

Whitstable Castle and Gardens



Audience Development Plan HLF Stage 2



CANTERBURY CITY COUNCIL WHITSTABLE CASTLE AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT PLAN HLF STAGE 2 BID

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Whitstable Castle and gardens form **an important site**, and have significant status within the town as its only public park. Owned by the City Council, and only opened to the public from the 1970s, it is perceived to be **under-used by local communities and visitors** alike. The Council commissioned this study, from Creative Cultures, to:

- **investigate, identify** and **understand current audiences**
- **identify** those who do **not currently visit** the Castle, and the **barriers** that prevent people from visiting
- **assess** the **potential** for audience development
- propose **strategies** and **actions** to **address barriers** and **promote** the Castle to **users** and **under-represented users** alike.

Since the creation of the original ADP, the City Council has been successful in securing Stage 1 funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund. This **Stage 2 Audience Development Plan** has been undertaken in parallel with the production of the **Business, Training** and **Volunteer Plans** for the Castle, and will draw on these as appropriate.

The main **challenge** for the Audience Development Plan has come from the need to find ways to **encourage greater use** and **appreciation** of the Castle by the public, whilst preserving its quintessential charm and peaceful character. Although the main **focus** of **effort** and **investment** should be for the **benefit of local people**, the Castle has considerable **potential** for hosting visits by **tourists** in Whitstable, too.

Canterbury City Council has **prioritised capital projects** within its overall strategy to develop the cultural and heritage offer in the district, and will **support** those most likely to offer the **greatest return to the community**: the Castle is already designated an **important asset**.

An Audience Development Plan must establish the **current position on 'users'** of the Castle, and we have been able to secure useful information on **users** and **under-represented users** through:

- surveys carried out during summer festival events in 2003 and 2004
- a Castle user questionnaire in 2003
- a Castle users discussion group in December 2004
- a visitor survey carried out in autumn 2007
- installation of visitor counters in autumn 2007
- a series of consultative focus group discussions, including additional sessions for this Stage 2 Plan
- stakeholder interviews, also with additional consultation.

From these we can summarise the **current position** on users and under-represented users thus:

The site is most used by older people, with between three and four times more female than male users: a high proportion come from the town or Canterbury district, and most cite relaxation and enjoyment of the gardens or attending events as the main reasons for visiting
The site is least used by young people (12 – 25)

We describe the **barriers** for all users in the terms recognised by the HLF and these cover:

- **Physical and sensory**
- **Intellectual and attitudinal**
- **Cultural**
- **Organisational and operational**
- **Financial**

Those who are **most affected** by the barriers which these represent:

- **Families with young children**
- **Disabled people (sensory, physical or learning)**
- **Young people.**

Given the **priorities** of the **Council** itself and its **partners**, we are **recommending** that **families with young children** and **disabled people** (including **adults with learning difficulties**) are **prioritised** in the delivery of actions to develop the Castle site **primarily as a community resource**. We provide **reasons** for **not prioritising young people** as a target audience, although we do set out ways in which they can contribute. There is a special emphasis on engaging with young people in the Volunteer Plan.

There are clearly **many aspects** about the Castle site which **can** and **should be improved**. **Access issues** and recommendations are the subject of a **separate report** commissioned from Mary Noble Consultancy.

The following **opportunities** illustrate some of the **best prospects** for sensitive and appropriate **action** by the new Castle Trust and its partners to 'develop' the Castle and gardens.

Upgrading and developing facilities on site:

- creating a café and new conservatory space
- providing a reception area (and site manager)
- developing imaginative play spaces for young children
- designing art into the garden development
- using the Gatehouse for artist accommodation/holiday lets/live-work unit
- developing spaces and facilities for more outdoor events.

Raising the Castle's profile:

- creating a strategic plan to market the Castle
- hosting Open Days to attract local communities and providing guided tours
- increasing the variety of events and activities on site, especially those targeted at children and their families and disabled people, including adults with learning difficulties.

Developing partnerships to boost community use and visitor numbers:

- with mainstream and lifelong learning providers (to make more use of the site as a learning venue and stimulating resource in its own right)
- with community development organisations (especially those working with and on behalf of families and disabled people, including adults with learning difficulties)
- with arts, culture and heritage organisations (to enhance creative opportunities for local artists and local residents)
- with the commercial sector (to generate increased levels of earned income).

Activities and events:

- local history and reminiscence projects, to record and capture details of the role of the Castle in the life of Whitstable
- artist residency programmes, to work with local communities (and especially families and disabled people)
- increasing numbers of fun events, festivals or trails linking up the Castle and other parts of the town, especially the harbour and sea front
- play activities for young children.

The **aim** of the Audience Development Plan is to:

To improve the quality of visits to the Castle and gardens, giving people new reasons for visiting and making the whole site a vital hub of community life, as well as a popular leisure destination for visitors and residents alike.

We propose **three main objectives** for Audience Development at the Whitstable Castle site, where we believe the new independent Trust and its partners, including the City Council, should focus the majority of effort:

- A Ensuring that the quality of the experience of all those who visit or use the site is considerably enhanced**
- B Widening the Castle's appeal to local communities, drawing in and retaining new users**

C Using facilities at the Castle and gardens for a wider range of social, creative, learning and informal activities.

The **Plan's three elements**, linked to the objectives, are:

- 1 Improving access and quality for Castle users and visitors**
- 2 Telling more people about the Castle**
- 3 Giving people reasons to visit and get more involved.**

The Audience Development Plan concludes with an **Action Plan**, setting out what the new Trust intends to achieve in developing the Castle and gardens in the short, medium and longer-term.