

**Preparing the ground:
Rebuilding Hastings Castle into a 'must see' attraction
Hastings Borough Council & Local Government Association**

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in partnership with



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Introduction

Over the past three months, **Rubicon Regeneration**, in partnership with **Planning Solutions Consulting Limited**, has been working with Hastings Borough Council and the Local Government Association (LGA) to research and develop plans to transform Hastings Castle into a world-class heritage destination.

The project has been funded through the Local Government Association Economic Growth Advisers Programme, with a focus on preparing the ground work for the Council to develop its Business Case for funding support from the Government's Towns Fund.

The Hastings Investment Plan and Towns Fund award provides an exciting 're-set' programme for investment to support inclusive growth across the town. Hastings Castle stands above the town, yet despite its dominant location and links with William the Conqueror, the castle currently stands as a ruin with little resonance to visitors. Transforming Hastings Castle is at the heart of the investment programme: "our flagship project for the whole Hastings Town Investment Plan¹" bringing the story of the Norman invasion to life, through creative interpretation and increased footfall. The ambition is to create a must-see attraction adding to a critical mass of visitor attractions in the town and creating a destination which has appeal among visitors and members of the local community.

The key objectives of the commission were to address the following:

- Undertake desk research on what attracts visitors to existing heritage destinations (nationally and internationally), and collate best practice from these in terms of their offer
- Conduct qualitative research on what visitors like/dislike about the current castle offer, which can feed into a wider piece of quantitative and qualitative research to assist develop the business case
- Undertake a vision workshop with heritage organisations from across 1066 Country
- Understand how the significant heritage assets in Hastings and across 1066 Country (Hastings Museum & Art Gallery as it is being developed; Fishermen's Museum; Shipwreck Museum; 1066 Battle of Hastings, Abbey and Battlefield at Battle; Pevensey Castle) can be integrated into an offer that tells the story of the Norman Invasion, its immediate consequences, and its ongoing legacy

¹ Hastings Town Investment Plan

- Evaluate how a transformed Hastings Castle might feed into the national curriculum over the next 10 years

As part of this commission, we have also facilitated discussions with Historic England, the National Lottery Heritage Fund and National Lottery Community Fund to understand how Hastings Castle can be developed for the town and what their 'red lines' might be in terms of the development of the site.

This report sets out a series of Technical Papers to address these questions together with a summary section and recommendations on next steps.

The Technical Papers are as follows:

Technical Report 1

Best Practice Review:

What makes a 'must-see' heritage attraction

Technical Report 2

Local Consultation and Stakeholder Engagement

Technical Paper 3

Education and the National Curriculum

Technical Report 1
Best Practice Review:
What makes a 'must-see' heritage attraction



1. Introduction

The aim of the project is to transform the visitor and heritage offer at Hastings Castle into a must-see visitor attraction, specifically by:

- Making Hastings Castle and heritage more accessible
- Creating a step-change in the town's visitor heritage offer
- Contributing to the regeneration of the town centre
- Creating a critical mass of heritage visitor attractions in the town and wider 1066 Country.

Transforming Hastings Castle into a world heritage destination is the flagship, signature project for the whole Hastings Town Investment Plan. The project has 5 components:

- Making the West Hill Cliff Railway the main visitor approach for the castle, including making the West Hill Cliff Railway all-accessible
- Creating a new (off-site) heritage hub
- Providing a new footbridge from the Ladies' Parlour to the castle and gateway entrance via the East Gate
- Developing a permanent all-weather visitor facility within the castle
- Animating the whole experience through world class story-telling and interpretation

Further details on the project components are included within the attached 'Look Book.'



The ambition is to create a must-see attraction adding to a critical mass of visitor attractions in the town and creating a destination which has appeal among visitors and members of the local community.

History and heritage are strongly associated with Britain's holiday offer and the UK continues to be a world-leader in the 'experience' economy – the creation and operation of visitor attractions such as museums, galleries, theme parks and heritage sites, whose success is built upon originality, creativity, imagination and ingenuity.

If the ambition is for Hastings Castle to become a heritage attraction of national or indeed international significance, it is important at the outset to understand what that means and what are the constituent components that collectively make an attraction world-class.

There is no agreed set of criteria or a charter mark for achieving must-see status but it is possible to identify the core elements required – to some extent, we recognise it when we see it.

Our experience suggests the following characteristics:

- An attraction, which has national / regional reach;
- Interprets a compelling story and engages visitors on different levels;
- Relatively large in size and impact;
- Its appeal is attributed to distinct qualities, including uniqueness, sense of place, authenticity, location, reputation and media attention;
- A unique theme that attracts interest and curiosity and provides opportunities for learning and discovery;
- The central component of a destination's differentiation which determines the visitor's travel decision and choice of destination;
- A focus on delivering a high-quality customer experience, which is supported by appropriate catering and retail offers
- Generates ancillary demand and economic benefits for the wider destination and region.

Through a review of Case Examples of recognised best practice in heritage attractions and destinations, this paper sets out the core ingredients ("must haves") in creating a successful heritage visitor attraction. We have included a selection of case examples both established heritage attractions, such as Warwick Castle, as well as castle ruins where the majority of structures have been lost or destroyed. The final section of the paper considers some of the lessons applicable to Hastings Castle to inform development of the project and subsequent business case.

2. Case Examples

Case study 1: Scarborough Castle

Background

- Scarborough Castle overlooks the historic seaside resort town of Scarborough and is managed by English Heritage.
- The site can trace its history back 3,000 years and in the 4th century AD a fortified tower was erected on the headland itself.
- Work began on Scarborough Castle in the 1130s and in 1159 Henry II started to rebuild the castle, including the great tower. Over time, the castle was further developed and played a role in the English Civil War.



Images kindly provided by English Heritage

Visitor numbers

- Between 2012 and 2019, overall visitor numbers increased from 54,529 in 2012 to 76,046 in 2020.
- However, visitor numbers peaked at 82,068 in 2017, then declined to 70,923 before recovering in 2019.
- Due to COVID-19 during 2020, visitor numbers declined to 31,488.² It is estimated that 80% of visitors are tourists.
- Visitor numbers peak over the summer holiday period; Scarborough Castle is very weather dependent, particularly outside of the school holidays.
- The castle is recognised as an outdoor attraction with no real wet weather space.
- Scarborough Castle attracted very few group visits prior to COVID, it is recognised that the castle is not easy to access for coaches.
- Castle is not open during the week throughout November, December, January and February (apart from the school holidays).

Visitor offer

- Gatehouse

² Visitor Attraction Trends in England 2020 Full Report, August 2021

- Exhibition area with interactive displays and artefacts are located in the Master Gunner's House
- There is no onsite car parking (apart from pre-bookable bays for visitors with disabilities)
- An audio tour is available

The education offer is focused on³:

- *"KS1 History: Significant historical events, people and places in the locality. Study of castles*
- *KS2 History: A local history study. Changes in Britain from the Stone Age to the Iron Age. The Roman Empire and its impact on Britain. Britain's Settlement by Anglo-Saxons and Scots. A study of an aspect or theme in British history that extends pupils' chronological knowledge beyond 1066*
- *KS2 Geography: Human geography: types of settlement and land use, identify the difference between natural and manmade defensive features of the castle, understand the strategic significance of the castle's position*
- *KS3 History: A local history study. The development of church, state and society in medieval Britain 1066-1509 and in Britain 1509-1745*
- *KS3 Geography: Understand the key processes in human geography; understand how human and physical processes interact to influence and change landscapes"*

During consultation with the Manager, it was noted that if castles are on the national curriculum, they see a corresponding increase in school visits. Pre-Covid Scarborough Castle would attract at least one education group per week during the school term. The castle has introduced Discovery Visits which is a staff-led experience which schools are charged a fee for and these are becoming more popular.

Membership sales and admissions are the key income drivers for Scarborough Castle, followed by catering and retail. During 2021 events have been very popular. The catering is run in-house at Scarborough Castle and across the English Heritage estate all of the catering outlets are now managed in-house. Prior to COVID and excluding periodic maintenance, Scarborough Castle generated a small-surplus.

³ <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/scarborough-castle/schools/>



Images kindly provided by English Heritage

Future plans

Scarborough Castle currently does not have any development plans.

Lessons for Hastings Castle

- Benefits from being of English Heritage's property portfolio (expertise of managing multiple heritage sites, buying and marketing efficiencies as part of a national organisation, also membership base)
- Importance of placing the visitor experience at the heart of all decisions and changes on site
- Retaining catering operation in house ensure standards are maintained
- Links to the curriculum are important in driving education visits

Case Study 2: Old Sarum Castle



Background

- Old Sarum is one of the most historically important sites in southern England
- It combines a royal castle and cathedral within an Iron Age fortification
- A major centre of secular and ecclesiastical government for 150 years (in 1226 the cathedral moved to Salisbury but the footprint is still clearly visible on site)
- Old Sarum became a notorious 'rotten borough' which continued to elect members of Parliament until 1832



Images kindly provided by English Heritage

Visitor numbers

- Pre COVID reached approximately 60,000 annual visitors which has dipped to around 40,000 with emergence of COVID 19
- Approximately half of visitors are EH members (most live within an hour's drive)
- Old Sarum is acknowledged as being predominantly an outdoor attraction with limited wet weather spaces for general visitors or groups.
- Old Sarum has limited access for coaches and most drop off and park away from the immediate site

- A significant number of visitors combine their trip with a 'circuit' of Salisbury Cathedral and Stonehenge
- Events are important in driving annual visitors. The main events programmes include large weekend events such as jousting and re-enactments (can attract 3,000 people over 2 days) to small trails /quests/ storytelling for children principally in the school holidays. Important to highlight that there is often 'something going on' at the site
- Dogs are allowed onsite on a lead

Visitor offer

- Entry bridge
- Toilets (next to carpark)
- Small wooden shop building (inside castle)
- Limited car parking (outside the monument)
- Two World War II bunkers
- No dedicated education space at present and no real shelter

The education offer shares the same Key Stage focus as other English Heritage sites as shown in Scarborough Castle above).



