



# WESTGATE-ON-SEA COASTAL COMMUNITY TEAM

*together with Westgate-on-Sea Town Council*

## AN ECONOMIC PLAN FOR THE REGENERATION OF



## WESTGATE-ON-SEA

Westgate-on-Sea  
THANET  
The Ideal Watering Place.



CHILDREN'S CORNER, ST. MILDREDS BAY, WESTGATE-ON-SEA. 8892

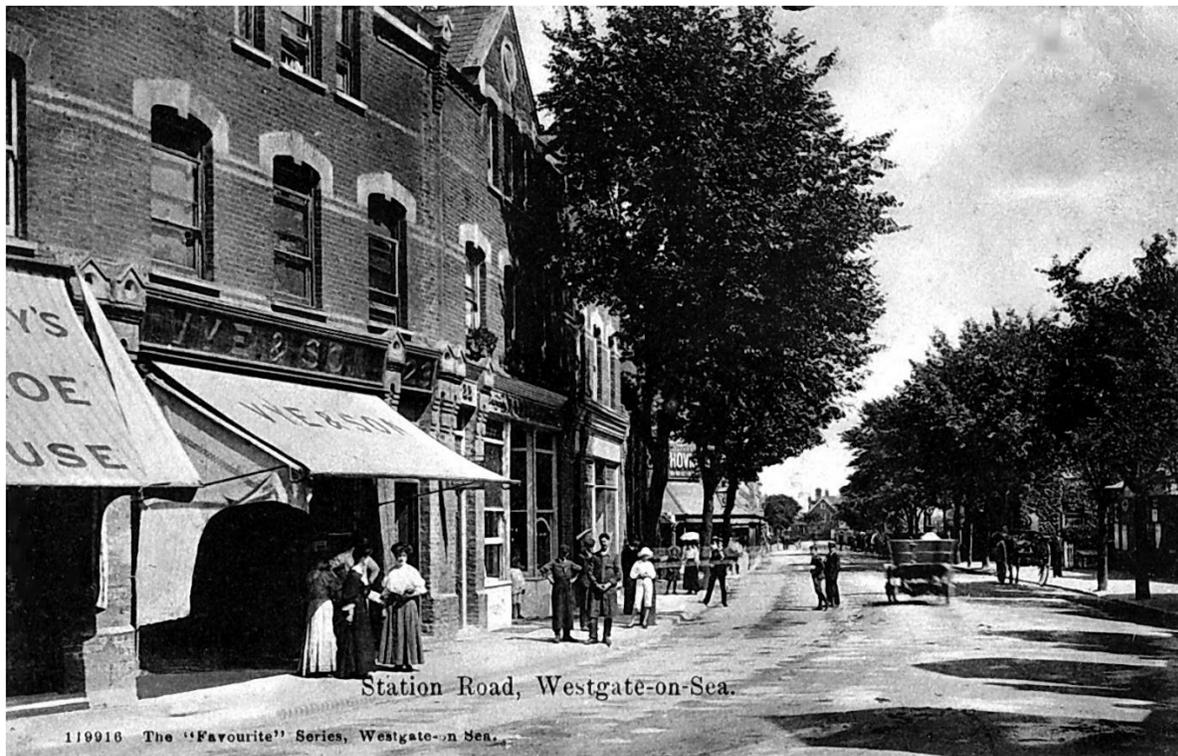
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Mr J. E. WOODS, Secretary, Westgate-on-Sea Advertising Committee  
or Mr G. PEDDER, Clerk to the Council

## Introduction and Context – our starting point

Westgate-on-Sea is a relatively small coastal resort beautifully situated on the Thames estuary.

Westgate-on-Sea was developed originally as a private estate for wealthy London-based families wishing to holiday by the sea at a distance from Margate, following the opening in 1871 of the railway station, which still lies at the heart of the town (its story is told in a series of brochures written by Dr Dawn Crouch and produced by the Westgate Heritage Centre). The town has wide sandy beaches at St Mildred's Bay and West Bay; traditional-style beach huts give a colourful splash to the promenade which links the beaches, and there are many small rock pools which are popular with children. The beaches have nearby cafés, and share a Blue Flag Award. Nearer the centre of town, two grassy squares echo the parts of London which the original developers sought to emulate.





It now has a population of around 7,000, and borders the larger seaside resort of Margate to the east, and its neighbour town of Birchington to the west, on the Isle of Thanet. The main road and railway divide the town into two parts, the southern part being mainly composed of newer houses.

However the town and its infrastructure have not been well maintained for decades, and much of the employment in the town is in low-wage sectors such as retail, and care of the elderly. We now need urgently to address the challenges which face the town and the community.

