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Whitstable Town Centre Strategy

2026-2043



Executive Summary

This strategy outlines a transformational vision for Whitstable town 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 local character of Whitstable should be amplified and used to develop the town centre's identity. Image by Visit Canterbury © Alex Hare



The working harbour is a key asset to the town and should be celebrated and supported. Image by Visit Canterbury © Josh Carter



The high street needs to be more pedestrian-friendly. Image by Visit Canterbury © Alex Hare

What is the vision?

Whitstable will be magnet for people drawn to its lively maritime character, creative culture and historic charm, all year round.

Its working harbour and quirky independent high street will better balance the needs of its residents with its popularity as a tourist destination.

A greater variety of high-quality spaces will make sure the town is a desirable place to live and spend time in.

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 Whitstable's town centre.

It provides a clear framework for how the town 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, experience and ambitions have directly shaped the priorities, themes and strategic direction set out here.

Because the strategy is rooted in talking to people with a stake in the town, we have confidence that what it articulates truly reflects the issues that matter most to the people who know and use it every day.

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

To achieve the vision, Whitstable should:

1. Improve first impressions
2. Connect land and sea through active travel
3. Put people first on the high street
4. Reimagine the harbour as a dynamic economic anchor
5. Ensure the harbour and high street operate in harmony
6. Shape spaces for community and celebration
7. Nurture Whitstable's creative spirit
8. Balance the rhythm of visitors and residents



Image provided by Explore Kent ©

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We Made That

Whitstable Town Centre Strategy

Document Version
January 2026

01

Introduction

- Introduction and purpose
- Whitstable town centre context
- Policy context
- Key challenges to address



Image provided by Visit Canterbury © Alex Hare

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 town.

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 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 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.

Town centre context

Introduction

Whitstable is a seaside town on the north coast of Kent, well known for its maritime heritage, thriving arts scene and distinctive coastal charm.

Located about seven miles north of Canterbury, it has a long history as a fishing and oyster-harvesting community, with records of oyster cultivation dating back to Roman times.

The town's famous Whitstable oysters remain a defining feature, celebrated annually in the Whitstable Oyster Festival, which draws visitors from far and wide for its food, music and community spirit.

Beyond its seafood, Whitstable has become a popular destination for day-trippers and those seeking a quintessential English seaside experience.

The town's pebble beaches, colourful beach huts and working harbour create a picturesque setting, while the narrow High Street is lined with independent shops, galleries and cafés.

The combination of traditional charm and contemporary creativity has attracted a mix of

artists, writers and professionals, giving the town a lively yet relaxed cultural atmosphere.



Whitstable experiences some tension between long-time residents and the growing number of visitors and second-home owners drawn to its charm. As the town's popularity has increased, property prices and rents have risen sharply, making it harder for local people – especially younger generations – to live in the area.

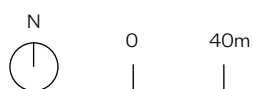
The influx of tourists, while beneficial for businesses, puts pressure on infrastructure during peak summer months therefore bringing people into the high street during the quieter winter months is key. Some residents express concern that the town's character and sense of community are being diluted due to its appeal to large numbers of tourists. Others view tourism as an essential part of Whitstable's economic vitality. Balancing the preservation of its 'independent' local identity with the benefits of a thriving visitor economy remains an ongoing challenge for the town.



Key takeaways

- Active travel routes from the train station to the town's high street and seafront are poor
- There is conflict between pedestrians and vehicles along the high street and issues with congestion and safety
- The working harbour is a key asset but is not particularly public facing
- Harbour Street, the High Street and Oxford Street all have a slightly different character

-  Whitstable Harbour Mixed Use Allocation
-  Town centre boundary (Local Plan)



Where is the town centre?

This strategy document focuses on the area within Whitstable's draft Local Plan town centre boundary which stretches the length of high street and western portion of Harbour Street. It also includes Whitstable Harbour due to its connection and complementary importance to the High Street and Harbour Street in a town centre context. This strategy therefore looks holistically across Whitstable, reflecting that places outside the formal town centre boundary still play a key role in how the town functions and evolves.