Images kindly provided by English Heritage

Future plans

Old Sarum does have long term plans for a separate visitor hub and new parking area outside the main monument walls, which has previously received English Heritage Head Office support and approval five years ago but has yet to be introduced on site. The visitor hub would provide education space, a reasonable size shop and cafe with a small 'museum' space. The initial budget of £1 million was seen as not ambitious enough and now needs re-

considering. As it is located outside the monument it could also service passing walkers and cyclists. The existing hut would not be removed altogether as it is deemed important to retain a physical presence on the site and not appear disconnected from the site (for staff and volunteers)

Lessons for Hastings Castle

- Links to the curriculum are important in driving education visits
- Old Sarum has a lower profile than Stonehenge but nevertheless the two sites work in partnership on a number of levels including twin destination itineraries for group bookings
- The entry bridge provides an attractive sense of arrival and also helps to efficiently control visitor flows to the monument
- Developing a successful events programme, which drives visitors particularly during the shoulder months
- The lack of any major wet weather space has hindered development and the quality of the visitor experience. Plans are in the pipeline for a new visitor hub outside the monument walls

Case Study 3: Other Ruined Castles

Corfe Castle

Owner: National Trust



Corfe Castle is a fortification standing above the village of the same name on the Isle of Purbeck Peninsula in Dorset. Built by William the Conqueror, the castle dates to the 11th century and commands a gap in the Purbeck Hills on the route between Wareham and Swanage. The first phase was one of the earliest castles in England to be built at least partly using stone when the majority were built with earth and timber. In mid-2006, the dangerous condition of the keep caused it to be closed to visitors, who could only visit the walls and inner bailey. The National Trust undertook an extensive conservation project on the castle, and the keep was re-opened to visitors in 2008. The castle is a Grade I listed building and recognised as an internationally important structure. It is also a Scheduled Monument. According to figures released by the Association of Leading Visitor Attractions, the number of visitors in 2019 had risen to over 259,000.

Key lesson: The importance of using technology to enhance the visitor experience

Resonix Creative (www.resonixcreative.co.uk) were commissioned to create 'Corfe Castle As A Home' audio trail (May 2021). The audio trail uses a series of on-site posts, creatively telling the story of Corfe's history as a 'home'. Using humour, the audio experience provides a journey from the conception of Corfe Castle, through the Norman and Tudor periods to the Civil War and present day.

Pontefract Castle

Owner: Wakefield Council



Pontefract Castle was a key strategic military stronghold in Northern England which played a crucial role in many of the country's most bitter conflicts for over five hundred years. The land that now houses the remains of one of the most notorious castles in England was given to Ilbert de Lacy soon after the Norman Conquest. Not much remains of what was one of the most impressive castles in Yorkshire other than parts of the curtain wall and excavated and tidied inner walls.

Key lesson: The importance of conservation works and improved visitor facilities working hand-in-hand

Wakefield Council, who manage the site, commissioned William Anelay Ltd to begin repairs on the castle in September 2015. The Council then engaged Heritage Building & Conservation (North) Ltd, who began work on the site in March 2017. A new visitor centre and cafe were opened in July 2017 and on Yorkshire Day 2019, the restoration was completed, and the castle was removed from Historic England's "Heritage At Risk" list. In January 2020, the Castle received a Civic Society Design Award in recognition of the significant conservation work that has taken place at the castle.

To improve the family experience, a themed play area, located next to the Visitor Centre, has been developed. The wooden play area features equipment including a battering ram swing, drawbridge, ramparts, cargo nets and more. It is of high-quality, bespoke design and has proved a success in attracting young people from the community to visit the castle as well as visitors.

Case Study 4: Caerphilly Castle



Background

- Caerphilly Castle is recognised as one of the finest historic sites in Wales, and one which has the potential to become an unmissable visitor attraction.
- One of Henry III's most powerful and ambitious barons, Gilbert de Clare, lord of Glamorgan, built the castle. His purpose was to secure the area and prevent lowland south Wales from falling into the hands of the Welsh leader Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, who controlled most of mid and north Wales.
- The size and scale of the castle structure – the largest in Wales - is impressive.
- The castle is owned by Cadw, who is committed to develop the role and contribution of Caerphilly Castle as a 'must see' heritage destination in south east Wales and the country as a whole to stimulate regeneration and economic growth whilst at the same time protecting and conserving this significant historic monument.

Visitor Numbers and Core Markets

- Visitor numbers have remained relatively stable over a long period, attracting between 90,000 and 120,000 visitors per annum
- Family market is key
- The castle has a comprehensive events programme to attract visitor during the shoulder months.

Visitor offer

The core proposition is built around the following propositions:

- 'Family Heritage Adventure - not just our largest castle but our fullest day out, every day...'
- 'The complete castle experience, a marvel of medieval military engineering'
- 'The Big Day - a spectacular and unique setting for some of Wales' (and your) most important events'

The castle is continuing to develop new products to enhance the visitor experience including the Labyrinth and the Dragon's Lair.

Future plans

A detailed masterplan has been prepared, which sets out a pathway to secure a step-change in the visitor offer through a series of product development recommendations that are practical, deliverable and sustainable with the aim of delivering commercial benefits whilst considering the sensitivities of the monument. Future interventions is being carefully assessed to manage change in ways that will best sustain the monument's heritage values, whilst recognising opportunities to reveal or reinforce those values for present and future generations. Cadw has committed £5m in development works, including:

- Installation of a new visitor centre
- Makeover of the medieval Great Hall
- New world-class interpretation throughout the castle.

In addition to the investment to improve and extend the visitor experience at the Castle, the estate is will benefit from a 5-year programme of essential works to maintain the estate and meet Cadw's conservation priorities.

Lessons for Hastings Castle

- Caerphilly Castle is a vital element in marketing Caerphilly County Borough as a destination to visitors. It is a unique feature within the South Wales Valleys, in an area famed more for its industrial heritage rather than medieval buildings.
- A core element of offer is a comprehensive education programme of learning activities, which until recently has comprised three specific activities; Castle Life (covering aspects of life for castle inhabitants), Castle Servants (covering feasting in an Anglo-Norman castle) and Knights' Tales (pupils met a medieval knight).
- Cadw has increased significantly the commercial income generated from its estate specifically from weddings, filming and events. All three activities are actively

marketed and promoted at Caerphilly Castle and provide an important income stream for Cadw.

- Long term planning – as demonstrated through the master planning exercise helps to create the strategic direction for investment.
- Events and animation are a key part of the offer, e.g. the work on restoring four full-scale siege engines (a ballista; a mangonel; a trebuchet and a Perrier) adds to the defensive architecture and features of the Castle. They have been re-designed and manufactured from Welsh oak and the intention is to fire the siege engines on Saturdays and Sundays during July and August and on public holidays.
- Maintaining the historic fabric of the site is a huge financial cost, including the maintenance of visitor experience elements such as exhibitions, hardware, software and comfort facilities.
- Online presence including social media is hugely important, ensuring it carries the same image and branding that a site wants to present.

Case Study 5: Dover Castle



Background

- Part of English Heritage portfolio: Dover Castle is the second most visited property in the English Heritage collection
- Known as the 'The Key to England'
- At its heart is the Great Tower, created by Henry II
- The castle also played a key role in two world wars, which are explained at the recreated Port War Signalling Station.

Visitor Numbers and Core Markets

- One of the Top 10 most visited attractions in the South East; in the region of 300,000 visitors come to the Castle each year
- 20% of visitors are from overseas although this figure can fluctuate up or down by 10% depending on market conditions and other macro factors.
- 69% of visitors are within a one-hour drive and 88% are within a two hour drive.
- 55% of visitors are repeat visitors although the number of member visits is below the national average at 36%.

Visitor offer

- Aim is to provide a whole day visit at Dover Castle
- Dover Castle is working to attract a family market- 'Child Pleasers'; this links to their brand development for the site as 'engaging' and 'living'
- 3 catering outlets (ranging from grab and go, cafe and meals as building allow)
- Events and added value activities (e.g. Living Theatre group Past Pleasures provide historical re-enactments in a living history format)
- Education – mostly free education visits in addition to some paid Discovery Visits

- Outreach / Community – increasing participation in local community events e.g. floats in parade
- Corporate hire is done on an ad hoc basis

Visitors experience the site in a self-directed way dipping in and out of the different areas. Previous interpretation provided 5 themed routes around the site focussed on different time periods. The direction of the interpretation is led by the curatorial team with representation from all departments.

Future plans

Dover Castle is currently undergoing a master planning exercise which will map out development for the next 10-15 years. The current master planning process is looking at new approaches and the feeling is that this will change to a way of giving the visitor more context about their location on the site and in time as a whole. This has been informed by visitor feedback, market research and knowledge and experience from the EH team. Key to this master planning process is the collaboration of all departments in EH involved in the site to ensure that developments for visitors dovetail in with the needs of the maintenance for the fabric of the site and the historical knowledge and research of the site. Finance is not unlimited and it is vital to maximise the investment for the good of the building, the visitors and the financial sustainability of the site. Collaboration is key to getting the right answer and the organisational acknowledgement that Dover is the right site for development and the development fits with all aims and objectives for the organisation.

Lessons for Hastings Castle

Whilst on a different scale to Hastings Castle, it is possible to identify a number of important lessons.