We start from a position with many strengths, notably:

- A strong and visible historical heritage as the town was founded and grew rapidly in the late Victorian period – this heritage is protected through a Conservation Area;
- Two beautiful sandy beaches, lots of rock pools, and the amazing panorama of the sea;
- Walks on a wide promenade and cycle paths along the coast from Westgate to Margate, all part of the Margate Coastal Park initiative;
- Strong solidarity and identity of the local population, including several local people active in the business community;
- Good transport links;
- Three good primary schools and several good secondary schools in the area;
- An inviting street of shops and tea-rooms, run mostly by local people;

- A lively and picturesque cinema; and
- A variety of local voluntary organizations catering for many aspects of community life.

However, life in Westgate-on-Sea has been changing over the last 20 years or so, presenting us with a number of challenges.

- A very high proportion of residents of retirement age (31% compared with a national average for England of 19%);
- Loss of resort amenities, in particular the closure of the hotels and the virtual absence of overnight accommodation for visitors;
- The poor economic situation of Thanet in general (see annex 1), which limits growth prospects for local businesses;
- The creation of a large shopping complex (Westwood Cross) nearby which has attracted shoppers away from smaller centres like Westgate-on-Sea.

The past few years have seen the loss of a number of events which served to strengthen the local community and attract visitors, in particular those which were fun for children (especially those from the local schools), such as the pancake race, as well as some amenities like the putting green. Family outings from Westgate tend to focus on the Westwood Cross shopping centre rather than the town itself.

However the community is responding as best it can to some of these challenges, for instance through 'Westgate against rubbish' which holds litter-picking days and works in co-operation with similar groups in neighbouring towns. The willingness to work together and in particular for the schoolchildren to play their part in the community is strong.

The decline of some key facilities is typified by the Westgate Pavilion. Originally a bandstand, it was converted in 1925 to a 600-seat theatre, but urgently requires restoration. The Community Centre, situated in the south of the town, needs completely rebuilding in order to play its part in the town's regeneration.

### **Objectives – our aims**

The regeneration can only be achieved by mobilizing the existing energy and goodwill of all those involved in this venture. The CCT is there to give some direction and co-ordination but is only the focal point of wider efforts. Moreover the CCT will work in tandem with those drawing up the Neighbourhood Plan. It will take into account the results of the survey of residents conducted by the Town Council in early 2016, which identified cleanliness, activities for young people, and evening activities, as areas to make Westgate-on-Sea more attractive.

Our **overall objectives** are to regenerate Westgate-on-Sea as a thriving seaside resort, and to create a better environment for residents to live in. This initiative is inclusive of the newer part of the town, south of the main road.

The selling points for this approach are wellbeing, heritage and creativity.

Wellbeing: The wide beaches and sea air, just a short train ride from the pressure and pollution of London, are very attractive – just as they were to Westgate’s original investors. The idea of a weekend – or even a day - in such an environment might appeal to many.

Heritage: Much more can be made of this, including a full-time heritage outlet in the main shopping area, selling late Victorian and Edwardian memorabilia, photos and videos demonstrating Westgate’s development. The town is of particular interest in relation to the architecture of the period and has several large houses from the period.

This can be combined with a family emphasis in relation to beach/seafront activities such as donkey rides. The town is planning the renovation of the two shelters overlooking the sea.

Given the proximity of Westgate-on-Sea to Margate and Birchington, the opportunity to organize events jointly or with a common theme could be interesting – one area is of course music, but others such as fine art could be possible, not least given the importance of the area in the work of J. M. W. Turner.

Creativity: Westgate has scarcely begun to advertise its creative legacy and indeed its present role as a creative centre. The artist Sir William Quiller Orchardson painted some of his best-known pictures while living in Westgate, and Louis Wain, renowned for his anthropomorphic paintings of cats, lived in the town from 1894, but there is currently no evidence of this in the town.

In the short term, we are looking to **strengthen the community** and to **increase footfall** by improving the shopping environment and raising the profile of the town, and by organizing events to strengthen the local community and attract the public in. It is a key objective of the new Town Council, which has created an Events and Tourism Committee to support this approach.

In the longer term, we plan to:

- (i) **expand the accommodation available** for visitors and holiday-makers. This would involve the creation of B&B capacity, leading to the re-establishment of hotels, and ideally facilities for business meetings and small conferences.
- (ii) **Develop a 'heritage strategy'** which will bring together the key elements of the town’s past and relate them to the present day. Its focus would be a full-time outlet in the centre of the town to bring together information on all the various themes. It could include the development of a 'heritage hotel' which would be a building renovated to its original state, available for short-term lets and open to the public at certain times.

