



Canterbury Connected

BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT

Background

Established in 2014, Canterbury Connected represents and works with around 650 businesses to support and develop Canterbury city centre as a vibrant and well connected place with successful businesses, visitor and education economy. Sharing offices with Visit Kent, the county Destination Management Organisation, the BID also works closely with Canterbury City Council, major businesses, the universities, Cathedral and key city attractions. The Cathedral and Canterbury Christchurch University are represented on the Board. Canterbury is a World Heritage Site inscribed in 1988.

Canterbury BID's approach to place branding

The BID initiated the partnership that developed the Canterbury Destination Management Plan and has a grant and service level agreement with Canterbury City Council to deliver the plan reporting on economic impact and Purple Flag status. The concept of a shared story is at the core of the plan with the purpose of communicating a consistent message about the city. Canterbury's heritage and its location in the Garden of England are at the heart of the story. The place brand is intended to engage visitors, investors, businesses relocating, and to promote the city as a place for major sports events and learning.

Heritage in place branding in Canterbury

Heritage is used to deliver the BID business plan priorities of a strong brand and a superb destination to enhance visitor spend and Canterbury's reputation.

"As one of the oldest places in England, heritage has shaped the character of the place and is a facet of the city's personality and [we] don't want the city to be seen as a medieval pastiche. It is about getting the balance right. The city's heritage can't be ignored and is the context for the 21st century city."

The BID contributed to Visit Kent's Kent Contemporary marketing campaign in London mainline stations and on the underground. The Canterbury image was consciously chosen to show both heritage and contemporary art with the historic riverside and the Marlowe theatre mask sculpture viewed from the river, and not an image of the Cathedral or people eating. The impact of the campaign is being assessed by Visit Kent through website use, survey and visitor statistics.

Building on the success of the 2015 Magna Carta day, 2016 saw the launch of a Canterbury Medieval Pageant based on Henry II's pilgrimage to the tomb of Thomas

Beckett and penance for his murder. The pageant attracted an audience of around 2,000 people while a linked history trail, taking people to less well known city centre historic sites, proved popular. The Castle, part of the trail, welcomed 850 visitors (a substantial increase on a normal day). The pageant script, specially commissioned, both drew on the historical events and reflected a contemporary context.

A team of street ambassadors supports businesses and provides visitors with information about key heritage and culture attractions and events. The team engaged 32,000 people in their first year responding to visitors and gathering feedback.

The benefits of place branding and heritage

With limited resources for research, the BID uses 'bellwether' information, such as monthly commercial property vacancy rates, as an indicator of business vitality in Canterbury. The quality of new business is important and the BID has set up a commercial property landlords and agents forum to discuss and determine shared aspirations about how businesses want to improve the city's offer.

Turnover is monitored through a group of 25 businesses providing monthly turnover figures that are averaged and indicate business strength. The BID is looking at different, innovative ways of assessing impact, for example the Medieval Pageant family history trail gave chocolate coins to families who visited more than five attractions.

Challenges to delivering heritage and place branding activities

From the BID's perspective, the World Heritage Site has further potential to open up more of the city's heritage, bring more people to Canterbury and enhance joint working across the city.



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