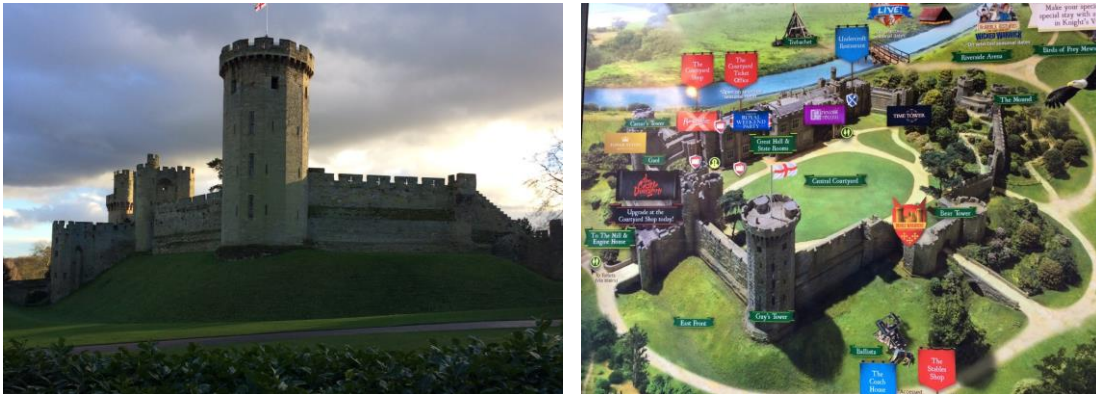
- Collaboration between all departments involved in the operation, historical research, maintenance and finance of a site is key to achieving best results for visitors, organisational 'buy-in' and financial sustainability of the site.
- Long term planning – as demonstrated in the 10-15 year master planning exercise at Dover Castle – helps to create the strategic direction which all departments can follow.
- While maintaining the historic fabric of the site is a huge financial cost, organisations have to acknowledge and budget for the maintenance of visitor experience elements such as exhibitions, hardware, software and comfort facilities. Visitors cost money too.
- While developing new exhibitions such as the Great Tower attract significant increases in visitor numbers, these do drop off after time and further refresh and developments are needed to further develop audiences.

- A large site with buildings and features from different time periods can be a challenge to interpret. Visitors want to understand where they are on site in the context of the site as a whole.
- New approaches to interpretation and exhibitions can be challenging to traditional audiences.
- It is important for a site to be clear about their key target audience and see this reflected in their branding externally but also be aware of how they fulfil this expectation internally on site, ensuring that activities, events and facilities match the target audience's requirements.
- Online presence including social media is hugely important, ensuring it carries the same image and branding that a site wants to present.

Case study 6: Warwick Castle

Background

- Warwick Castle is an impressive monument, close to the attractive town and tourist destination of Warwick.
- It has extensive grounds (with the landscape and gardens designed by Capability Brown) and offers exceptional long- distance views over the adjacent river, attractive countryside and the distant Malvern Hills.



- The castle has been in the ownership of nobility for centuries however in the 1970s, the Earl of Warwick realised there were insufficient funds to continue with the castle on a sound footing and the whole site was sold to the Tussauds Group in 1978 for £1.5 million. Merlin Entertainments took over the venture when they acquired Tussauds in 2007.
- They have invested in the order of £26 million over this time in maintaining the fabric of the built structure and in enhancing the visitor experience itself.

Visitor numbers and core market

- Visitor numbers have become a closely guarded secret in absolute terms. The last publicised figures were in 2009 at around 650,000 per annum.
- Under Tussauds, the Castle experienced 30 years of stable and growing operations and it is known that the castle has experienced a strong growth trend over the past decade under Merlin.
- The scale of the property and the extensive grounds means that the Castle does not really experience capacity issues in general.
- Throughput averages in the order of 1,000 per day on off peak periods and reaches 7,500 on peak days, without any real congestion issues.
- The main area which is constrained in this respect is the main catering offer, which can struggle to meet demand over mealtimes. The site can also cope with large events and some single events have attracted as many as 20,000 visitors.

Visitor offer

- Introduction of the Kingmaker attraction was a real game changer for the attraction and helped to position the castle more in the attractions marketplace and less in the heritage property sector. The acquisition by Merlin Entertainments took this direction of travel even further (although there has been criticism re the scale of 'disneyfication').
- The key approach focussed on the family day out market rather than heritage.
- The experience included outdoor entertainment, live characters to enhance appeal to the family market.
- Other secondary elements (which Merlin term as 'second gates') included a Dragon's Tower and a Dungeon's experience. The latter has proved very popular and in the order of 20% of admissions purchase a combined entry ticket to the castle and dungeon experience.

Over the past decade or so Merlin considers that the whole heritage sector has changed. Previously, heritage attractions had limited appeal to families but they have now become destinations which families visit. This has been helped in part by the change of approach by the National Trust and others to cater for younger audiences.

Future plans

The move from Merlin Entertainments to embrace 'disneyfication' and overlook the heritage aspects led to a number of issues, which meant that Warwick Castle lost credibility in heritage market.



The interactive exhibits have helped to develop the visitor experience and to create a more compelling offer

It is now accepted the operation went too 'left field' in terms of developing the fantasy element. This included abolishing tour guides and putting in more live actors. This was primarily geared to meeting the needs of the core family market and looking to generate higher revenues per head. There is little doubt this approach did drive higher volumes however there were some negatives which surfaced as a result. Now the priority has been

reigned back to a degree and the current aim is to foster appeal to both the family and more general heritage market. The latter is seen as important particularly in off peak periods. The Dragon's Tower 'exhibition' has now been removed as a separate pay point and there is only one 'second gate' - The Dungeon experience.

Perhaps the biggest recent investment programme has been to develop 28 new wooded lodges and a central facility for overnight guests to stay on site. The area known as Knight's Village is within the wider estate (some 500 metres from the main entrance) with attractive views over the river valley from some units. The accommodation brings an additional flow of users to the castle and often results in 2 visits per person per trip. Key elements of the new masterplan include:

- Launch a purpose-built hotel to complement other onsite accommodation
- Improve food and beverage outlets and create new restaurant
- Overhaul the arrival welcome hub / ticketing 'parlour'



Lessons for Hastings Castle

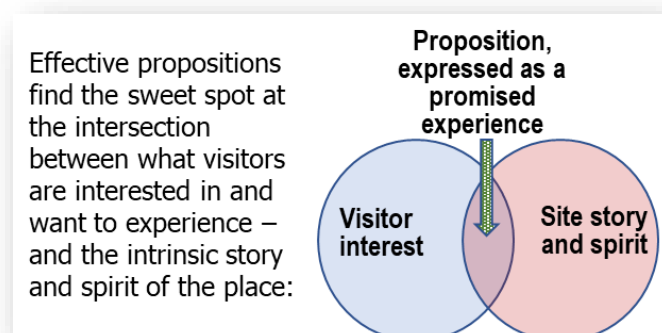
Although on a different scale, there are some important lessons for Hastings Castle:

- The highly consumer led, Disneyfication era impacted on the relationship with planners and lost credibility in the heritage market. This is a difficult aspect to 'juggle' and needs sensitive handling.
- The earlier decision to remove guided tours was seen as negative and this has been reversed at Warwick Castle.
- The pricing of the annual pass also aims to attract higher levels of repeat visitation and is now set at a multiple of less than 1.5 times standard day ticket. In addition for general visitors they are able to return the next day for an entry ticket costing just £1.
- The marketing impact prioritises the pursuit of families (partly through extensive programme of outdoor shows). Families are acknowledged to be higher spend visitors, important to develop revenue generation

- There is a desire to satisfy family market without upsetting the more general heritage market (including trade platform and tour operators).
- Warwick is a tourist destination but does not have a very big identity. There is still a need to pair with Stratford which has a much stronger tourism cachet.

3. Learnings Applicable to Hastings Castle

- 1) **It all starts with conservation** ... An ambitious conservation plan is vital to ensure that the site is protected for the future whilst unlocking the heritage assets to secure maximum visitor impact. This means engaging visitor's interest in on-site projects when they are happening and, more importantly, ensuring that every conservation project also adds to the quality of spaces and the way they are experienced when the work is done.
- 2) **Put STORY at the heart of the experience** ... The case studies and our experience show how important it is for the narrative of the site to be carefully researched, written and then woven into the experience and spirit of place - as its primary driver. The Hastings story is interesting – it has many strands and it needs historians, curators, writers, storytellers and producers to work out how it all fits together in a way that will entrance visitors. **A clear visitor proposition for Hastings Castle is vital.....e.g. the castle of 'firsts'**
- 3) **Make the interpretation consistent with spirit of place and brilliant** ... following on from various points above, this calls for brilliant interpretation that centres on the core narrative and is consistent with the distinctive spirit of the place. It needs to flow throughout the site and build connections and learning.
- 4) **And then develop a visitor proposition based on it** ...



- 5) **Put the 'visitors first'** ... Everyone involved – curators, conservators, operational teams, gardeners, administrators – need to remember that visitors have to come first: their needs, their enjoyment, their encouragement to recommend a visit and come back again. This does of course create conflict with primary duties of

guardianship and conservation. Indeed, for the site's long-term well-being and to generate to care for it, visitors are the lifeblood.

6) Remembering that families will always be the most significant audience segment ...

The challenge of creating intelligent absorbing experiences at historic sites that work for adults and children together often fails to be met. Children bring their immense imaginations to historic sites – the key is to provide a place that can respond.

7) Support with programming ... In addition to the core permanent interpretation, regular programming of public events, both for core family audiences and to develop new segments – must be a regular part of the offer. If it is really well done and captures public imagination, it can strongly impact visitor numbers and address seasonality.

8) Catering and retailing ... Excellent retailing and catering should be an integral part of the visitor experience as well as an important driver of secondary income.

Presenting the West Hill café as the main visitor approach means developing a quality catering offer and bulk of visitor facilities to encourage increased dwell longer, as well as a key income source.