Town centre context

Snapshot

Heritage

Whitstable Harbour falls entirely within the Whitstable Town Conservation Area. The harbour sits between the Whitstable Town Conservation Area and Tankerton Conservation Area.

There are several clusters of listed buildings within the town centre.

Green and open spaces

The public space outside Whitstable library is the only open space within the town centre. There is green open space at Westmeads and Cornwallis Circle recreation grounds. The towns largest green areas capable of hosting events are located outside of the town centre at Tankerton slopes and Church Street playing fields.

Development context

There is only one allocation in the draft Local Plan within the town centre which comprises seven new dwellings. There is also a mixed-use allocation at Whitstable Harbour which includes current sites such as the Oyster Indoor Bowls Club.

Outside the town centre, on the edge of Whitstable, significant new development is planned along the Crab and Winkle Way at Brooklands Farm (Site W4), with scope for approximately 1,400 new dwellings, commercial and shopping and community uses, business space including flexible working space and improved transport connectivity routes.

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 the areas which make up Whitstable town centre (these sub-ward levels of geography are called Lower Super Output Areas or LSOAs) are ranked between the fifth and seventh deciles (or 50-70%) of LSOAs in England in 2025.

This indicates low to moderate levels of deprivation in the town centre itself.

Despite this, one LSOA just south of the town centre, also part of Gorrell ward, experiences

comparatively high levels of deprivation. Overall, this area is ranked within the second decile (20% most deprived areas of the country).

Income, jobs and education and skills deprivation are key challenges in this LSOA.

In each of these three sub domains this LSOA is ranked in the 10% most deprived areas in the country.

Cultural and social infrastructure

Cultural infrastructure in Whitstable is densely located within the town centre boundary.

There is a particularly strong presence of the arts including the Horsebridge Centre and smaller galleries including the Fishslab, In A Space Hub and Creative Space in Red Lion Lane.

Also, Whitstable Playhouse and Whitstable Umbrella are established performance spaces.

Other significant cultural buildings include Whitstable Library and Whitstable Community Museum.

There are several schools within the vicinity of the town centre, with a cluster situated next to Whitstable Library. Whitstable Health Centre and Whitstable Family Hub are located next to the town's Gorrell Tank car park.

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). Whitstable forms an important part of Canterbury district's appeal and offer to visitors alongside the city, countryside and Herne Bay. Data for 2024 highlights that tourism supports 1,152 jobs in Whitstable, up by 5% from 2023. This equates to 2% of all jobs in the district's economy.

Total Whitstable visitor spend in 2024 was £42,706,000, equating to £66.40 per visitor trip. This was a higher spend/visitor trip compared to both Herne Bay (27% higher) and Canterbury (16% higher), reinforcing Whitstable's popularity as a day and overnight stay destination. Higher earning visitors are a key part of its market.

This Strategy and the Draft Local Plan

The draft Local Plan provides the statutory framework for how Whitstable's town centre should evolve and Policy W1 forms the core of that policy direction.

It identifies Whitstable as a distinctive and valued district centre whose independent shops, working harbour activity, heritage assets and cultural life should be safeguarded and enhanced.

While the draft Local Plan sets the broad requirements for maintaining vitality, supporting commercial uses and improving the quality of the public realm and sustainable transport connections, it does not attempt to describe how these policy intentions should be expressed within Whitstable's specific geography, character and community context.

This town centre strategy complements the draft Local Plan by interpreting Policy W1 through a place-based lens, translating its statutory requirements into a coherent, locally-grounded narrative for how the town centre should function and feel in practice.

The ambitions contained within Policy W1 closely reinforce the strategy principles that guide this document. Its emphasis on improving accessibility, strengthening active frontages and creating streets that are pleasant and safe for pedestrians aligns directly with the principle of putting people first on the high street.

The draft Local Plan's expectation that regeneration should enhance character, support mixed uses and improve the quality of public spaces reflects this strategy's commitment to shaping spaces for community life, celebration and year-round activity.

