



## Hawkhurst

“ The ancient Wealden village of Hawkhurst is widely known for its beautiful surroundings and long history, not least for the notorious Hawkhurst Gang of ruthless smugglers who terrorized the neighbourhood in the 18th century. ”



### Need for the Project

The Market Towns Healthcheck for Hawkhurst was carried out in 2006 with extensive consultation across the community. This study clearly identified that Hawkhurst was in need of regeneration and also highlighted that tourism, despite the potential, was one key area where little was being done.

The Hawkhurst Community Partnership developed an ambitious action plan to address this, with the following key aims:

- increased local footfall
- increased local turnover and sustainability of smaller retail units
- increased awareness and sale of local produce
- improved tourism business development
- improved public realm
- increase the supply of local visitor accommodation

Key Facts	
County:	Kent
District:	Tunbridge Wells
Population:	4400
Project Started:	2008



### The Process

The Action Plan enabled the Steering Group to bid for SEEDA-funding through Kent Rural Towns to deliver a 3-year programme of town improvements, tourism development, community activities and events, to address and meet the aims.

In drawing up and developing the costed project plan, HCP had assistance from Hawkhurst Parish Council, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and Tourism South East. However any SEEDA funding needed to be matched, so Hidden Britain was asked to help identify potential matched funding sources and help refine the action plan. By February 2009 all matched funding was in place from 20 funders.

This was an ambitious project with a wide focus and many different strands, therefore HCP employed a project co-ordinator part-time to keep an overview on the process. In addition separate working groups were set up for each element, pulling in different expertise and volunteer input as needed. All of the projects with a direct tourism focus were supported by Hidden Britain.

Although there were a number of projects and a correspondingly high workload, by phasing them over the 3 year period the group has, so far, been able to achieve a large amount of outputs for a manageable level of input.

### What is Hidden Britain South East?

Hidden Britain South East offers support to rural communities to help them uncover the fascinating wealth of landscape, history and culture within Britain's countryside. What's really special is that the local communities themselves, develop truly unique and distinctive experiences for people who visit their towns and villages.

Hidden Britain has been working in the South East since 2004 to encourage tourism at a locally managed level. The project aims to facilitate rural regeneration and community development where it is needed most. The project is funded by SEEDA through the Rural Development Programme for England.

# Hidden Britain

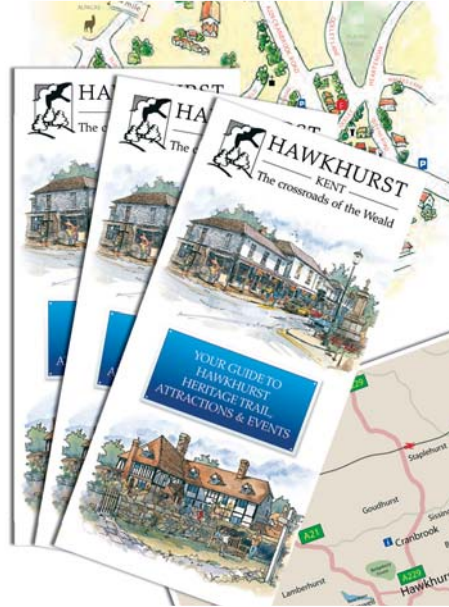


## Progress to date

### Who is Involved?

Formed in July 2008, The Hawkhurst Community Partnership evolved from previous functions of “Hawkhurst Happens”, the Hawkhurst Community Healthcheck. Currently the Partnership is a constituted body with 9 trustees and a close working relationship with Hawkhurst Parish Council, who act as the accountable body.

Of those involved in the working groups several have been key in the delivery of the tourism aspects of the project, namely; Bruce Cova, Sara Lovell, Gary Pharo, Stephen Fleming, Barbara Weeden, Alec Travers and John Buckles. These volunteers have been supported by Hidden Britain as well as the project co-ordinator Yolanda Laybourne, Parish Clerk Andrew McTrusty, Daryl Jones from TWBC and Phil Cornish from NFU.



### Status of Funding

An initial total of £168,000 was achieved in grants and matched funding in order to implement the project, 50% of which came from the SEEDA Rural Towns Programme. In addition matched grant funding was obtained from various bodies, as well as contributions from local businesses. HCP has also been able to lever in additional funds to expand or take on complementary work, bringing the project total to nearly £200,000.