9) Building local support ... The local community needs to have pride and ownership in the transformation project and it will be important to continue to build constructive relationships with local communities, organisations and stakeholders. A visit to Hastings Castle does not stand in isolation from experiencing the town as a whole destination. The primary research exercise shows there appears a strong local appetite among residents to enhance the castle's offer.

10) Marketing (traditional and digital) ... All the above needs to be supported by brilliant and sustained marketing that is clear about target audiences, builds a compelling visitor proposition and concentrates on messages that will motivate visits. Both traditional and digital channels need to work together to deliver unified communications (working in partnership with 1066 Country and others where appropriate, including possible joint ticketing arrangements). Pricing needs to be attractive but – when the improvement programme has been delivered – does not undersell what is on offer.

11) Numbers and the long game ... Any major development project must set a target for increasing future visitor numbers. Experience tells us that there is a natural minimum and maximum for any historic site, based on a combination of multiple

factors – inherent historic interest, location, proximity to markets, accessibility, size, maturity, links to other places within a destination, catering and retailing, offers for families and children, and so on. Even after a major development project with substantial investment, natural constraints lead to a maximum number.

Technical Report 2 Local Consultation and Stakeholder Engagement



1. Local Consultation

As part of our study, we have carried out a module of primary research among local residents and visitors.

A survey was set up online and promoted via the Council's communications channels as well as providing hard copies at key visitor 'hubs' in the vicinity including the VIC, Smugglers' Adventure and Hastings Museum and Art Gallery.

The survey ran through October and November 2021 (including the Autumn half term holiday) and generated just under 1,000 completed responses, which represents a strong sample base.

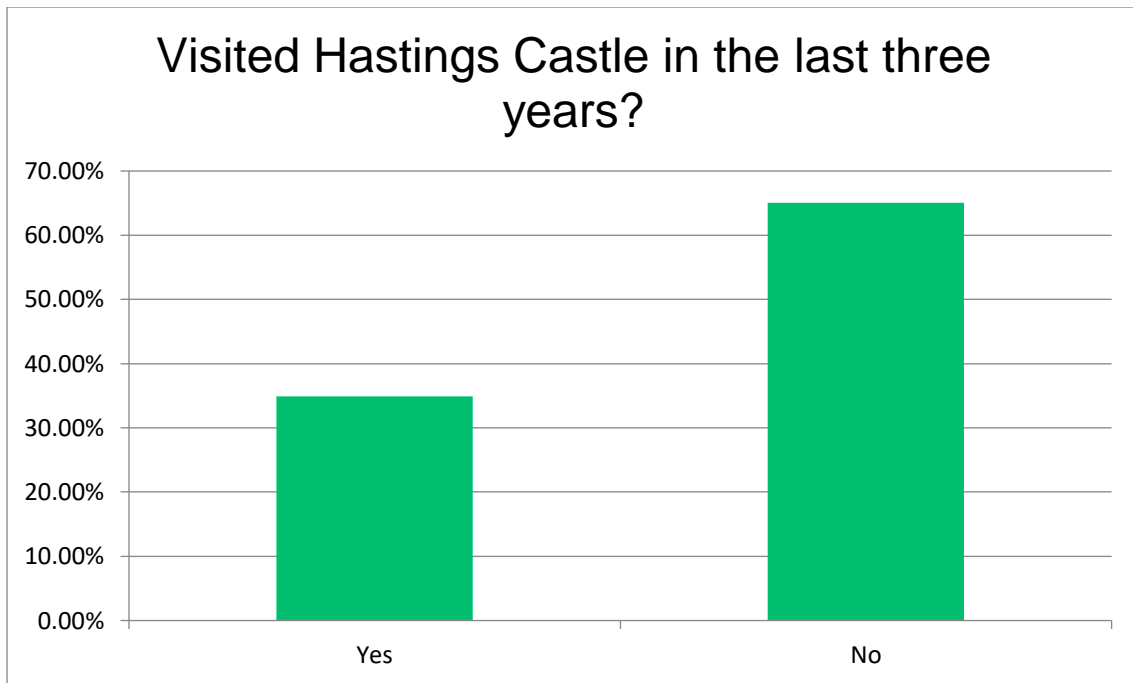
The lead findings from the survey are shown below and the questionnaire is attached as Appendix 1.

Summary of survey response

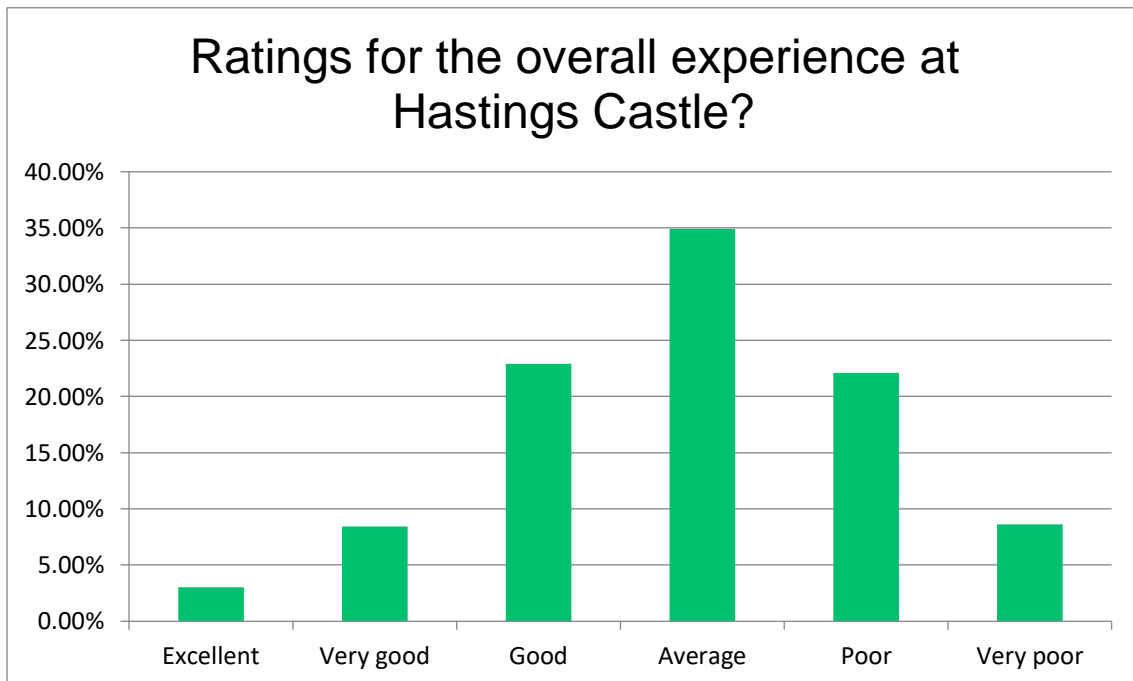
Characteristics of respondents

A high proportion of respondents to the survey are living in Hastings or within 10 miles, which reflects the season the survey was taken and the current uncertainty around the visitor market in light of the Covid 19 pandemic. Only 40 respondents, or just over 3%, were day visitors or staying visitors to the town.

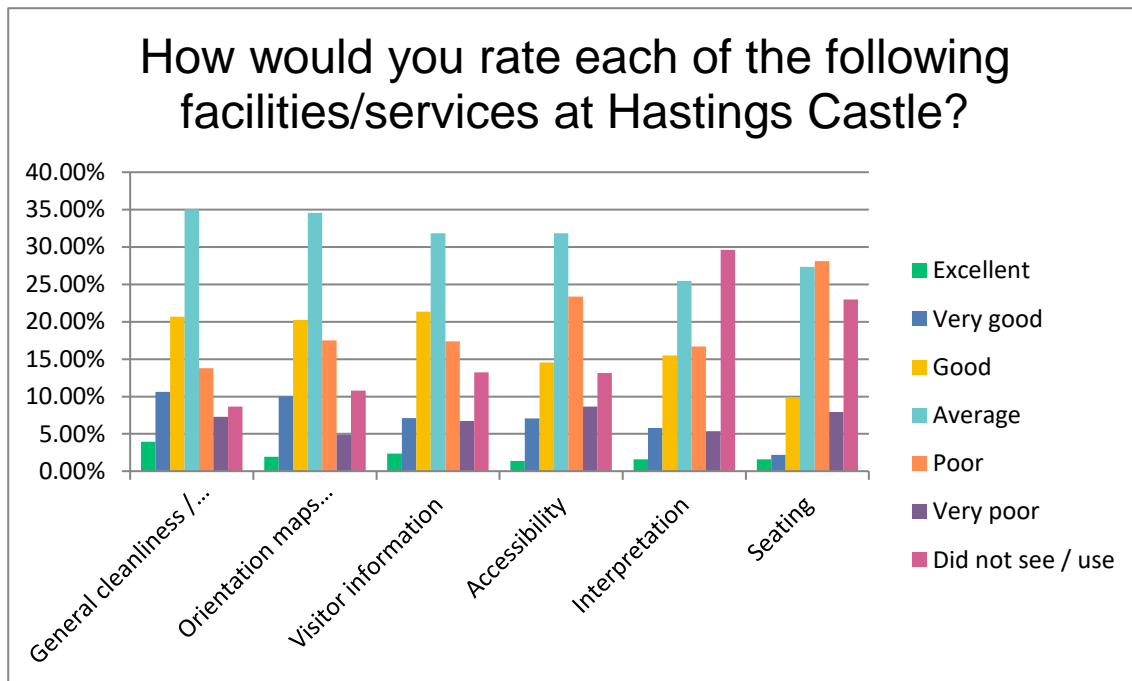




Despite the high ratio of local people some two thirds of respondents have not visited the Castle within the past three years, showing it is not currently a 'feature' in the lives of many residents.



