

Dover District Council Draft Local Plan – Tourism Strategy and Tourism Topic Paper submitted as evidence for Regulation 19 by Debbie Turner

I have carefully studied the *Tourism and Visitor Economy Strategy*¹ and *Tourism Topic paper*² submitted by Dover District Council with respect to Regulation 19 Dover District Council Draft Local Plan.

Much of the tourism data and information contained in the Strategy and Topic Paper is largely derived from the *Economic Impact of Tourism – Dover 2021*³ report commissioned by Dover District Council and produced by Visit Kent.

There are a number of inconsistencies and discrepancies in the DDC Tourism Strategy, Tourism Topic Paper and Visit Kent reports that are cause for concern. Given that the Tourism Strategy and Topic Paper have been submitted as evidence to support the Regulation 19 Dover District Draft Local Plan, it is questionable how much credence can be given to them.

For example, DDC's Tourism Strategy states that, 'The tourism industry is a major contributor to the local economy with 17% of all employment in the Dover District either tourism or visitor based, supporting 6,071 jobs in 2019'. These figures are also repeated in the Tourism Topic Paper, but no indication is provided how these figures were derived.

However, the Visit Kent report says that 15% of all employment in the Dover District is tourism related. The figure of 15% employment in tourism was estimated from surveys which arrived at a figure of 3,710 of directly supported tourism jobs and 812 non-tourism related jobs linked to multiplier spend from tourism giving an estimated total of 4,522 tourism related jobs.

The Visit Kent report also gives the total number of people employed in the Dover District as 30,924 in 2021. However, the 2021 Census gives a figure of 35,000 for the total number employed in the Dover District. For 2019 and 2020, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) figures for the total employed in the Dover District is given as 34,000 and 33,000 respectively. Even using Visit Kent's estimated figure of 4,522 tourism jobs, this equates to 13% of all employment in the Dover District is tourism related (based on the Census 2021 figure of 35,000 employed). Significantly less than the 17% quoted in the DDC Tourism Strategy and Topic Paper and less than the 15% quoted in the Visit Kent report.

However, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) data for 2021 (Table 1) gives 3,900 people were employed in the Accommodation & food service and Arts, entertainment & recreation sectors in the Dover District, equating to 11.2% of the total number employed in these sectors in the Dover District.

Table 1. 2021 Census employment data

	Dover District	Dover %	Kent	Kent %	South East %	Gt. Britain %
Accommodation & food services	3000	8.6	47000	7.5	7.3	7.2
Arts, entertainment & recreation	900	2.6	13000	2.1	2.3	2.3
Total	3900	11.2	60000	9.6	9.6	9.5

Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS) Business Register and Employment Survey, 2021

Notes: Numbers and % are for those of 16+ % is a proportion of all persons in employment

¹ Destination White Cliffs Country - Growth Strategy for tourism and the visitor economy 2020-2030. Executive Summary Dover District Council (May 2021)

² Topic Paper: Tourism Regulation 18 Consultation on the Draft Local Plan, Dover District Council (December 2020)

³ Economic Impact of Tourism White Cliffs Country (Dover District) 2021 results, Visit Kent (November 2022)

In addition, DDC's Tourism Strategy and Tourism Topic Paper emphasise that it is the aim of DDC to increase visitor numbers and overnight stays in the district. Figures from DDC's Tourism Strategy, (derived from the Visit Kent Report) state that the average length of stay in the Dover district is 3.42 nights (annual average 2000-2019).

Interestingly, a comparison of the number of overnight stays in the Dover District and Kent with the neighbouring counties of East and West Sussex (in which the same Cambridge Model analysis was used in the Visit Kent report), shows the average length of stay in the Dover District as 3.4 days and the average length of stay in Kent as 3.7 days, compared to 2.7 days for East Sussex and 2.5 days for West Sussex.⁴ The England average is 3.0 days.

This would suggest that both the Dover District and Kent as a whole, attract longer visitor stays than neighbouring East and West Sussex and the England average, which contradicts DDC's claim that the district is under performing in this respect.

DDC's Tourism Strategy states that:

'It is fully aligned with the objectives of Dover District Council's Corporate Plan, Local Plan, Heritage Strategy, Climate Change Strategy and Economic Growth Strategy. We have also adopted the five strategic pillars of the Government's 'Tourism Sector Deal' and 'UK Industrial Strategy' as its core themes. These pillars are: Ideas, People, Place, Business Environment and Infrastructure.'

However, DDC are seemingly unaware that since the launch of the UK Government's *Industrial Strategy* in 2017,⁵ the fundamental purpose of which was to address poor productivity in the UK, particularly outside the South East, that the *Industrial Strategy* was scrapped by the Government in March 2021 and replaced with '*Build Back Better: Our 'Plan for Growth'*', intended to reflect the new economic circumstances post Covid-19.⁶

Similarly, the '*Tourism Sector Deal*,'⁷ also part of the UK Industrial Strategy, was likewise scrapped and replaced with the Government's '*Tourism Recovery Plan*' in June 2021.⁸

Therefore, DDC's Tourism Strategy, which adopted as its core themes, the five strategic pillars of, Ideas, People, Place, Business, Environment and Infrastructure, from the Government's 'Tourism Sector Deal' and 'UK Industrial Strategy', and which has been submitted to support the Council's Draft Local Plan, is irrelevant, and arguably now in need of review.

⁴ Sussex Visitor Economy Baseline Report, Blue Sail (July 2021)

⁵ Industrial Strategy: Building a Britain fit for the future. HM Government (2017)

⁶ Build Back Better: Our plan for growth. HM Government (March 2021)

⁷ Industrial Strategy: Tourism Sector Deal. HM Government (2019)

⁸ The Tourism Recovery Plan, Department for Digital, Culture, Media, & Sport (June 2021)