovative place-based infrastructure.

### **7. Connect new parts of the city**

*SDG 9 – Industry, innovation and infrastructure*

*Linking neighbourhoods and growth areas depends on upgraded, inclusive movement infrastructure.*

### **8. Champion innovation and the power of learning**

*SDG 4 – Quality education*

*SDG 9 – Industry, innovation and infrastructure*

Partnerships with universities, creative industries, workspace development and digital infrastructure all strengthen learning, skills and innovation ecosystems.



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We Made That

# 04

## Governance, Evaluation and Project Delivery

- Measuring success
- Monitoring and review
- Projects and action plans
- Local governance planning



Image provided by Visit Canterbury © Alex Hare

## Measuring success

### Introduction

**This strategy will be delivered alongside the Canterbury District Local Plan until 2043.**

Throughout the life of this plan, it is vital to track progress against the strategy principles and vision.

Monitoring progress will enable understanding whether interventions have been successful and will ensure future activity and investment is targeted in the right areas.

## Measuring success

### Desired outcomes

1. High profile vacant and brownfield sites are brought back into productive use

2. Canterbury is a regional hub for innovation and creativity which encourages clustering of these businesses in the district

3. The city has a dedicated welcome centre, improved visitor experience at key welcome points and co-ordinated visitor offer

4. Cultural and creative assets across the city centre are activated by creative, cultural and community organisations

5. Universities have an onsite presence within the city centre

6. Walking routes around the city wall are extended and improved. Connections between the historic core of the city and neighbouring areas with growing populations are upgraded

7. Story gardens and creative storytelling experiences expand across the city, supported by a public realm that hosts a vibrant programme of events

8. Digital connectivity is strong and reliable, supporting residents, business and visitors

9. Our roads are easy and safe to navigate, congestion in the city centre is reduced by improvement in active travel and public transport

10. Canterbury is a leading conference, hotel and event destination in South East England

## Monitoring and Review

### Introduction

**Monitoring and review are essential to ensuring this high-level strategy remains relevant, effective and responsive to change.**

Because this document sets out strategic principles rather than detailed projects, ongoing review will help maintain a clear line of sight between the long-term vision for Canterbury and the evolving local, regional and national context in which it will be delivered.

#### **A dynamic, adaptive strategy**

The monitoring and review process is designed to keep this strategy dynamic, enabling Canterbury to respond confidently to opportunities and challenges over the coming decades. By regularly assessing progress, refreshing priorities and maintaining strong engagement, the strategy will remain a robust and forward-looking framework long after its initial publication.

#### **Approach to monitoring**

Progress will be monitored against the desired outcomes set out in this strategy, focusing on whether Canterbury is moving in the right direction rather than on the delivery of individual schemes.

Monitoring activity will track changes in the city centre's vitality, accessibility, heritage setting, cultural offer and overall visitor and resident experience.

This will help ensure that future projects, once defined, are targeted where they will have the greatest impact.

## **Transition to a new unitary authority**

We will cease to exist in April 2028, at which point responsibility for this strategy will transfer to the new unitary authority.

To support this transition, a short-term action plan will be developed for the remaining period of our existence (October 2026–April 2028).

This will provide focus and clarity for the final 18 months of delivery before handover.

Once the new authority is established, these strategies will need to be reviewed to ensure they align with the priorities, governance arrangements and strategic frameworks of the new organisation.

An early review within the first year of the unitary will allow for adjustment, confirmation of focus and the integration of new opportunities, funding programmes or policy directions.

## **Review cycle**

To maintain momentum, relevance and accountability, the strategy will be reviewed every two years once within the unitary structure. This regular review cycle will allow progress to be assessed, emerging challenges to be identified and strategic priorities to be refined as needed. It will also ensure alignment with the Local Plan review cycle, which takes place every five years, providing an additional opportunity to refresh the strategic direction where appropriate.