Policy W1's recognition of the harbour as a vital part of the town centre's identity provides the policy foundation for this strategy's approach to the harbour as a dynamic economic and cultural anchor.

Policy W2 references the Whitstable Harbour Strategic Plan, which identifies land east of the harbour (Zone D) as having potential for future mixed-use and leisure-led development.

This town centre strategy reinforces that ambition by clearly positioning the harbour as a complementary destination rather than a competing retail centre. The strategy emphasises leisure, cultural, creative

and maritime-related uses at the harbour that build on its working character and attract footfall, while maintaining the high street as the primary focus for independent retail.

By strengthening physical and functional connections between the harbour and the high street, the strategy ensures that new development on land east of the harbour supports town centre vitality, encourages movement between key destinations and reinforces a balanced, distinctive and resilient local economy. The policy's focus on sustainable transport, improved movement between key destinations and better gateways into the town centre supports the strategy's ambition to connect land and sea through active travel and to improve first impressions for residents and visitors alike.

Where the draft Local Plan seeks to protect Whitstable's commercial base and ensure its town centre remains vibrant and attractive, this town centre strategy interprets those objectives within the particular spatial and social realities of Whitstable. It considers the distinct character and function of Harbour Street, the High Street and Oxford Street and acknowledges the unique relationship between the working harbour and the town centre.

The draft Local Plan's recognition of the importance of heritage and cultural uses reinforces this strategy's commitment to nurturing Whitstable's creative identity, ensuring growth and change continue to be rooted in its distinctiveness.

Its emphasis on balancing the needs of residents with those of visitors reflects the strategy's ambition to maintain Whitstable as both a thriving home and a welcoming destination. In this way, the draft Local Plan establishes the what, while this town centre strategy provides the how.

Policy W1 sets out the statutory direction of travel, but the strategy gives it practical meaning by explaining how the aspirations of the draft Local Plan can be delivered on the ground in ways that reflect Whitstable's character, community priorities and everyday experience. Rather than repeating or replacing the draft Local Plan, this document adds the clarity needed to turn Policy W1 into an actionable, place-shaping framework that will guide Whitstable's evolution in the years ahead.



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Funeralcare

MARK SMITH

Image provided by Visit Canterbury © Alex Hare

Key challenges



Ensuring the town thrives beyond the summer season

Managing the needs of independent small businesses alongside industrial uses in the harbour. Balancing the ambition to incubate small businesses on the South Quay with the demand from visitors for a more consistent retail offer and the need to let larger vacant units.

Organising events effectively and viably without the support of a business funded partnership. Attracting residents into the town at quieter times of the year particularly over the winter period.



Ensuring independent businesses thrive despite rising rents

Ensuring the independent culture and heritage feel of the high street is not exclusive to Harbour Street.

Signposting tourists to explore and use the whole town centre.

Ensuring cultural spaces remain vibrant, viable and complementary of one another.



Growth that protects Whitstable's identity

The development of the mixed-use allocation at Whitstable harbour presents opportunities but may also threaten the unique character and viability of the high street.

Development briefs for this land must not undermine the working industrial uses which form a key part of the town's heritage and character.

Clearer links need to be made between the coastal path and the retail offers in both Whitstable and Tankerton.



Addressing traffic and pedestrian conflict on the high street

Whitstable's high street, with its narrow layout and steady mix of shoppers, cyclists, and delivery vehicles, has become a point of friction between pedestrians and motorists. The street was laid out long before modern traffic levels and its limited width mean cars, buses and pedestrians often have to share tight spaces, particularly during peak tourist season. Heavy footfall from visitors can make it difficult for vehicles to pass, while the constant movement of traffic can feel unsafe or unpleasant for those walking or browsing the high street.

