



Edenbridge

Project Case Study



Hidden Britain Project Case Studies



From November 2006 the England Rural Development Programme has been implemented by SEEDA. Hidden Britain is a programme managed under the existing scheme and supported by Defra, Tourism South East, and SERCC. The project works to ensure social and economic growth in rural communities across the South East through small tourism initiatives. www.seeda.co.uk



SERCC is the regional umbrella organisation of the eight Rural Community Councils across the South East. RCCs are independent, county-based, rural community development charities, providing support and advice to rural community organisations and individuals. They are the major rural VCS stakeholder in a range of local, regional and national funding and support initiatives in the delivery of public services. They also provide infrastructure support to rural voluntary and community groups in both generic and specialist arenas. www.sercc.org.uk

TOURISM SOUTH EAST

Tourism South East is the regional body dedicated to fostering tourism growth and innovation in the region; a partnership of industry with regional and local government.

www.industry.visitsoutheastengland.com



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Overview of project

This project aimed to introduce a complete tourism package to Edenbridge and the Eden Valley. It was set up to address marketing, information provision, interpretation, and building of local capacity in order to sustain the momentum in the future.



Need for the project

With a long and distinguished history Edenbridge has always had a draw for visitors, however more recent times have not been kind to the area. Whilst industry blossomed in the 15th and 16th centuries, particularly leather, charcoal and agriculture, by the 17th century this was already in decline. The area remained in depression until the start of the 20th century, when London overspill bought industry and housing, however this did not affect the downturn in agriculture in the area. Although certain tourist honey pots have sprung up, rural

businesses in general are struggling, particularly those upon which the communities depend.

A further complication has been the reduction of the tourism provision by the local authority and who decided to close the Edenbridge Tourism Information Centre at the end of September 2004. The other tourist information centre nearby (at Clacket Lane on the M25) has also closed.

Edenbridge as the focal hub of the area undertook the Countryside Agency's Market Town's Healthcheck in 2004. The major theme that returned from the consultation was the dissatisfaction with the local economy and opportunities, and the realisation that tourism and visitor input is a realistic path to rejuvenate the area.

The project aims to address this need and to provide a holistic tourism initiative, with an emphasis on not only drawing visitors in, but also providing information and interpretation once they





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arrive. A key element of the project is to develop a self-sustaining framework encouraging communication and partnership working between the tourism stakeholders of the area and those in a position to deliver actual work.



more enticing and complete package. In addition this will also spread the benefit to the communities and businesses of the wider area.

The Eden Valley, is the geographical area that spreads roughly from Haxted in the West, Cowden in the South, Leigh in the East and Ide Hill to the North. This area corresponds roughly to the TN28 post-code.

Research was gathered using, community workshops and tourism stakeholder meetings to augment the Healthcheck data. From this base data the Edenbridge Hidden Britain group developed an action plan of tourism projects.

Planning of the project

In the spring of 2005, James Turner attended a meeting of the Edenbridge Town Forum to explain how Hidden Britain could assist in achieving the tourism objectives of the Healthcheck.

It was quickly determined that the project needed to focus on the wider area of the Eden Valley in total rather than just the town of Edenbridge. This is in the main because although Edenbridge itself is the service centre of the area, the majority of attractions, activities and accommodation lie outside the town, therefore there is much more strength in marketing the area as a whole as it is a

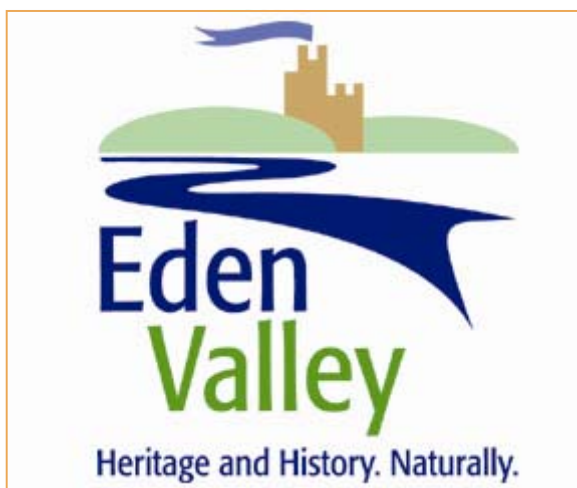
Who was involved?

The project group comprised representatives from; Edenbridge Town Council, Edenbridge Chamber of Commerce, other local businesses, and local residents.





With the advice and support of Hidden Britain and Sevenoaks District Council, the group was able to turn this action plan into achievable objectives by securing funding.