It is acknowledged that Hastings Castle is in need of enhancement to improve the visitor experience and quality of the overall offer. Only 3% consider the attraction to be excellent and a further 8% to be very good which represent very low levels of approval ratings. There is a strong bias in the responses towards average and poor ratings as answered by more than half of respondents (58%).

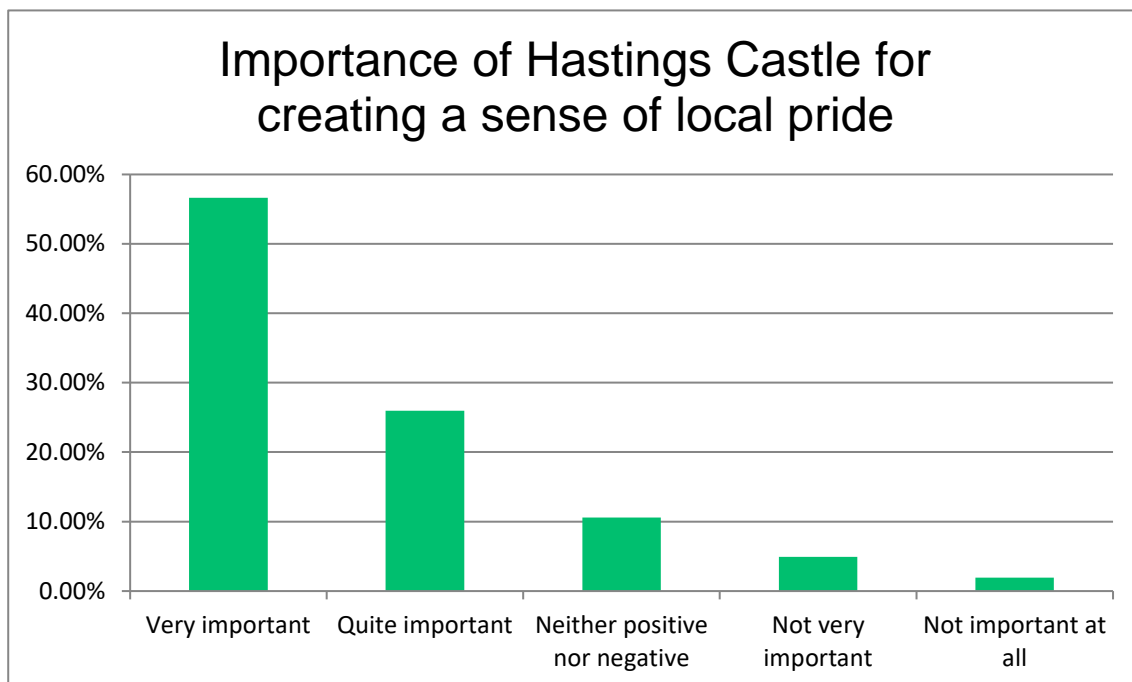
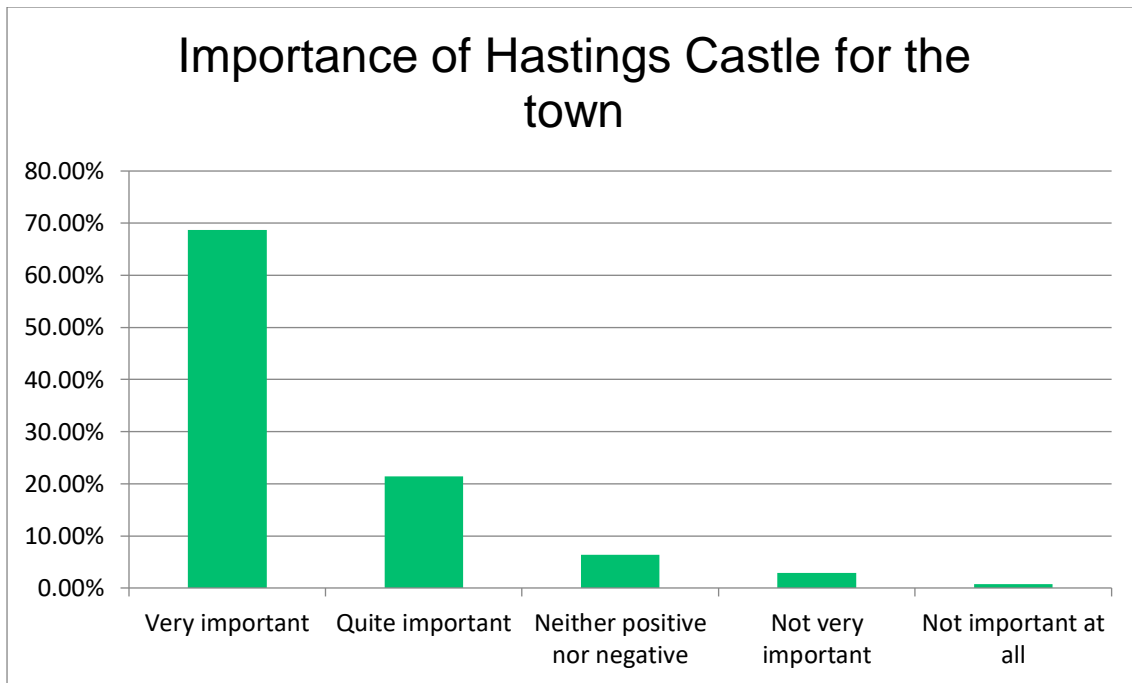


In a similar vein to the overall experience ratings, the individual facilities and services achieve relatively low levels of approval. General cleanliness receives the highest proportion of responses of excellent or very good, but still only aggregates to just below 15% of all the surveys completed. This demonstrates a strong need to develop and build on the product, service and overall experience.

Placemaking and sense of community

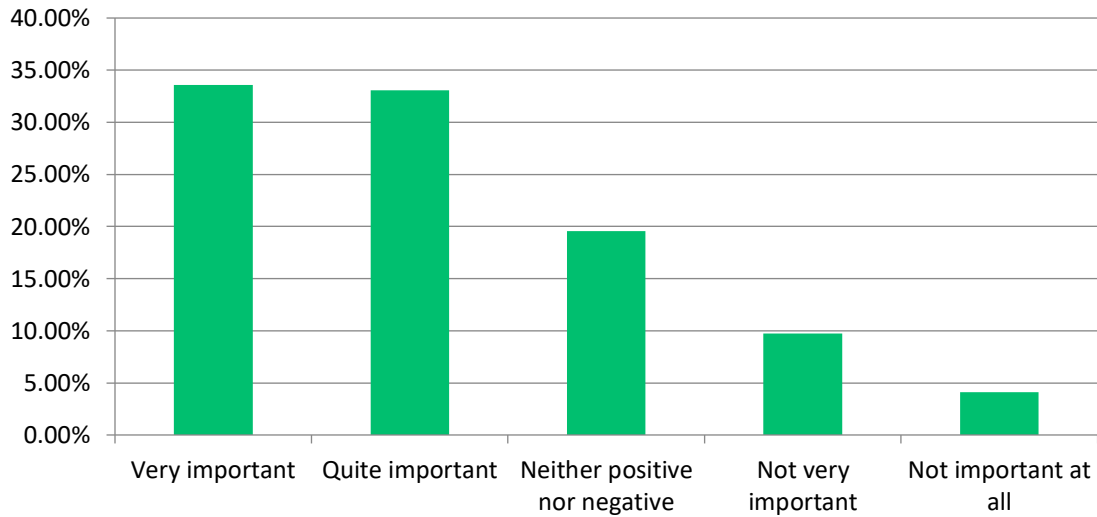
The survey sought feedback on people's views to understand how important the Castle is for the town and in terms of placemaking, sense of local pride and sense of community. In all these respects, Hastings Castle gains a strong endorsement. In terms of its importance for the town, more than two thirds believe the Castle is very important and more than 90% state that it is either very or quite important.

The importance for local pride scores slightly lower but nevertheless more than half consider the Castle to be very important and overall some 83% state that it is either very or quite important.

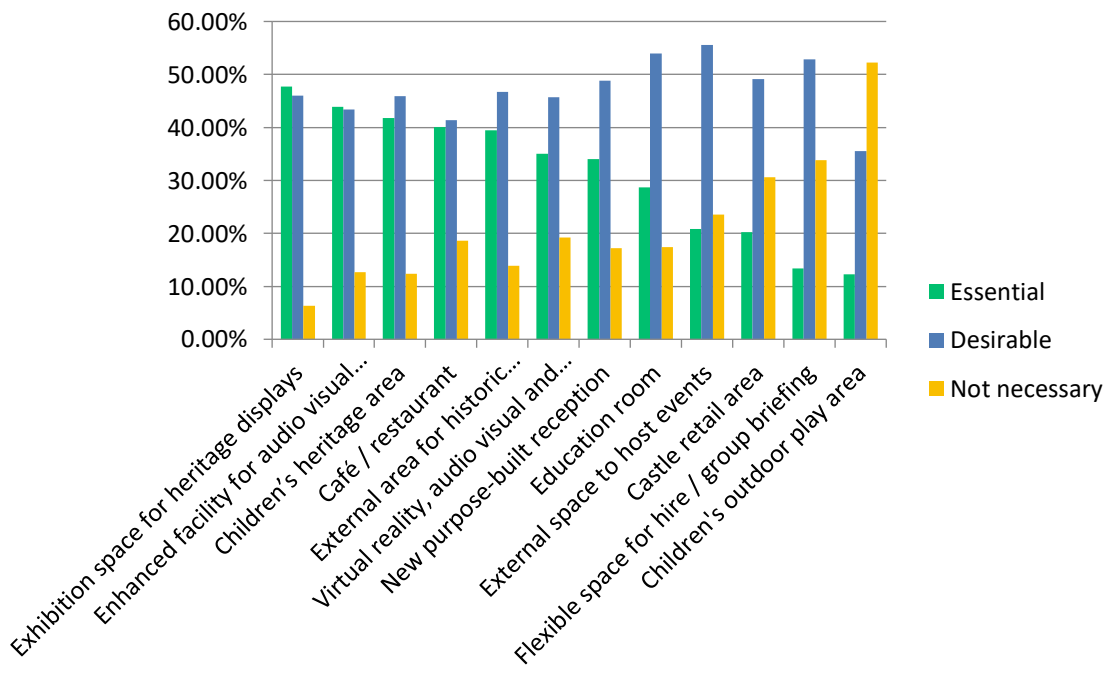


The importance of the Castle for creating a sense of community receives lower levels of highest approval than for the town and local pride and this is perhaps as a consequence of the limited level of community-based facilities / amenities currently available at the attraction and wider site. Nevertheless, the importance for the community is still considered as quite or very important by 66% (combined). This shows the strength of the heritage site and its potential to become a lead asset and hub for local engagement and wellbeing and 'more of a focus' for the town.