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



Community drop-in session, Saturday 13th September, Whitstable, at South Quay Shed

Drop-in session summary

- Improvements are needed to the south end of the high street near the library.
- We should celebrate Whitstable's heritage.
- People love the independent shops and want vacant shops to be filled with diverse and creative uses.
- Public realm improvements/ pedestrianisation are needed to the High Street end of Harbour Street.
- People love the working harbour but would like to understand the heritage and have more activities there.
- Improve cycling routes and give pedestrians priority. Traffic is a safety concern on High Street.
- Affordable workspace and co-working space is needed for creative people.

Stakeholder meeting summary

- Important to retain a working harbour and not just a leisure and retail harbour.
- Getting a fish market back into town is important, but isn't viable on its own so needs a mix of uses to be successful.
- For the high street to thrive you need places where people don't need to spend money and are accessible to everybody.
- Signs are needed - a lot of attractions and spaces are not easy to find - if you arrive via the railway station it's not clear how to get to the top of the High Street or to Tankerton.
- How can you attract both residents and new visitors in the quieter winter period?
- Concern that Canterbury tends to dominate destination marketing activities in the district.

Local business meeting summary

- Business is very seasonal – there is a famine and feast contrast between winter and summer.
- Issues with parking charges.
- Interest in improving walkways and cycle ways to alleviate congestion.
- Traffic congestion along the High Street and Oxford Street negatively impacts the visitor experience.
- Need for improved wayfinding and signs including from the railway station to the town centre (including harbour) and Tankerton.
- Negativity towards groups of young people 'hanging around' outside business premises which can be intimidating.
- Need to retain the town's reputation and offer as a high-spend visitor destination.
- Issues with high rents and with moving or downsizing.

What have people said?

Public survey results

A total of 185 people responded to the public survey. There was a range of ages with less representation under 35 and over 75.

Key findings:

- 1. Locals love Whitstable's independent retail and want this to be diversified through addition of a fish market**
- 2. Addressing traffic congestion and improving pedestrian and cyclist experience is a priority**
- 3. Improvements to the beach experience are desired**

More things for teenagers to do to prevent anti-social behaviour

Upgrade some venues so these can accommodate live music and comedy in the town

Challenges in getting people to shop in the town where street parking is limited and parking charges are extortionate for everyday shopping

Traffic! Too much of it and parking is too expensive. No secure places to lock bicycles.

Key priorities

57% wanted to see improved traffic flow, and 45% wanted to make walking and cycling easier and safer

Active travel

46% say wider pavements and crossings would encourage them to walk to town, and 37% say less traffic would encourage them to cycle

Beaches

48% wanted better places to swim and 35% wanted new walking and cycling routes

Independent shops

72% said these spaces are the most important features

New spaces

65% of respondents want a fish market

Areas for improvement

Include Oxford Street (40%) and the beach/seafront

Public realm

48% said more places to dispose of rubbish would improve outdoor spaces and beaches

Whitstable's strengths

From the survey, the most common strengths mentioned about Whitstable were:

1. Its range of shops and independent businesses
2. The strong feeling of community
3. Its food and hospitality offer

Key things to get right



What's the context?

There are strong opportunities for development in the harbour with two large vacant units and a mixed-use development allocation to the east.



What's the context?

There are several strong green links within the wider area, including the seafront, Crab and Winkle Way and Stream Walk.

What needs to be done?

Balancing any new development at the harbour while retaining the vibrancy of the high street is key. This requires careful consideration of land use, particularly retail, cultural, industrial. Green corridors must connect better with the coastal cycling paths. Green leisure spaces next to or near the town centre must be better signposted.

Supporting quotes from public survey

Achieving a better balance between tourism & residents where all can enjoy what it has to offer without restriction or compromise.

No cars, space for cycles & pedestrians, far more trees & greenery, pleasant public spaces with seating for people to meet. A forward looking traffic free place to walk, cycle, shop, eat & enjoy. Clean sea water for swimming, and a local fish market.



What's the context?

There are relatively few public open spaces within the town centre or harbour, particularly those suitable for outdoor events.



What's the context?

Whitstable has a strong reputation for cultural activity, with infrastructure clustered throughout the town centre. Heritage is also important, contributing to a valuable town centre streetscape.

What needs to be done?