## Initiatives – our means

At this early stage, our plans to increase footfall are to implement the following initiatives:

### **Shopping centre:**

- Support existing successful community-led ventures such as the Christmas lights, pancake race etc;
- Renovate the Victorian aspect of the shopping centre, in particular through the restoration of the distinctive corrugated iron canopies;
- Improve the look of the shopping area by flower baskets and planters, and regular cleaning;
- Produce videos and leaflets to increase awareness of the town, for instance via Thanet websites;
- Use the station as an advertising platform to encourage visitors (the station will celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its opening in 2021).

### **Events:**



- A major element of this approach will be the renovation of the Pavilion, on the seafront (bottom right-hand corner of the photograph), as a venue for a variety of events;

- The two churches in the town have impressive possibilities for housing musical and choral recitals, especially attractive at Christmas;
- We plan to give the beaches and seafront a traditional seaside atmosphere with the re-introduction of donkey rides, etc;
- To support existing events based on the town's rich historical heritage, a more structured approach is being introduced with planned and guided walks, more information boards, 'thematic' heritage activities (such as a food fair) and brochures explaining the town's development;
- Upgrading of the children's play area at Lymington Road Park, and the children's tidal pool in St Mildred's Bay, will provide better amenities for residents and also help to bring families into the town.

Like all coastal resorts, we will look to develop the offer of activities such that there are things to do during the times when the tide puts the beaches out of use. We also need a seasonal balance; while the town is always going to be more popular as a resort in the summer, we also need to attract people during the winter months.

The town can benefit from the revival of Margate in recent years if the right tourist facilities can be provided. To improve the supply of accommodation for visitors and holiday-makers, we will encourage the growth of B&B accommodation in the town, with a view to the eventual re-establishment of hotels in the town, possibly together with conference facilities.

The town currently has quite a large language school which houses its students with local residents, and this may provide a model for developing B&B facilities.

### **Implementation – how we'll do it**

Constitution of the CCT is the first step on a long journey in which community involvement will be strengthened and broadened. Amongst the first actions of the CCT will be to contact the businesses in Westgate-on-Sea which are members of the local Chamber of Commerce, to discuss ways in which small and medium-sized enterprises (SME's) could be given more help.

The Westgate-on-Sea Town Council, with the help and support of Thanet District Council, will act as the main framework for the CCT's efforts. The Council has only been in existence since May 2015, matters affecting Westgate having been dealt with directly by Thanet District Council and its predecessors for the last 80 years. The Council will develop new communication tools with the aim of involving all the residents in a permanent dialogue on the regeneration of the town. Good relations with the other CCT's in the area will be essential, in the framework of the umbrella group chaired by Thanet District Council.

It is hoped that the programme of short-term measures outlined above can all be delivered in the next two years, by the end of 2018 (see Action Plan, annex 3).

## ANNEX I: MAIN INDICATORS

Indicator	Westgate	Thanet	Kent
% adults on Income support	2,3%	2,9%	1,9%
% Jobseekers	2,1%	3,0%	1,4%
Attendance allowance	18,5%	15,4%	13,1%
Disability allowance	7,5%	6,8%	4,6%
Pension credits	20,0%	16,8%	11,4%
In bad/very bad health	8,5%	7,5%	5,1%
Life expectancy at birth: Men	73 years	77,6 yrs	79,9 yrs
Women	77	82,5	83,4

Sources: TDC and ONS websites

## ANNEX 2: MEMBERSHIP OF THE COASTAL COMMUNITY TEAM

The team is made up of representatives of:

Westgate-on-Sea Town Council (chairs the team)

Local Primary and Secondary schools

The Westgate Heritage Centre

Conservation Area Advisory Group

Shopowners and businesses

Churches and children's/youth work

Mr Geoff Orton (co-opted)

The Coastal Communities Fund (CCF) encourages the economic development of UK coastal communities by giving funding to create sustainable economic growth and jobs. Since the start of the CCF in 2012, grants have been awarded to 218 organisations across the UK to the value of £125 million. This funding is forecast to deliver over 12,000 jobs and help attract over £240 million of additional funds to coastal areas. £90 million is available for projects in the period 2017/18 to 2020/2021.

ANNEX 3: ACTION PLAN

ACTION	By end-2017	By end-2018	By end-2019
Support community-led ventures ( Christmas lights, pancake race, etc)	X		
Improve upkeep of the shopping areas	X		
Produce material to increase awareness of the town	X		
Use the station as an advertising platform	X		
Create a traditional seaside atmosphere	X		
Renovate seafront shelters	X		
Organize musical events to attract visitors		X	
Upgrade and expand children’s play areas		X	
Implement a ‘heritage strategy’		X	
Develop B&B options		X	
Renovate Westgate Pavilion			X
Restore shop canopies			X
Rebuild Community Centre			X