Importance of Hastings Castle for creating a sense of community



Levels of support for potential initiatives to be included in the Castle development?



Enhancing the offer at Hastings Castle

In terms of the most important areas for enhancing the offer at the castle, respondents saw the need to improve the exhibition space and varying forms of interpretive media as the most pressing and important need with almost half (47%) believing it to be essential and a

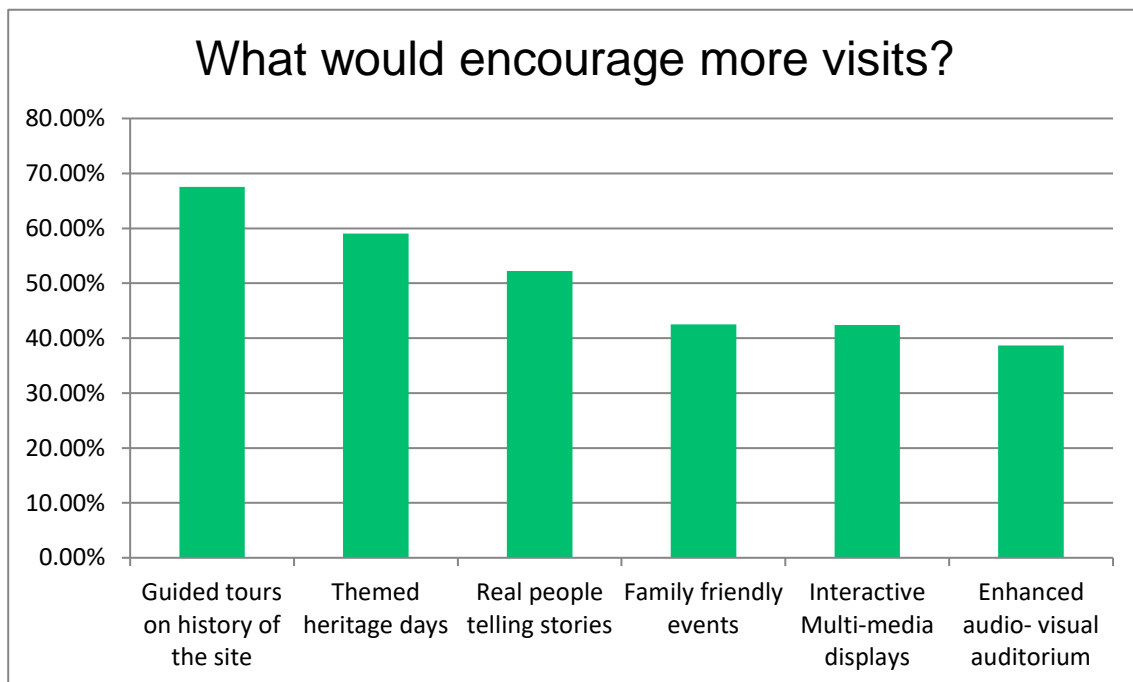
further 44% as desirable. In terms of essential elements, a children’s heritage area and a high-quality catering offer are the next highest scoring elements.

Interestingly there is a low level of respondents who consider the introduction of children’s play as essential or high priority.

Not surprisingly, the most important areas for enhancing the castle experience also feature in the respondents feedback on the single most important element to address (ie exhibition space, improved interpretive media (including virtual reality) and catering. In addition, there is significant support for a new purpose-built reception facility as well as for an education / multi-media room of some form.

There is also some support expressed for lighting up the castle at night and generally to improve accessibility. The current interpretation building is considered unsightly and as it can be seen from the beach, anything in its place must fit into the space in an unobtrusive way.

In terms of encouraging more visits it is interesting to note the strong desire for person to person interpretation, including specialist guide-led tours in particular as well as themed heritage days and ‘live’ storytelling.



- The current status and appeal of the Castle is poor quality and generates relatively poor ratings
- The castle fosters considerable goodwill and attachment among residents which currently is coupled with feelings of an underutilised asset in a poor state of repair and the visitor experience does not do justice to its siting and heritage importance
- Improvements to the exhibition and interpretive media are considered the highest priorities but there is broad support for a wide 'package' of interventions
- There is a positive level of support for incorporating virtual reality technology mechanisms as part of the visitor experience offer, preferably alongside 'live person to person guided tours

2. Visioning Workshop

An important component of the consultation programme was a facilitated visioning workshop with stakeholders representing the heritage sector in the town and the wider sub-region. The workshop took place on 16th November at Hastings Museum.

The attendees of the session are included in Appendix 1.

This workshop was led by Rubicon Regeneration and Hastings Borough Council and covered a number of areas as part of the plans to transform Hastings Castle into a leading heritage destination including:

- Presentation of the developing plans for Hastings Castle
- Early feedback from community consultation
- General discussion on the vision and development plan and identifying the core ingredients for a must-see heritage attraction

Feedback on development plan

The presentation outlined the context and 5 core components of the castle project:

All-access West Hill Cliff Railway

Signature heritage hub

Iconic new footbridge gateway

All-weather visitor facility

World class story-telling and interpretation

The key comments and observations on each of the component are summarised below.

All-access West Hill Cliff Railway

- General agreement that at least one of the West Hill Cliff Railway carriages should be adapted to accommodate people with a physical disability (i.e. wheelchair) and should be promoted / reinforced as the main pedestrian route to the castle from the town centre (alongside a hydraulic moving platform to overcome the need to use the steps);
- However, there was agreement that alternative routes to the castle needed to be identified to cater for any technical issues which meant the lift was not in operation for a period and also address potential congestion at peak times;
- A range of alternative routes were suggested including the potential for a shuttle bus (during peak times) to take people from the town centre to the castle;
- It was felt that additional interpretation could be included at the lift to enhance the story (and history) of this unique facility;
- Pricing needs to be carefully considered as currently school groups appear to avoid the lift due to added cost for education visit beyond available budgets;

- It was also stressed that the project needed to include a comprehensive programme of wayfinding and orientation to ensure that the castle is visible and accessible and a core part of the town's 'narrative' and visitor offer.

Signature heritage hub

- The West Cliff café is seen as being a disappointing 'gateway' and visitor facility;
- There was overwhelming enthusiasm to redevelop the site as a flagship facility offering a better catering and retail offer as well as included some heritage interpretation to 'start' the journey to the castle;
- The option to include more interpretation at the West Cliff café is seen as being positive, which is likely to gain favour with Historic England;
- Further thought is needed regarding the relationship off-site and on-site interpretation, e.g. the AV in the castle grounds with the need to remove / replace the portacabins which is unsightly and in very poor repair;
- Improvements are needed to make the path from the café to the castle more accessible.

Iconic new footbridge gateway

- General support on the proposal to create a new access route across Ladies' Parlour to the East Gate, which would become the main entrance to the castle;
- The proposal to create a new bridge over the dry moat was supported;
- The enhanced pedestrian access across the Ladies' Parlour would need to take into consideration the sensitive nature of the site;
- Additional concerns included security and access and ticketing (which area would be defined as the pay zone).

All-weather visitor facility

- The provision of an all-weather structure within the castle grounds was seen as being the most contentious component of the overall project;
- It was generally recognised that the current AV building was not fit-for-purpose but any future structure within the Schedule Ancient Monument (SAM) would need to be sensitively planned and designed (and meet Historic England's requirements);
- The option for re-purposing the ruins of the Collegiate Church was seen as offering potential (with a modern covered facility, possibly using steel and glass materials); however, attendees were keen that other site options within the castle were also explored (e.g. the current entrance).

World class story-telling and interpretation

- Heritage is one of the main reasons people come to this town and wider 1066 area

- Despite some investment in new interpretation boards, it was agreed that current interpretation was poor and needed to be improved;
- There was some debate as to what the focus of the heritage 'story' should be; it was stressed that the focus needed to be on the castle and the Norman heritage of the town but these needed to complement other heritage 'assets' within 1066 country, specifically Battle Abbey;
- New interpretation would need to incorporate the latest technology to provide world-class story-telling and interpretation.
- Important to cater for families as well as education visits and groups

Other Comments

It is also important to recognise and acknowledge the importance of the castle in terms of its '**place in the landscape**' for Hastings and the fact that it could be portrayed more as a start point for visits to the town as the 'castle with exceptional panoramic views'.

A number of points were raised in terms of 'critical success factors' and 'must-have's' for a successful heritage attraction (further information is presented in Technical Report 1). These included:

- The importance of engaging and involving heritage and tourism experts in developing the project and bringing the vision to reality;
- Generating community buy-in to the project;
- Addressing aspects of uniqueness and differentiation; an issue raised was the need to ensure that the evolving product complements and adds value to existing heritage experiences in the region (e.g. Battle Abbey);
- Sufficient resources need to be diverted to interpretation planning and delivery; interpretation and story-telling is a central part of the visitor experience and requires knowledge about the heritage being presented;
- An effective marketing strategy will be needed.