Existing public spaces should be improved, including the library square and potential pedestrianisation of Harbour Street. The harbour, Beach Street and Gladstone Road car parks could include flexible spaces for outdoor events. More imaginative ways of interpreting and sharing the town's rich industrial heritage need to be added to the public realm.

Supporting quotes from public survey

A buzzing tourist town with pride in its fishing industry but balanced with local town needs For residents which includes practical shops, not just artist galleries.

A town with uniqueness that draws tourists into a clean, thriving centre with great transport links. Whitstable is quite different to your average seaside town with a lot more to offer. Private & public investment has taken us from a sleepy backwater of a town to a jewel of the Kent coast.

Key things to get right



What's the context?

Connectivity throughout the town centre should be improved. Particularly connections between the high street and the harbour and routes from the railway station.



What's the context?

Significant growth is due to take place at the Brooklands Farm Site (W4) to the south of the town centre along the Crab and Winkle Way. This will bring increased footfall into the town centre.

What needs to be done?

New homes will be developed, in turn attracting new residents. The town centre needs to ensure this growth translates into increased trips and footfall to the town centre. New developments need to be well linked via good public transport and active travel routes.

The high street needs to be a safer more enjoyable space to walk with fewer cars and improved pedestrianisation.

Supporting quotes from public survey

Congestion from tourists during summer months, on the road, in car parks, and on pavements. A Park and Ride is desperately needed. Inconsiderate/selfish parking in the High St, usually abuse of loading bays, is a regular cause of congestion.

We need a bespoke strategy for the town based on our super unique characteristics and needs - to set us up for continued growth and success.



What's the context?

Whitstable is a popular destination for high spend visitors. Town centre deprivation is lower than the national average.



What's the context?

Whitstable's heritage is a key feature of the town centre but this has a more 'everyday' character than other destinations, relying on strong overall quality and character.

What needs to be done?

Whitstable must continue to attract high spend visitors including overnight stays, possibly looking at new target markets in west Kent for example.

The unique character of the town centre, seafront and harbour should be maintained, particularly within the harbour mixed-use allocation. Whitstable will attract people interested in learning about its heritage and industrial history.

Supporting quotes from public survey

A more accessible centre for people with mobility issues. A working fish market as there used to be. Better access to the beaches and sea for individuals with mobility issues. Cafes, restaurants and bars on the beach. More changing places and toilets.

The town has a heritage, reputation and 'a brand' - we are known for many positive things from the obvious 'oysters' and fishing, to being a creative place, foodie retreat, strong community and well being (sea swimming, town sauna, coastal runs etc).

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

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Vision

By 2043, Whitstable will be:

A magnet for people drawn to its lively maritime character, creative culture and historic charm, all year round.

Its working harbour and quirky independent high street will better balance the needs of its residents with its popularity as a tourist destination.

A greater variety of high-quality spaces will make sure the town is a desirable place to live and spend time in.

OYSTER BAR



JELLIED EELS 5 2
PIECES
COCKLES 2/6
" " 6^D
WHELKS 2/9
" " 6^D
LOBSTERS 5/6
CRAI

FOOD HYGIENE RATING
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

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Image provided by Visit Canterbury © Alex Hare

We Made That

Whitstable Town Centre Place Strategy

Strategy Principles

To achieve the vision, Whitstable should:

1. **Improve first impressions**

Designing a sequence of attractive and functional welcome features announcing people's arrival into Whitstable. This should guide vehicles to appropriate parking and help visitors navigate between the high street, harbour and beach. Clear, creative wayfinding will improve visitor flow and reduce pressure on the town centre.

2. **Connect land and sea through active travel**

Creating green links for walking and cycling connecting the station, high street and seafront towards Tankerton. New routes, such as the extension of the Crab and Winkle Way, will encourage active travel, reduce car dependency and connect the town's key gateways and attractions in a sustainable, enjoyable way.

3. **Put people first on the high street**

Tackling congestion and accessibility issues by creating a safer, more enjoyable pedestrian experience. Addressing pinch points and reducing traffic through the town centre by encouraging sustainable transport and better traffic management. A calmer and greener high street will strengthen the town's social life and support traders.

