

January's Tourism Matters: Start the year right - news, awards and events

Dear Tourism Industry Colleague

Welcome to our first Tourism Matters of 2026. We hope you all had a good festive break and New Year.

In this issue, save the date for English Tourism Week in March, make your nominations in the Kent and Medway Food and Drink Awards, read the latest news on Margate's Theatre Royal and enter your images of the coast into the East Kent Coast photography competition.

Tourism and Visitor Services News

Exciting news: Save the Date for the Thanet Tourism and Hospitality Industry Event!

Mark your calendars for **Tuesday 24 March 2026!** We are delighted to announce our Tourism and Hospitality Industry Event at **Chapel House Estate between 10am and 1pm.**

This is a fantastic opportunity to network with fellow Thanet businesses and hear about the latest updates, developments, and upcoming opportunities for 2026 and beyond.

We will be sending you further information in the coming weeks.

Tourism team out and about!

Our Tourism and Culture Manager, Paula Harbidge, was invited to represent us at the Dutch Travel Show, Vakantiebeurs (8 to 11 January), on the England Coast stand. A competition for a two-night stay in Ramsgate proved successful, generating significant interest in our part of the Kent Coast and allowing us to gather valuable visitor data.

Despite extreme weather including snow and freezing temperatures, the level of interest and the number of competition entries for our English Coast destination actually increased.

Visitor Information Services opening hours

The **Thanet Visitor Information Centre** at Droit House, Margate, is open from 10am to 4pm, Wednesday to Sunday during January and 10am to 5pm during February. During the February half term (Monday 16 to Friday 20 February), the centre will be open daily.

Broadstairs Information Kiosk on the promenade will reopen for the 2026 season on Thursday 2 April until Sunday 4 October. The kiosk will be open daily (weather permitting) 10am - 4pm.

Ramsgate Visitor Information at The Custom House, Harbour Parade, is open every day from 11am to 3pm until the end of March.

Business Support

A Warm Welcome for All: Grow Your Business with Accessible Tourism Webinar

Is your business ready to welcome everyone?

Accessible tourism is about much more than just ticking boxes; it's about making sure every visitor feels truly welcome on the Isle of Thanet.

Join us and **Tourism for All** on **Thursday, 26th February at 11am** for an insightful webinar on how small changes can make a huge difference, both for your visitors and your growth.

We'll explore how to tap into the "Purple Pound" (worth £14.6bn!) by making sure every visitor, regardless of their needs, feels truly welcome to enjoy the best of Thanet.

Don't miss this **FREE** opportunity to hear from industry experts in a tailored webinar for Thanet businesses.

We'd love to see you there! To save your place and receive the link, just send a quick hello to lisa.powell@thanet.gov.uk to register.

FREE - Fully Funded Accessibility Assessments Available for Thanet Businesses

As part of the **Stronger Together** project, funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), we are offering local businesses a valuable opportunity to receive a professional, guided assessment of their venue's accessibility, provided by AccessAble, a leading expert in the field.

What you will receive:

- **A Quality-Assured Detailed Access Guide:** A professional access surveyor will conduct the assessment and create a comprehensive guide. This guide removes the guesswork for visitors with access needs, building confidence and encouraging them to choose your business by knowing exactly what to expect.
- **Widespread Publication:** All Access Guides are published and searchable on AccessAble's established website, which is used by over six million people annually.
- **Accessibility Improvement Report:** Businesses will also receive a detailed report outlining potential areas for improvement.

Benefit and Funding:

These valuable assessments are worth up to **£205**. We are currently able to fully fund this for businesses on a **first-come, first-served basis for a limited time**.

How to Register:

To express your interest or to find out more, please contact lisa.powell@thanet.gov.uk

Become a Disability Confident Employer with FREE mentoring

We are pleased to be able to offer fully-funded, 1:1 mentoring sessions with **Shane Forster from The Education People** (worth over £500 per business) who will enable you to either start your journey to become a [Disability Confident Employer](#) or progress beyond your current level.

Why take part?:

By becoming Disability Confident, you gain immediate access to a wider talent pool and improve employee retention. This status significantly reduces your legal risk under the Equality Act 2010 while boosting your brand reputation and allowing you to tap directly into the billions associated with the "Purple Pound," increasing market opportunities.