3. Consultation with Historic England

A session was arranged with Historic England (Rebecca Lambert, Inspector of Ancient Monuments, Kent, East and West Sussex) to summarise the project proposal and component elements and try and secure a steer from HE on moving forward, particularly with regards to development within the castle grounds.

The broad response from HE was positive: they recognised that the project was exciting and interesting, particularly the intention of putting Hastings Castle front and centre of the regeneration plans for the town.

Hastings Castle is recognised as a nationally important monument and archaeological site, being designated as a Schedule Ancient Monument and listed. Any development works to the castle would need to apply for Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC). Written consent must always be obtained before any work on a scheduled monument can begin.

Applications for SMC must be made to the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport for any works which might affect a monument either above or below ground level. The changes outlined in the concept proposal mean that the development programme would also require planning permission.

The scope and scale of the proposals for Hastings Castle mean that a strong justification and rationale for change will need to be included within the SMC process.

The process for moving forward will require the following staged approach:

Statement of Significance

The first step will be to prepare a Statement of Significance of the castle, its contents and setting to provide a foundation for considering changes to the building. The methodology for preparing a Statement of Significance for the Castle would begin with a detailed survey of the site, its buildings, its archaeology and its setting. It would also review the existing designations for the site. Understanding gleaned from the survey would be added to by archival research, primarily desk-based, into the history and occupation of the site from medieval times to the present day. Together these would enable an assessment of cultural significance to be articulated in the form of a Statement of Significance report.

Completion of this task will provide an understanding of significance of the current monument, associated buildings and available collections, and written such that it can meaningfully inform future decisions about the options for Hastings Castle.

It is likely that a heritage specialist would need to be appointed to prepare the Statement of Significance.

Options Appraisal

The Options Appraisal will be informed by the understanding of the castle and its significance as set out in the Statement of Significance. The Options Appraisal will explore opportunities for innovative new interventions to improve access and the visitor experience. The current concept proposals clearly provide an important starting point, which will need to be assessed through the options appraisal process. Clearly, the preferred option (s) will limit negative impact on the SAM. It should justify the preferred option, explaining why such changes are essential or desirable and also identify what public benefits might arise from the preferred option.

Decision by DCMS and Planning Authority

This stage would be the formal process to involve Historic England in determining Scheduled Monument Consent. The internal process would be through one of the following routes:

- Internal review at a regional level (IAR), or
- Consideration by the Historic England Advisory Committee, which offer expert advice of cases of national significance.

It is likely that as the project could involve development within the castle walls that the project would be considered by the wider Historic England Advisory Committee.

Scheduled Monument Consent and Planning

The final stage would be to seek formal Scheduled Monument Consent and planning approval for the preferred development scheme.

What is clear is that the process is likely to take between 15-18 months to go through the various required stages. Clearly, this make impact on the preparation of the Business Case, which will be dependent on the type and scale of interventions to enhance the visitor experience.

Appendix 1



Re-imagining Hastings Castle

We need your input Complete our questionnaire and enter a prize draw to win a £50 voucher of your choice

Hastings has recently been awarded over £24m from the Government's Town Fund to kickstart the re-set button for the town and its regeneration ambitions. Transforming Hastings Castle is the flagship project for the town. The project been allocated £3.2 million, subject to the development of a successful business case.

For more information on the Hastings Castle project visit:

www.visit1066country.com

This is your opportunity to say what you think and we would be grateful if you could answer a few questions to help shape the future of this project.

Please complete this online survey.

We will select one winner from people who complete the questionnaire and they will receive a £50 voucher as a prize.

Hard copies of the questionnaire are available at Hastings Museum & Art Gallery (John's Place, Bohemia Rd) Smugglers Adventure and the VIC). If you have any questions about our work please do not hesitate to contact: Kevin Boorman at kboorman@hastings.gov.uk

Thank you for your time and help.

Survey

1. Do you (tick one only)

Live in Hastings or within 10 miles of Hastings?....

A day visitor (living more than 10 miles away)

A visitor staying here overnight

2. Where do you live (town or village, no need to give your address)

.....

3. Have you visited Hastings Castle in the last three years?

Yes

No

If no, please go to Q6

4. How would you rate the overall experience at Hastings Castle?

Excellent, Very good, Good, Average, Poor, Very poor

5. How would you rate each of the following facilities at Hastings Castle?

(Matrix box with choice of answers Excellent, Very good, Good, Average, Poor, Very poor)

Visitor information

Orientation maps /signposting / signage

Accessibility

Interpretation

Seating

General cleanliness / appearance

6. How important do you think Hastings Castle is for the town?

Very important, Quite important, Neither positive or negative, Not very important, Not important at all

7. How important is Hastings Castle for creating a sense of community in town?

Very important, Quite important, Neither positive or negative, Not very important, Not important at all

8. How important is Hastings Castle for creating a sense of local pride in the town?

Very important, Quite important, Neither positive or negative, Not very important, Not important at all

1. What would you like to be included in the Castle development?

Facility	Essential	Desirable	Not Necessary
New purpose-built reception			
Castle retail area			
Café / restaurant			
Enhanced facility for audio visual and other shows			
Exhibition space for heritage displays			
Virtual reality, audio visual and other multimedia interpretation			
Children’s heritage area			
Flexible space for hire / group briefing			
Education room			
External area for historical interpretation of the Castle			
Children’s outdoor play area			
External space to host events			
Other ideas for Hastings Castle?			

10. What do you think is the single most important feature needed at the Castle from the list above?

.....

11. Please tell us more about what you would like to see at Hastings Castle, and what would directly encourage you to visit?

- | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Interactive Multi-media displays | <input type="checkbox"/> | Family friendly events..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Enhanced audio- visual auditorium | <input type="checkbox"/> | Themed heritage days | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Real people telling stories | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other..... | |
| Guided tours on history of the site..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | | <input type="checkbox"/> |

ABOUT YOU

12. Are you? (Please tick one)

- | | | | |
|------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Male | <input type="checkbox"/> | Female..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Non binary | <input type="checkbox"/> | Prefer not to say | <input type="checkbox"/> |

13. Your age group (Please tick one)

- | | | | |
|----------------|--------------------------|---------------|--------------------------|
| Under 16 | <input type="checkbox"/> | 45-54 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 16-24 | <input type="checkbox"/> | 55-64..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 25-34..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Over 65s..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 35-44..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |

Appendix 2:

Transforming Hastings Castle into a must-see heritage attraction:

Meeting with 1066 Heritage Attractions

Hastings Museum and Art Gallery, 16th November 2021 @ 10am

	Organisation	Name	
1.	Hastings history house	Anne Scott	
2.	British tea museum	Rebecca Gildea	
3.	Alistair Fairley	Alistair Fairley	
4.	Guide	Francoise Haslam-Dodo	
5.	Guide	Wilf Jackson	
6.	Hastings Area Archaeological Research Group	Lynn and Kevin Cornwell	
7.	Hastings Chronicle	Steve Peak	
8.	friends of Edith statue	Ian Jarman / Jenni	
9.	Battle abbey	Natasha Williams	
	Rubicon Regeneration	David Howells	
	Planning Solutions	Kevin Brown	
	Hastings Borough Council	Kevin Boorman Damian Etheraads	

Technical Paper 3 Education and the National Curriculum



1. Introduction

Educational visits are an integral part of school life and an important source of visitors to tourist attractions. Days out and trips are a key part of the offer which schools provide, particularly primary schools. For example, the attractions managed by Planning Solutions Consulting's sister company welcome some 50,000 school visits per annum. It is also important to recognise that this is a regenerating market segment with a new intake every September.

Successful attractions need to connect and inspire children through offering a responsive product, which is relevant to the curriculum. Our research indicates that education visits are dependent on a number of different factors including:

- Alignment with the National Curriculum and range of programmes on offer
- Facilities (e.g. classroom, interpretation)
- Availability of teacher led activities
- Pricing
- Marketing
- Accreditations e.g. Learning Outside of the Classroom Quality Badge
- Ease of booking
- Distance to travel

It is important to recognise that education visits outside of the classroom can have a number of benefits for participating schools and children, which are linked to:

- Social skills and team work
- Improved motivation and engagement with learning
- Personal wellbeing

We have noted a number of key trends in respect of organised school visits which bring a risk of decline in trips:

- Rising costs
- Time and financial pressure in schools
- Health and safety (particularly, as we are continuing to deal with COVID-19⁴)

The rising cost of transport means that some schools now travel shorter distances. Out of school trips may prove increasingly difficult to justify unless the entire cost is passed on to parents.

⁴ During 2020 and 2021 a number of heritage and other attractions provided free online content to help parents with home-schooling.

The latest research published by Visit England noted that during 2020 there was an 84% decline in school visits to the attractions, which took part in their annual survey. This compares to a decline of 61% in children visiting attractions. In the table below we set out longer term trends of school visits to attractions in England between 2015 and 2019.

Year	School Admissions
2015	-1%
2016	-1%
2017	-2%
2018	+1%
2019	-5%

Source: [Visitor Attraction Trends in England \(various years\) Full Report. VisitEngland](#)

Over the five years prior to COVID, there has been a year-on-year decline (apart from one year) in school visits to visitor attractions in England which took part in the VisitEngland survey.⁵

The education market remains a challenging marketplace for visitor attractions. This will need to be taken into account when developing the ‘schools offer.’ Annual research produced by Visit England also commented: *“schoolchildren are now only a major audience (comprising over 30% of visitors) for 3% of attractions.”*⁶

In terms of Hastings Castle, this perhaps highlights a potential need for off-site outreach educational activities, which will play a role in a ‘blended’ approach to the education offer with Hastings Castle’s education staff visiting schools and introducing off-site resources, for example ‘Hastings Castle Loan Boxes’; digital learning services etc. At Battle Abbey, English Heritage has a dedicated team to support school visits, including a Teacher’s Kit; Expert-led Discovery Visits; downloaded resources etc. There may be potential to enter into a partnership or informal collaboration with English Heritage at Battle Abbey to enhance the education offer.