During the remainder of our tenure, monitoring and review will be led by the council's officers working alongside councillors and drawing on the expertise and perspectives of partners, stakeholders and residents. After April 2028, responsibility for monitoring and review will transfer to the new unitary authority. It is expected that the unitary will build on the governance structures already established to ensure that local voices continue to play a central role in shaping Canterbury's evolution.

## Projects and Action Plans

**This strategy provides the long-term vision and strategic principles for Canterbury’s city centre.**

**It does not set out detailed, costed or deliverable projects at this stage. Instead, it establishes the framework within which future activity will be developed, prioritised and delivered.**

To support the next phase of work, the council will begin developing a project directory.

This will draw together the wide range of ideas, proposals and opportunities identified through extensive engagement with the public, elected representatives, community groups and stakeholders.

The directory will form a consolidated long list of potential projects that reflect the ambitions, challenges and opportunities highlighted throughout the engagement process.

From this long list, we, working alongside partners and stakeholders, will prioritise which projects should be taken forward during the remaining period of our existence.

This will result in the creation of an 18-month action plan, covering October 2026 to April 2028.

The action plan will set out which projects will be progressed during this period, and to what stage.

Not all projects will be completed within this timeframe. Some will be large, complex or long-term in nature.

Instead, the action plan will identify realistic next steps, such as feasibility work, scoping, design development or partnership formation.

The project directory and action plan will ensure Canterbury maintains momentum during the transition period before the formation of the new unitary authority in April 2028.

Once the new authority is established, the directory and action plan will provide a clear and organised starting point for future delivery planning, enabling the unitary to align these projects with its wider priorities, resources and governance structures.

Together, the project directory and the 18-month action plan will form the bridge between this high-level strategy and the more detailed programme of work that will follow, ensuring clear direction, transparency and continuity during a period of change.

# Local Governance Planning

## Introduction

The early years of the strategy will be characterised by some of the most fundamental changes to the democratic institutions and processes of local government in a generation.

These changes will be driven by key events including local government reorganisation (LGR), Kent's drive for full devolution and a Community Governance Review (CGR) in Canterbury.

Changes present both uncertainty and opportunity which must be addressed directly through a stable and coherent localised governance approach to guide the delivery of the strategy - a model within which communities feel directly empowered and which local identity is maintained will be essential to maintain momentum while the wider system undergoes change and the new landscape of local government settles.

Everyone working together has been central to the development of this city centre strategy and will remain critical to its ultimate success.

The delivery ambitions set out within the strategy will require an effective coordination of efforts, resources and investments, including from new sources which must be identified and secured through future targeted action.

As such, coordinated governance and delivery arrangements that genuinely empower communities and wider stakeholders must now be put in place.

The following proposals consider how governance should best be approached within the broader context of the fundamental changes reshaping local democracy over the delivery period and how this approach could evolve appropriately over time.

## The changing landscape of local government

Local government reorganisation (LGR), potential devolution to a Kent and Medway Mayor and a future Community Governance Reviews (CGRs) together form the backdrop against which this strategy will be delivered. At the invitation of the government, Kent's proposals for LGR would replace the current two-tier system with new unitary authorities, reshaping

responsibilities, service structures and decision making across the county.

Regardless of which model is ultimately adopted, the transition will create a period of uncertainty, with changes to systems, policies and leadership capacity. These shifts will directly influence how city and town centre priorities for Canterbury, Herne Bay and Whitstable are governed, resourced and implemented.

Alongside LGR, Kent's continued ambition for full devolution — including the possibility of a directly elected Mayor with strategic powers over areas such as transport, housing and economic development — adds another layer of potential change.

Should a combined authority with mayoral powers progress in the future, some responsibilities relevant to city centres may sit at a regional level, while delivery remains local. This strategy therefore needs to be robust enough to align with any future governance landscape, ensuring the direction set out here continues to hold regardless of where specific powers eventually sit.

At the same time, there is growing interest in establishing new parish or town councils for Canterbury through a CGR. If introduced, these bodies would reshape local representation and potentially take on responsibilities for services, assets or public spaces that directly shape the experience of the city centre.