The Hawkhurst Community Partnership presents:



### Project Outputs

- ▶ The production and distribution of 50,000 copies of the Hawkhurst Heritage Trail leaflet.
- ▶ The organisation of “Flix & Pix”, Film and Arts Festival in 2009 in conjunctions with the Kino digital cinema.
- ▶ Accommodation workshops to assist providers to obtain official accreditation.
- ▶ Business workshops for existing and start-up businesses.
- ▶ Refurbishment of the canopy of Hawkhurst’s iconic Colonnade.
- ▶ The organisation of “Beefing it Up” – a Celebration of Local Food and the centenary of the Oxo Cube (created in Hawkhurst) in 2010.
- ▶ A new Business Networking Group which meets monthly.
- ▶ The organisation of “Ways & Means” (2011) – the creation of a Smugglers Trail to mark the existence of the famous Hawkhurst Gang; and a Classic Car Show with an emphasis on Rootes cars (founded locally).
- ▶ A new website for Hawkhurst’s community, businesses and visitors at [www.visithawkhurst.org.uk](http://www.visithawkhurst.org.uk).



## Project Achievements



### ► Businesses engaged (est 132)

Around 100 businesses have attended the business group events and in addition basic listing on the website is free of charge for all Hawkhurst businesses, giving free publicity to many more.

### ► no. of volunteers (est. 15)

There have been around 15 core volunteers involved in delivery and management of the projects, although plenty more have and will continue to become involved as some of the larger events come to fruition. On top of this many businesses and organisations have also freely given their time. An estimate from HCP pegs this in-kind contribution at a value of around £100,000 to date.

### ► Skills & training

30 Local businesses have benefited from business workshops, covering subjects such as marketing, starting a business and growing your business. On top of that 30 people have attended the accommodation workshops, encourage new start-ups and existing businesses to become accredited. In addition volunteers have gained skills and experience in various areas, such as; obtaining funding, project planning, project management, commissioning and working with designers and printers, planning events and marketing.

### ► Marketing support

HBSE has assisted Hawkhurst in development of content for Ruralways and several other destination websites, both regionally and nationally. In addition HBSE has assisted with design and creation of flyers, posters, logos and business cards to help publicise the project.



## Hidden Britain Input

Hidden Britain became involved via a recommendation from the Kent Rural Towns co-ordinator. Although the actions were broadly established prior to this, HBSE was still able to feed into the process and refine several of the ideas. However the HCP group in themselves proved more than capable of developing a costed project plan, and required minimal input from HBSE in order to obtain all the necessary funding.

Hidden Britain input really came into its own once implementation began, where HBSE could bring its expertise and knowledge on both tourism and the running of community projects to the table. As a result HBSE has closely supported several of the working groups, particularly those working on the leaflet, website and food festival. In addition HBSE has provided further support such as; designing the Beefing it up logo, creating posters, flyers and business cards to promote the web launch, sourcing images and content for the website, providing advice and training in using the Content Management System and introducing a wider net of contacts to help deliver the projects.



## Hawkhurst

### Going Forward

- ▶ The group is currently publicising the newly launched website at [www.visithawkhurst.org.uk](http://www.visithawkhurst.org.uk). Based on a CMS the site has potential to grow organically over the next few years.
- ▶ Plans are currently underway for the “Beefing it Up” Food festival to be held in July 2010, involving celebrity chefs, a local produce market and farm safari, and the “Ways and Means” Heritage festival in 2011
- ▶ The group are also currently assisting publicity for the second year of the “Flix & Pix” arts and film festival in May 2010, this year being repeated with private funding.
- ▶ HCP are further involved in a potential project to re-open the disused Hop Picker’s train line for recreational use.



### Lessons Learned

- ▶ With proper planning, phasing of actions and concerted support, even large diverse projects can be easily delivered by community groups.
- ▶ Events programmes are a great way of raising destination awareness and also can really enthuse and engage the local community, however to be sustainable they really need to gain private sector support.
- ▶ Publicise what you do widely, you never know who might be able to support you.



*Hidden Britain has contributed specific knowledge, expertise and objectivity in the fields of tourism and community regeneration, bringing new dimensions to the Partnership’s approach.*

Bruce Cova, Chairman  
Hawkhurst Community Partnership



- ▶ Accept any offers of advice or assistance, each one can make the difference in a project.
- ▶ Developing tangible benefits is the most effective way of engaging with business.
- ▶ Consider employing a co-ordinator in large projects.

This case study forms part of a series evaluating the impacts and benefits of the Hidden Britain South East Project across the region. The Project is managed by the South East Rural Community Councils (SERCC) in partnership with Tourism South East. The Hidden Britain South East Project is funded by SEEDA through the Rural Development Programme for England



Further Information  
[www.visithawkhurst.org.uk](http://www.visithawkhurst.org.uk)  
[www.hiddenbritainse.org.uk](http://www.hiddenbritainse.org.uk)  
[www.sercc.org.uk](http://www.sercc.org.uk)  
[www.tourismse.com](http://www.tourismse.com)  
[www.seeda.co.uk/rdpe](http://www.seeda.co.uk/rdpe)