4. **Reimagine the harbour as a dynamic economic anchor**

Building on the success of the South Quay Shed by introducing new active uses that enhance Whitstable's unique mix of maritime industry and visitor experience. The harbour is a dynamic community asset at the town's heart - a place that sustains livelihoods while offering cultural experiences rooted in its seafaring heritage.

5. **Ensure the harbour and high street operate in harmony**

Ensuring new developments in and around the high street and harbour complement one another and contribute to Whitstable's character and vitality. Development should support mixed use, reflect local materials and scale, and prioritise spaces for people and sustainable transport.

6. **Shape spaces for community and celebration**

Introducing new public pockets of spaces for events, markets and community activities in the town centre and harbour area. These spaces will be inclusive, accessible and flexible, supporting year-round cultural programming and everyday social interaction.

7. **Nurture Whitstable's creative spirit**

Expand workspace opportunities for creative and cultural businesses and strengthen education links with the town's maritime and artistic heritage. Champion public art and projects that express Whitstable's identity and creativity, ensuring space for artists and makers remains part of the town's fabric.

8. **Balance the rhythm of visitors and residents**

Maintain Whitstable's popularity as a visitor destination while ensuring it remains a liveable, thriving home for its community. Encourage residents to shop and spend locally throughout the year and manage visitor growth in a way that supports businesses and sustains quality of life.

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. Improve first impressions

SDG 11 - Sustainable cities & communities

Enhancing gateways, signage and welcome points strengthens the inclusiveness, safety and usability of the town's arrival spaces. This contributes to more coherent movement patterns, clearer navigation and a higher-quality public realm, helping the town function more effectively and creating a positive experience for residents and visitors.

2. Connect land and sea through active travel

SDG 8 - Decent work and economic growth

SDG 13 - Climate action

Improving walking and cycling links between the station, high street and seafront supports more accessible places and reduces reliance on cars. Strengthening these routes encourages sustainable movement, cuts emissions and increases resilience by making it easier and safer for people to choose active modes of travel.

3. Put people first on the high street

SDG 11 - Sustainable cities & communities

SDG 3 - Good health & well-being

A safer, calmer and more welcoming high street improves accessibility, reduces conflict between users and creates a more enjoyable environment. Cleaner air, reduced traffic and safer crossings contribute directly to improvements in physical safety and general wellbeing, making the high street a healthier place to spend time.

4. Reimagine the harbour as a dynamic economic anchor

SDG 8 - Decent work & economic growth

SDG 9 - Industry, innovation & infrastructure

Developing the harbour as a place that supports local livelihoods, small businesses and a vibrant visitor offer

contributes to sustained, inclusive economic activity. Strengthening and upgrading harbour infrastructure enables a more resilient local economy, supports innovation and maintains the working character that underpins long term prosperity.

5. Ensure the harbour and high street operate in harmony

SDG 11 - Sustainable cities & communities

Coordinating development and movement between the town's two strongest anchors strengthens the sense of place and makes the town more legible and connected. This helps people move more seamlessly between key destinations while supporting a balanced mix of uses that reflect the town's distinctive identity.

6. Shape spaces for community and celebration

SDG 11 - Sustainable Cities & Communities

SDG 3 - Good health & well-being

Providing accessible and inclusive public spaces increases opportunities for social connection, everyday gathering and cultural activity. Such spaces enhance civic life, promote stronger community bonds and contribute to wellbeing by creating safe, welcoming environments for people of all ages.

7. Nurture Whitstable's creative spirit

SDG 8 - Decent work & economic growth

SDG 4 - Quality education

Expanding space for creative enterprise and supporting pathways into skills and learning strengthens the town's cultural economy and sustains livelihoods. Access to affordable workspace, training and creative opportunities helps local people develop skills, supports entrepreneurship and reinforces the town's identity.