Their emergence could provide a stronger community-led platform for stewardship of the places this strategy seeks to enhance. Taken together, these wider governance reforms make it essential this strategy provides stability, clarity and continuity through a period of significant institutional change.

It sets out a long-term framework that can guide future decisionmakers, whether within the existing council, a new unitary authority, a mayoral structure or future town and parish councils. This will ensure that the priorities for the city centre remain coherent, community-rooted and deliverable whatever governance arrangements ultimately emerge.

## An evolving, community-centric governance model

A flexible, phased governance model is required, which focuses and enables local momentum now while preparing for and adapting to the significant changes that lie ahead:

- Delivering each of the strategies will require developing and embedding new collaborative models for local governance, spanning decision-making, case-making, resourcing, coordinated action and stewardship. This will actively involve public, private, community and not-for-profit partners. There is a clear ambition shared among councillors and wider stakeholders that the community is at the forefront of delivery.
- The differences between each of the three areas also must be accommodated. Canterbury benefits from well-established partnership infrastructure and stakeholder networks, Herne Bay has a more fragmented stakeholder infrastructure with early-stage capacity building underway locally, and Whitstable sitting between the two.
- In all cases, care must be paid to ensure too much responsibility is not delegated too soon locally, which could jeopardise delivery and confidence in the plans.
- As the ultimate custodian of the strategies, we must be prepared to play an ongoing enabling role in delivering the plans, coordinating partners, actions and resources in support of locally-led implementation.
- The approach will need to flex to accommodate LGR, devolution and CGRs, to ensure governance arrangements do not conflict with future local government arrangements but must also ensure continuity of support for local-led delivery.
- The requirement for flexibility and agility extends beyond addressing LGR – a number of the projects and priorities for intervention will need to be matched to future funding streams and stakeholder priorities as the strategies have not been developed in direct response to specific, known funding pots and confirmed partner projects.

An evolving approach to governance is proposed, which can effectively respond to the complex, diverse and changing delivery context within which the strategies will be realised.

### Case Study

#### Lincoln Town Board

Lincoln was one of 101 towns and cities selected by government to work towards a Town Deal and, in January 2020, a multi-agency board was established to oversee the creation of the Town Investment Plan. It acts as a focal point for partnership working across the public, private and voluntary sectors, helping to align local priorities with the aims of the Town Deal.

A key feature of the Board is its independence and balanced representation. The Chair operates independently of the City of Lincoln Council, helping to ensure impartial leadership and constructive challenge. Board members are drawn from a range of separate constituencies, including business, education, community and public sector organisations, rather than solely from elected councillors. This structure is designed to reflect a broad cross-section of local interests and expertise, supporting informed decision-making and reinforcing the Board's role as a partnership body rather than a council committee. The strategy also highlights the Board's distinct approach to communication and engagement.

The Town Board maintains its own communications platform and identity, separate from the Council's corporate channels. This allows the Board to communicate clearly about its purpose, decisions and progress, and to engage directly with stakeholders and the wider public. By doing so, the Board aims to promote transparency and build trust.



Lincoln Town Board

## Local Governance Planning

### Short-term priority: Create local groups that help communities have a real and lasting say in shaping their area

Two place panels should be established initially, one for the Canterbury city centre strategy and one to support both the Herne Bay and Whitstable Town centre strategies. This approach recognises both the differences and similarities in capacity and context for these areas as well as an opportunity to develop and share effective coastal expertise through the process. The composition of each panel should include a range of representatives across sectors and backgrounds to ensure there is effective influence over key partners and actions.

Residents, businesses and civil society, must be well-represented and well supported to participate fully and equally. Good practices in how councils approach selections for citizen's panels should be considered as part of determining the appointment criteria and process. The responsibilities of each panel will include coordinating and overseeing the development and delivery of more detailed plans for the key projects and interventions set out in the project directory and action plans, including progress and impact as delivery progresses. These shaping and stewardship functions may evolve over time as the capacity of each panel builds.