⁵ Visitor Attraction Trends in England (various years) Full Report. VisitEngland

⁶ Visitor Attraction Trends in England 2019 Full Report, October 2020. VisitEngland i

The language schools' market has always been important to the castle and other attractions in the town. A regenerated Hastings Castle presents a strong opportunity to become a "must-see destination" for foreign language students in Hastings; however, Brexit may impact on overseas students attending foreign language schools in Hastings. An important element of the transformed offer will be to scope and develop the education offer.

The education offer will need to have strong links to the national curriculum, particularly history and societal development.

- Key Stage 1 (events beyond living memory that are significant nationally or globally and *significant historical events, people and places in their own locality*)
- Key Stage 3 (the development of Church, state and society in Medieval Britain 1066-1509, including the Norman Conquest).⁷

The National Curriculum does change and a careful watching brief will be required to ensure that the education offer meets the needs of education providers. For example, in terms of the education service whilst we may immediately think about a 'heritage' education offer within Hastings Castle, the wider setting may also lend itself to an 'outdoor learning' type offer. Given the climate and biodiversity emergencies and the Education Secretary's recent announcement (November 2021) that *"Young people will be empowered to take action on the environment as part of new measures designed to put climate change at the heart of education... Teachers will be supported to deliver world-leading climate change education through a model science curriculum, which will be in place by 2023, to teach children about nature and their impact on the world around them,"*⁸ The wider grounds and coastal vistas will present further opportunities linked to education.

The Heritage Schools programme provided by Historic England aims to encourage teachers to think about using what is local to their school, to bring their local history and heritage to life, increase a sense of pride and use the resources 'on their doorstep' to help teach the national heritage story. The Heritage Schools programme is currently in its ninth year. In total, Heritage Schools worked with 551 schools in 2020/21. It would seem appropriate for Hastings Castle to connect with the Local Heritage Education Manager (appointed by Historic England) to ensure that the education offer is fully embedded within the Heritage Schools programme. <https://historicengland.org.uk/services-skills/education/heritage-schools/>.

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-history-programmes-of-study/national-curriculum-in-england-history-programmes-of-study>

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/education-secretary-puts-climate-change-at-the-heart-of-education--2>

Summary Conclusions

- The education market is competitive and challenging; it is a changing market and the consequences of Covid-19 continues to have a significant impact;
- In terms of outreach provision, there may be potential to work with the educational resource team at English Heritage at Battle Abbey to enhance the education offer. The quality of interpretation in visitor attractions, particularly interactive technology, is a key component for the education and school visits' market;
- The education offer will need to have strong links to the national curriculum, particularly history and societal development for Key Stages 1 and 3;
- The National Curriculum does change and a careful watching brief will be required to ensure that the education offer meets the needs of education providers.

Summary and Recommendations

Our research and analysis show that the concept to transform Hastings Castle into must-see heritage destination is sound and the five project components provide a coherent plan to achieve a step-change in the visitor offer.

Hastings Castle is recognised as a nationally important monument and archaeological site, being designated as a Schedule Ancient Monument and listed building. Any development works to the castle would need to apply for Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC). The changes outlined in the concept proposal mean that the development programme would also require planning permission. The scope and scale of the proposals for Hastings Castle mean that a strong justification and rationale for change will need to be included within the SMC process. Discussions with Historic England confirm the required process that the project will need to go through to secure SMC, which is likely to add 15 – 18 months to the project timeline.

A priority action is to commission an appropriate heritage consultant to prepare a Statement of Significance for the castle and surrounding area as the first step in securing Scheduled Monument Consent for the preferred development programme.

An important issue is to ensure that the Statement of Significance and Options Appraisal runs in parallel with the business planning process; deliverability and viability should be key criteria in terms of assessing options.

The qualitative research with the local community indicates that the current status and appeal of the Castle is poor quality and generates relatively poor ratings. However, the castle fosters considerable goodwill and attachment among residents which currently is couched with feelings of an under-utilised asset in a poor state of repair and the visitor experience does not do justice to its siting and heritage importance. Improvements to the exhibition and interpretive media are considered the highest priorities but there is broad support for a wide ‘package’ of interventions. There is a positive level of support for incorporating virtual reality technology mechanisms as part of the visitor experience offer, preferably alongside ‘live person-to-person’ guided tours.

Generating community buy-in to the project will be key. It will be important that mechanisms are put in place to inform and involve the local community in the design, development and delivery of the castle project.

Local community comments and observations on the castle were mirrored by stakeholders. The castle is an under-utilised asset, which has suffered from neglect, lack of investment and poor management and there is general support and enthusiasm for the plans with some minor reservations.

There is a general willingness of stakeholders to support the Council drive forward the project and it will be important to continue to engage and involve heritage and tourism experts in developing the project and bringing the vision to reality. Addressing aspects of uniqueness and differentiation was an issue raised and it will be important to ensure that the evolving product complements and adds value to existing heritage experiences in the town and sub-region.

The Council should consider setting up some a task and finish group to support the project during the business planning, design and delivery stage.

Although there is consensus to reinforce the West Hill Cliff railway as the main pedestrian route from the town, it was felt that alternative routes to the castle needed to be identified to cater for any technical issues which meant the lift was not in operation for a period and also to address potential congestion at peak times. A range of alternative routes were suggested including the potential for a shuttle bus to take people from the town centre to the castle (during peak times).

The Council should consider assessing alternative routes to the castle in addition to the West Hill Cliff railway as well as developing a wayfinding plan to engage and direct visitors to the castle.

The review of best practice identified a number of 'critical success factors.' Interpretation and story-telling is a central part of the visitor experience and requires knowledge about the heritage being presented. Sufficient resources need to be invested into interpretation planning and delivery.

At an early stage, the Council needs to prepare an interpretation strategy and plan for the castle which is appropriate to the site and to the audience including the creative use of technology. The narrative of the site is key: it needs to be carefully researched, written and then woven into the experience and spirit of the place.

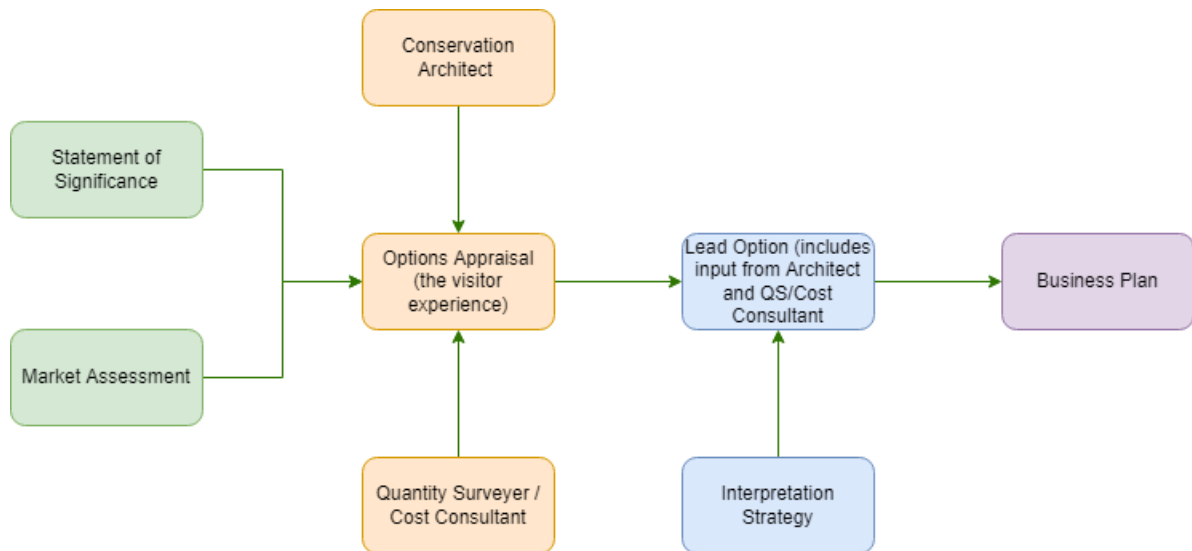
The Business Case, including options appraisal, will need to be based upon a detailed understanding and assessment of the market place, including the residential population living within the 30, 31 to 60 and 61 to 120-minute drivetime contours, the tourism sector (day and overnight visitors) and the competitive landscape. This will help to ensure that the end product meets the needs of the market both in terms of the current market and future trends. The market assessment will inform the development of the options appraisal in terms of identifying the preferred 'visitor experience' at a regenerated Hastings Castle (the scale, form and type of offer to attract visitors). We would recommend in terms of developing the options appraisal alongside the required business planning expertise that there is the need to involve a conservation architect experienced in developing castle-based attractions.

The Town Investment Programme includes a target visitor figure of 250,000 to the castle. Our initial assessment indicates that this is ambitious and probably not achievable.

Visitor numbers are based on a number of different factors:

- The offer
- Associated marketing carried out
- Opening times / tariffs
- Capacity
- The size of the available market and competitive landscape
- Wider economic trends

Visitor numbers will drive the business model in terms of admissions, membership sales and spend in catering and retail. This is alongside specific visits generated by a programme of events and educational offer. The financial assessment will need to consider the operating model along with the income and cost centres including ongoing maintenance post re-opening.



Ongoing community engagement and stakeholder consultation

The Business Case will need to be based on a detailed appraisal and analysis of the market and projection of visitor numbers based on realistic penetration rates.