8. Balance the rhythm of visitors and residents

SDG 12 - Responsible consumption & production

SDG 14 - Life below water

Managing seasonal pressures, supporting responsible visitor behaviour and protecting coastal assets helps maintain the town's distinctive offer without compromising quality of life. Ensuring that economic, cultural and environmental benefits are shared fairly contributes to a resilient year-round town that safeguards its coastal setting.



Image provided by Visit Canterbury © Josh Carter

04

Governance, Evaluation and 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. Vehicular traffic in the town centre is reduced and pedestrian safety at pinch points improved.

2. The wider harbour estate is actively developed to become a dynamic economic anchor for the town with high quayside occupancy.

3. New pockets of public realm are installed along the length of the high street to animate spaces and improve civic pride.

4. The town becomes less seasonal and more resilient - with residents having greater confidence in the town's infrastructure during the busy summer period.

5. There is more space for cultural and creative organisations.

6. Whitstable is greener with strong active travel connections along the coast and into Canterbury via the Crab & Winkle Way.

7. The town's heritage is preserved and celebrated with high quality shopfronts and forecourts.

8. Visitors report that they can more easily orientate themselves and have an improved first impression.

9. Whitstable has a strong calendar of community events that attracts visitors to the area throughout the year.

10. The harbour actively supports small businesses and the fishing fleet. It also supports, not detracts, from the high street.

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 Whitstable 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 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 Whitstable is moving in the right direction rather than on the delivery of individual schemes.

Monitoring activity will track changes in the town 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 Whitstable's evolution.

Projects and Action Plans

This strategy provides the long-term vision and strategic principles for Whitstable's town 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 Whitstable 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 Reviews (CGRs) in Whitstable.

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 town centre strategy and will remain critical to its ultimate success.

The delivery ambitions set out within the strategy will require an effective coordination of effort, 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 Review (CGR) 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 town centre priorities for 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 town 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 Whitstable through a Community Governance Review. 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 town 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 decision-makers, 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 town 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

Connected Coast Board

The Connected Coast Board brings together private, public and voluntary sectors to provide strategic leadership to develop and deliver a series of interventions to secure government funding and assist those interventions with completing business cases and preparing for delivery. Its portfolio of strategic work sets out a clear understanding of the area, focusing on its assets, opportunities and challenges. It will be the vehicle through which the Levelling Up vision and strategy for East Lindsey is defined. Following agreement of the Mablethorpe and Skegness Town Deals with the Government, the Board provides strategic direction and oversight to the delivery of the Town Deal projects.

The Chair is appointed on an independent basis and is not a serving councillor, which is intended to provide impartial leadership and constructive challenge. Board membership is drawn from a range of separate constituencies, including local authorities, business, education, skills, and other key partners, rather than being confined to a single organisation or political body. This breadth of representation is designed to ensure that decisions reflect a wide range of local perspectives and expertise, reinforcing the Board's role as a partnership rather than an extension of any individual council.



Connected Coast 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.

For example, Margate's Creative Land Trust (case study to the right), was born from the community engagement and stewardship approach put in place to shape and deliver Margate's Town Investment Plan.

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

Margate Creative Land Trust

In 2020 Thanet District Council and the Margate Town Deal Board developed a Town Investment Plan (TIP) underpinned by extensive community engagement and a widespread desire to transform Margate into a town with a strong year-round economy.

The TIP charts a 10-year course of improvements for Margate, focusing on scaling its creative economy and skills through key projects and a new Creative Land Trust; tackling deep health inequalities by providing more wellbeing amenities linked to Margate's coast; improving public realm and connectivity and making Margate's nationally-renowned heritage assets more sustainable and inclusive.

The Margate Creative Land Trust (MCLT) now has a fully operational board of trustees and has acquired its first asset, a former garage site which will be transformed into new creative workspace on Harold Road, Margate.

Creatives help to create a distinct attraction and 'buzz' in areas where accessible and affordable commercial spaces exist but are amongst the first to be priced out when market and visitor interest transforms into higher rents. MCLT's purpose is to safeguard sites for creative industries, mainly through buying property and taking headleases with a view to subletting at discounted rates.



Margate Creative Land Trust

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