We have approved further economic development resource, which could work alongside the panels, providing coordination and capacity support and ensuring each panel is effectively linked into council and partners' activities. A service level agreement should be put in place between the council and each panel setting out responsibilities and expectations. As part of its support and enabling role, we should further develop and establish the governance arrangements for each place panel, addressing matters like panel size, terms of reference, frequency of meetings, chairing and expected conduct. Relevant good practices and guidance from similar regeneration approaches such as Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government's (MHCLG) guidance for the Pride in Place programme should be referenced, where useful.

### Medium-term priority: Recalibrate to make the most of LGR, capacity and funding opportunities

At appropriate future points, a governance review will need to be undertaken to take stock of key changes to the architecture of local government, as brought about by LGR, CGRs or progress towards full devolution in Kent. The review will need to ensure compatibility and coherence with the new structures, delivery models and responsibilities within local government, to ensure these strategies remain active and activated within these new structures. Reviews also present opportunities to consider both how the place panels have developed and any key developments and opportunities within the wider landscape of funding, opportunities and policy priorities. For example, there may be an evidenced case for affording greater direct responsibility to each panel over time as capacity and experience builds up and new funding opportunities may emerge which could be accessed through working differently. It would be prudent to conduct this governance review at the first two-year review milestone, soon after the vesting day of the new unitary authority in April 2028.

#### Case Study

##### Neighbourhood Area Committees

Surrey County Council formed Neighbourhood Area Committees before a decision on the LGR restructure was made and used this hyper-local engagement as a way of collecting feedback from residents.



Neighbourhood Area Committees

## Long-term priority: Explore opportunities for sustainable legacy structures post-CGR and LGR

Important opportunities may be presented over the longer-term to establish one or more standalone legacy structures, which could support, coordinate and sustain community stewardship and influence in perpetuity. Community benefit models, such as community development trusts, community interest companies and charities, enable communities to crystallise and formalise community benefit ambitions within legal, not-for-profit structures that protect community purpose in perpetuity.

There are many precedents across the country for not-for-profit, community benefit structures which have emerged from place-focused renewal programmes and strategies.

By establishing and supporting community-led governance in the short-to-medium term through the actions proposed above, solid foundations will be established in terms of the capacity, good practices, experience and expertise, future community-benefit structures will require in order to flourish.

At this stage, it is not appropriate or feasible to determine the specifics about the legal form, geographic focus or composition that long-term community benefit structures could or should take for Canterbury, Herne Bay and Whitstable.

At an appropriate future point, an options appraisal, business case and business planning pathway will be required to make and shape the case for such structures.

Many of these decisions will be informed by the progress made in the short-to-medium term, the architecture for local governance that emerges from CGRs and LGR, and the prevailing landscape of policies, funding and partnerships available to each of the three centres.

### Case Study

#### Historic Coventry Trust

Historic Coventry Trust is an entrepreneurial heritage development trust which aims to bring new life to the city's heritage, finding innovative ways to sustain historic places and to inspire, involve and connect people with the city's history.

It was founded in 2011 (and previously known as The Charterhouse Coventry Preservation Trust). Their aim is to become the guardian of the city's heritage in perpetuity and a strategic partner to enable regeneration of Coventry's historic buildings and landscapes.

The Trust is a social enterprise and aims to become self-sufficient, generating revenue from restored historic buildings and innovative development. They have partnered with Coventry City Council to transfer ownership of over 20 heritage buildings under a framework agreement, enabling their restoration and productive use.

The Trust works alongside the BID and Council to leverage funding only available to charities for heritage projects, such as the Architectural Heritage Fund.



Historic Coventry Trust

## London

Unit 21 Tower Workshops  
58 Riley Road  
London SE1 3DG

+44 (0)20 7252 3400

## Manchester

Jactin House  
24 Hood Street  
Ancoats  
Manchester M4 6WX

+44 (0)161 9743206

[studio@wemadethat.co.uk](mailto:studio@wemadethat.co.uk)  
[wemadethat.co.uk](http://wemadethat.co.uk)

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Made  
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 **canterbury**  
city council

We Made That LLP is registered  
in England and Wales.  
Reg no. OC367789