Status of funding

£37,481 grant obtained from England Rural Development Programme, Rural Enterprise Scheme in June 2006. This was matched by an estimated £5,975 of in-kind time and £3000 local contribution.

What was included?

- ◆ To undertake a visitor survey.
- ◆ To undertake a tourism product audit.
- ◆ To undertake a SWOT analysis.
- ◆ To implement the formation of an Eden Valley Tourism Forum.
- ◆ Research and produce an Eden Valley brand and identity.
- ◆ Design and produce a visitor dedi-

cated website for the Eden Valley.

- ◆ Promotional beer mats!
- ◆ Valley map pads
- ◆ Valley guidebook
- ◆ Walking guides. – series of 10

Events were also planned to launch the project to the general public.

There has been accompanying publicity to promote the project to both local residents and visitors.

Project implementation

The Eden Valley has been working extremely successfully with Hidden Britain for the last 18 months. Initially, the Eden Valley Tourism Initiative was formed with local stakeholders – large and small attractions, local businesses, B&B's, amongst others – and these have provided useful contacts and encouraged different sectors to work together for the area's benefit. It began hosting forums and as a result of the first forum, a





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consultation was carried out for a valley logo. Under this branding, tear off maps and local walks leaflets have been developed, with local volunteers testing the walks. A visitor website has been created, with an accompanying guide book, and promotional beer mats distributed.

The project has drawn together many local groups and individuals and the outcomes of their endeavors have been very well received – particularly the maps and walks. Participants in the project have acquired a number of computer skills and tourism knowledge. This has been an exciting process for those involved.

The initiative has helped establish excellent working relationships with the surrounding big attractions, smaller tourism stakeholders, local government, and the community which are proving very useful, and the Hidden Britain project has boosted the area's profile enormously.



Who benefits?

In terms of tourism the project has delivered Edenbridge a complete visitor package. The area now has the basic tools to really market itself as a destination. By placing a real emphasis on partnership working between and within both the public and private sectors in the area, the initiative has developed a robust network of contacts and support. With Edenbridge Town Council at its heart, supporting the Hidden Britain group, there is a real chance for sustainability of this initiative.

The benefits of course, as with any tourism project will in the main be to local businesses, but in this case the knock-on effects can really deliver benefits for those living in the area as well. Increased visitor usage can have a revitalising effect, and can encourage investment; time will tell whether this initiative has made those sorts of gains. What can be seen already is the interaction and communication between businesses, working





together to market themselves as a unified group for greater effect. The level of volunteer input and support should not be overlooked, local people have been involved throughout the project, and have all given their views and input. In return they have gained key skills in tourism, IT and project management. As such this project has delivered real community benefit and will only continue to do so as the initiative develops in the future.

Hidden Britain input

The Hidden Britain Development Officer (James Turner (JT)) worked to set up the project group and worked with to review the information available and develop the project plan. He also facilitated at several stakeholder meetings.

JT co-wrote the funding bid and developed the delivery plan and financial management model for the group. He was involved in writing briefs for designers and obtaining quotes. JT facilitated



and ran the first two Eden Valley Tourism forums. He also worked in conjunction with the web developer to design and develop the website. He also took images and tested walks.

Overall he maintained a project management role in support of the local coordinator.

Achievements

- ◆ Involvement of businesses and stakeholders.
- ◆ Formation of a successful, sustainable tourism network.
- ◆ Level of volunteer input.
- ◆ Support from local government.
- ◆ Delivery of a complete tourism package.
- ◆ Real increase in local pride and confidence.
- ◆ Large skills increase amongst project participants.



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Lessons learnt

- ◆ Bigger projects require longer timescales.
- ◆ Engaging businesses key to sustainability.
- ◆ It's possible to start from scratch with a new tourism product.
- ◆ Supply of volunteers dwindles over time.
- ◆ Local government support is essential for larger projects.



Future Plans

With the imminent launch of the website, things are really starting to gear up for Edenbridge and the Eden Valley. As the website has a comprehensive content management system it can be maintained and updated simply and easily locally and will provide the focal point for the initiative in the future.

The Eden Valley Tourism Forum has been a success so far and plans are underway

to continue the forum after the end of the project. The Town Council will ensure continued input into tourism and the maintenance of the project outputs. A full evaluation will be conducted on completion.

Plans are already afoot to look at the next generation of the project and how interest and benefit can be maintained. Ideas at present are concentrating on expanding the Eden Valley walks product, and delivering a community arts event aimed at visitors.

The group have already approached the Hidden Britain Officer to help develop the strategy for the next 5 years.