This is a fantastic, rare chance that we've secured through UK Shared Prosperity funding. This free 1:1 mentoring is your chance to immediately unlock new visitor spending and truly invest in your business's future at no cost to you.

To find out more please contact francesca.sayer-doyle@thanet.gov.uk

Thanet Business Support Programme

[Ramsgate Space CIC](#) is delivering a business support series as part of the Thanet Business Support Programme, on behalf of Thanet District Council and funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

First Aid for small and micro businesses- spaces still available

This practical first aid session covers the essential skills needed to respond confidently in an emergency. Topics include assessing a situation, supporting unresponsive casualties (including CPR and use of an AED), managing choking, seizures, bleeding and shock, and treating minor injuries such as burns, bites and stings.

The session includes practical assessment throughout, covering wound care, care of an unconscious casualty and CPR, alongside a short multiple-choice assessment.

Friday 27 February, 9am - 4pm at [Thanet Visitor Information Centre](#) (The Droit House, Stone Pier, Margate CT9 1JD) Spaces available

High Street Business Support

Tourism and Place Marketing: What it Means for Your High Street Business

Tuesday 10th February 6pm-7.30pm at Ramsgate Space, 17 Albert Court

The event will begin with a short panel discussion featuring: Paula Harbidge, Tourism & Culture Manager, Thanet District Council and Lila Allen, Editor, Ramsgate Recorder

This session is for independent high street and town centre businesses across Thanet who want a clearer understanding of how tourism and place marketing impacts footfall and trading. Bringing tourism leads, local media and town stakeholders into the room, it focuses on how businesses can engage with and benefit from how towns are promoted.

It will explore how tourism strategies are shaped, how local stories are shared, and simple ways businesses can align activity and messaging with visitor marketing.

This session is ideal if you are:

- Trading on the high street and want to increase footfall
- Part of the visitor economy or hospitality sector
- Interested in closer links with town or tourism teams
- Designed to fit around the realities of running a business.

[RSVP here](#)

Accessing Finance for your Business - Lisa Young, Let's Do Business

Tuesday 24th February 8.30am- 9.30am at Broadstairs Venue TBC

This session is for independent high street businesses across Thanet who want a clearer understanding of funding options and how to prepare before applying. The session focuses on finance options for small businesses. It will cover common reasons businesses seek finance, the types of funding available, what funders look for, and how simple cashflow forecasting can support better decisions.

This session is ideal if you are:

- Already trading and feeling cashflow pressure
- Planning investment in stock, equipment or your space

- Exploring finance options for the first time
- The session is designed to fit around the realities of running a business.

[RSVP here](#)

There are more talks and panels, plus further events TBC, please check <https://www.ramsgatespace.co.uk/thanetbusinesssupport> for further information

Tourism Alliance-Business Rates Impact Poll

We have been asked to circulate the Tourism Alliance survey to collect quick evidence to support representations to the Government on business rates changes from April 2026.

The survey is made up of 4 questions, taking about 2 minutes to complete. Please complete the [survey here](#)

VisitEngland - English Tourism Week 2026

VisitEngland's annual English Tourism Week celebrates the tourism industry. The dates are Friday 13 to Sunday 22 March.

The theme for 2026 is '**Local Stories, National Growth - Celebrating English Tourism**'.

To find out more about the event, how you can get involved and to access a toolkit of assets, visit the [website here](#)

Thanet District Council

Cabinet approves recommendations for Margate Theatre Royal restoration

Thanet District Council's Cabinet considered and approved recommendations for the funding and future operation of Margate's Theatre Royal at a meeting on Thursday 22 January. The report outlines the next steps to completing the essential building works and finding a long-term, independent operator to run the historic venue.

You can read more about this in the [council's newsroom](#)

Update on the Walpole Bay beach facilities

Plans to provide new facilities at Walpole Bay in Cliftonville were approved by the council's Planning Committee on Wednesday 17 December.

The planning application is for a small two-storey café, a single storey community building, accessible toilets and outdoor cold water showers at Hodges Gap.

