5.10a. District Dashboard Swale

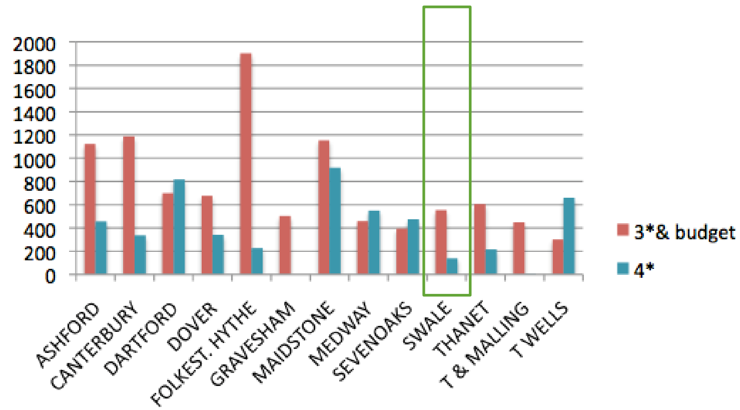
Swale, like Dover district, shows a marked contrast in the number of business bed-nights compared with holiday bed-nights. Paid accommodation accounts for a relatively high proportion of total trips to Swale, at 60% (equal to Ashford, and slightly ahead of Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells at 57%) – however, Swale comes in the bottom third of districts for both 3*/budget and 4* hotel accommodation, with much of its accommodation provision in campsite and holiday park locations. Airbnb provision is moderately low, with some growth and a slight balance towards entire home rentals. There are two concentrations of provision around Faversham and the Isle of Sheppey, and the **rental demand** metric is in midway position when compared with the other Kent districts.

10/13 for **BUSINESS NIGHTS**: 139,000 bed-nights = 5.6% of total for Kent
4/13 for **HOLIDAY NIGHTS**: 853,000 bed-nights = 10.6% of total for Kent

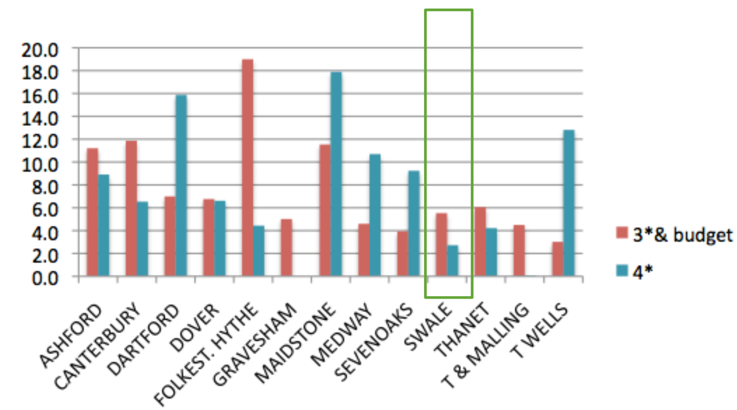
7 **MICE-ready** accommodation establishments = 6.5% of county total
Total **MICE capacity**: 1,280 = 7.9% of county capacity within accommodation establishments
Largest single MICE venue capacity: 250

Group tour-ready establishments: 7 = 7.6% of Kent total

Airbnb 270 **ACTIVE RENTALS** with a **rental growth** of **350%** between 2016 (Q2) and 2019 (Q2). **Rental demand** 72 (joint 8th/13)



3* and 4* bed distribution by district



3* and 4* bed nos by district as percentage of county total

Sources of data for district dashboards: Extrapolated from Destination Research 2018, Visit Kent Business Barometers, CCCU Accommodation Database audit and Airdna webpages (subscription to district level data).

Visitor Offer

Swale's visitor offer is spread over the Isle of Sheppey and the mainland, which comprises both rural areas and the towns of Sittingbourne and Faversham. Sheppey offers a 'traditional', camping and caravanning holiday product in the north of the island, whilst some niche developments in the south, where the Elmley National Nature Reserve is located, play to its outstanding landscape and food offer. On the mainland, camping and caravanning is also part of the rural offer, whilst the historic market town of Faversham is popular for heritage and locally produced food and drink. The climate change agenda is driving the development of new walking and cycling infrastructure, including improved signage, and trails for walkers and cyclists in rural areas and towns (e.g. the Faversham Food Trails).

Key Drivers for the Visitor Economy

The visitor economy is regarded as having a key role to play in supporting local communities, injecting life back into high streets by moving beyond the retail offer to bring in innovative businesses and organisations which can generate a creative buzz and new levels of interest in town centres.

Over half the county's camping and caravan provision is located on Sheppey, primarily in the coastal areas in the north, but a wider accommodation offer is required to shift perceptions, create more local opportunities, and cater for the island's businesses and industries (such as Peel Ports in Sheerness). However, it is important to maintain a balance in the island's provision, to diversify the offer without saturating the island with inappropriate development.

Drivers

Main:

Policy - Strategic policy is an important element shaping the visitor economy in Swale, with a focus on supporting partnership across sectors to put the visitor economy at the centre of economic development and regeneration in the district.

Location - proximity to London and continent.

Supplementary:

Visitor offer – Council strategies focus on developing the district's visitor offer through public realm improvements and its new Heritage Strategy 2020-2032.

Potential:

Infrastructure projects– Peel Ports Development, Sheppey - plans to transform 50 acre site, and create up to 1000 additional jobs.

Visitor offer – London Resort, Swanscombe Peninsula.

Gaps in Provision

Hotel development on the mainland is held back largely by infrastructure bottlenecks. Swale's position en route to the ports and Eurotunnel mean that a market exists for group travel, but despite the lack of hotels suitable for groups, more coach parking facilities are required to support expansion in group accommodation. The lack of infrastructure also holds back capacity to host events in the Borough.

Some rural locations are seeing demand for the new glamping offer, and there is also a need for more coastal accommodation beyond camping and caravanning. However, an increase in the supply of mid-range hotels would probably not be sustainable; whereas small scale hotels, guesthouses and quality pub accommodation are proving popular in Faversham.

As far as MICE provision is concerned, the Borough is able to make use of the excellent conference and event facilities available at some of the larger company premises in the district (for example in the Kent Science Park at Sittingbourne). This is one area in which partnerships across sectors (visitor economy and business/industry) can be fruitfully developed.

Links to key planning and policy documents

Visitor Economy Framework 2018-2023:
https://services.swale.gov.uk/meetings/documents/s8850/APPENDIX%20Visitor%20Economy%20Framework.pdf

Corporate Plan 2019-2022: (consultation draft) – sets out political priorities and delivery, and determine resource allocation https://services.swale.gov.uk/meetings/documents/s11246/Corporate%20plan%202019-2022%20V3-0%20public%20consultation.pdf

Swale Heritage Strategy 2020-2032 – completed consultation *(document not yet available)*

Bearing Fruits 2031 – Swale Borough Local Plan:
http://services.swale.gov.uk/media/files/localplan/adoptedlocalplanfinalwebversion.pdf

Priority gaps

Small-scale coastal accommodation

Glamping

Support for inward investment:

Enabling environment:
Swale is keen to pursue larger scale planning developments, with opportunities for mixed use, include accommodation. The Heritage Strategy also identifies larger buildings which could be repurposed to meet new needs.