You can find out more about the plans on the [council website](#)

Share your thoughts on the draft Air Quality Strategy

Thanet District Council's draft Air Quality Strategy has been developed to help protect and improve local air quality and public health. It outlines the current air quality in our district, the reasons for improvement and proposed plans.

People who live, work or own a business in Thanet are invited to share their views on the draft strategy. The feedback received will be reviewed to ensure that the strategy is practical and effective.

You can read the draft strategy and fill out the survey on [Your Voice Thanet](#). The survey is open until **Monday 23 February 2025**.

Improving Jackey Bakers Recreation Ground

Thanet District Council hopes to unlock up to £6 million in grant funding to improve the facilities at Jackey Bakers Recreation Ground in Ramsgate. This project is in partnership with the Football Foundation.

The council wants to understand what facilities and features people value most. These could be play areas, sports facilities, nature spaces, and accessibility improvements.

The survey is live on Your Voice Thanet until Monday 2 March.

(<https://yourvoice.thanet.gov.uk/en-GB/projects/jackey-bakers-hub>)

East Kent Coast Photography Competition

Calling all budding photographers. The annual Bird Wise East Kent and Thanet Coast Project 'East Kent Coast Photography competition' is back with categories including Coastal Landscape, Daring Dozen, Savvy Sea Dogs and Human Impact.

For full details on the categories and entry requirements head to the [website](#). Enter by **Monday 16 February** to be in with a chance of featuring in the summer exhibition.

Other News

Kent & Medway Food and Drink Awards 2026

Nominations are open for the Kent and Medway Food and Drink Awards, which celebrate the very best of the county's food and drink industry. It would be lovely to see nominations for Thanet businesses.

There are 12 categories including Chef of the Year, Restaurant of the Year, Tearoom/Coffee Shop of the Year, Farmers' Market of the Year and Hospitality Hero.

Nominations are open until **5pm on Friday 6 February**, with the finalists announced on Friday 12 February. The winners will be revealed in April. You can make your [nomination here](#)

Your News

Thanet - Isle of Culture 2029

Towns and villages in Thanet have the opportunity to submit a collective bid for the 2029 City of Culture. (which isn't just open to cities).

[Click here](#) - To find out more about the community-led bid and competition.

Award Success

Congratulations to Broadstairs and St Peter's Town Council

(<https://www.broadstairs.gov.uk/the-town-council-is-the-first-in-thanet-to-achieve-silver-status-nalc-award/>) that has started the year with a Silver Award from the National Association of Local Councils. The award demonstrates that the Town Council achieves good practice in governance, community engagement and council improvement and delivers to a nationally-recognised professional standard.

The Powell-Cotton Trust Centenary Celebrations Begin

Exciting times are ahead at [Quex House & Gardens and the Powell-Cotton Museum](#) as it reopens for the season on Saturday 14 February, that also marks the start of a very special year, a 100 years of the Powell-Cotton Trust.

Centenary celebrations begin Saturday 14 and Sunday 15 February, and continue throughout February half term, Wednesday 18 to Sunday 22 February, with The Big Museum Build - an exciting, hands-on project to commemorate their 100th year in partnership with Animate Arts.

Visitors are invited to respond to the Powell-Cotton Museum in a truly imaginative way. Choose an object from the collection, recreate it using paper and card, and add their creation to a growing exhibition that celebrates 100 years of the Powell-Cotton Trust.

Could you be Ramsgate Heritage Open Days (HODs) Coordinator?

The Ramsgate Society is looking for a local Heritage Open Days (HODs) Coordinator to work with participants for this year's programme. This is a part-time voluntary role and requires an average of two hours per week (fully flexible).

The Ramsgate HODs Coordinator will liaise with and encourage participants to sign up to the festival, supporting participants by providing a link to the national programme team, help with using commonplace sources, such as oral histories, personal memoirs, letters, photographs and objects, to create meaningful and inclusive experiences for visitors.

To find out more about Heritage Open Days visit the [website here](#)

If you are interested and would like to find out more, please email: news@ramsgate-society.org.uk with "Ramsgate Heritage Open Days (HODs) Area Coordinator" in the subject line.