

UNDERSTAND AND MEET THE  
NEEDS OF WALKERS AND CYCLISTS

**Welcoming walkers and  
cyclists to your business**

[kentdowns.org.uk](http://kentdowns.org.uk)

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# 01. Walking and cycling in the Kent countryside



## Walking and cycling in the Kent countryside

The Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the North Downs Way are fantastic places to walk and cycle, and they're getting even better. With outstanding landscapes and countryside, an extensive network of footpaths and hospitality, and excellent transport links, it provides an easily accessible way to find your space in the countryside.

The Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a nationally protected landscape. Its special characteristics include dramatic landforms and views, rich habitats, extensive ancient woodland, mixed farmland, historic and built heritage, and tranquillity and remoteness. The Kent Downs AONB covers a quarter of Kent and current estimates state that it welcomes around 20,000,000 visitors a year<sup>[1]</sup>; that's almost a third of all visitors to Kent and a number similar to that of the Cotswolds AONB.

In 2022, Kent's Heritage Coast, part of the Kent Downs AONB, was designated one of Lonely Planet's Best in Travel. The authoritative travel publisher highlighted the region's commitment to sustainable tourism, the regeneration of Dover, and Kent Downs AONB's ambition to establish a cross-Channel UNESCO Global Geopark.



[1] The Kent Downs AONB Management Plan 2021-2026

## Major hiking and biking routes

In addition to a dense network of footpaths (4,200 miles/6,876 km), Kent has many high-profile walking routes: the Saxon Shore Way, Greensand Way, and three pilgrimage routes including the Pilgrim's Way and the Via Francigena, which takes pilgrims from Canterbury to Rome and is the only European cultural route in the UK.

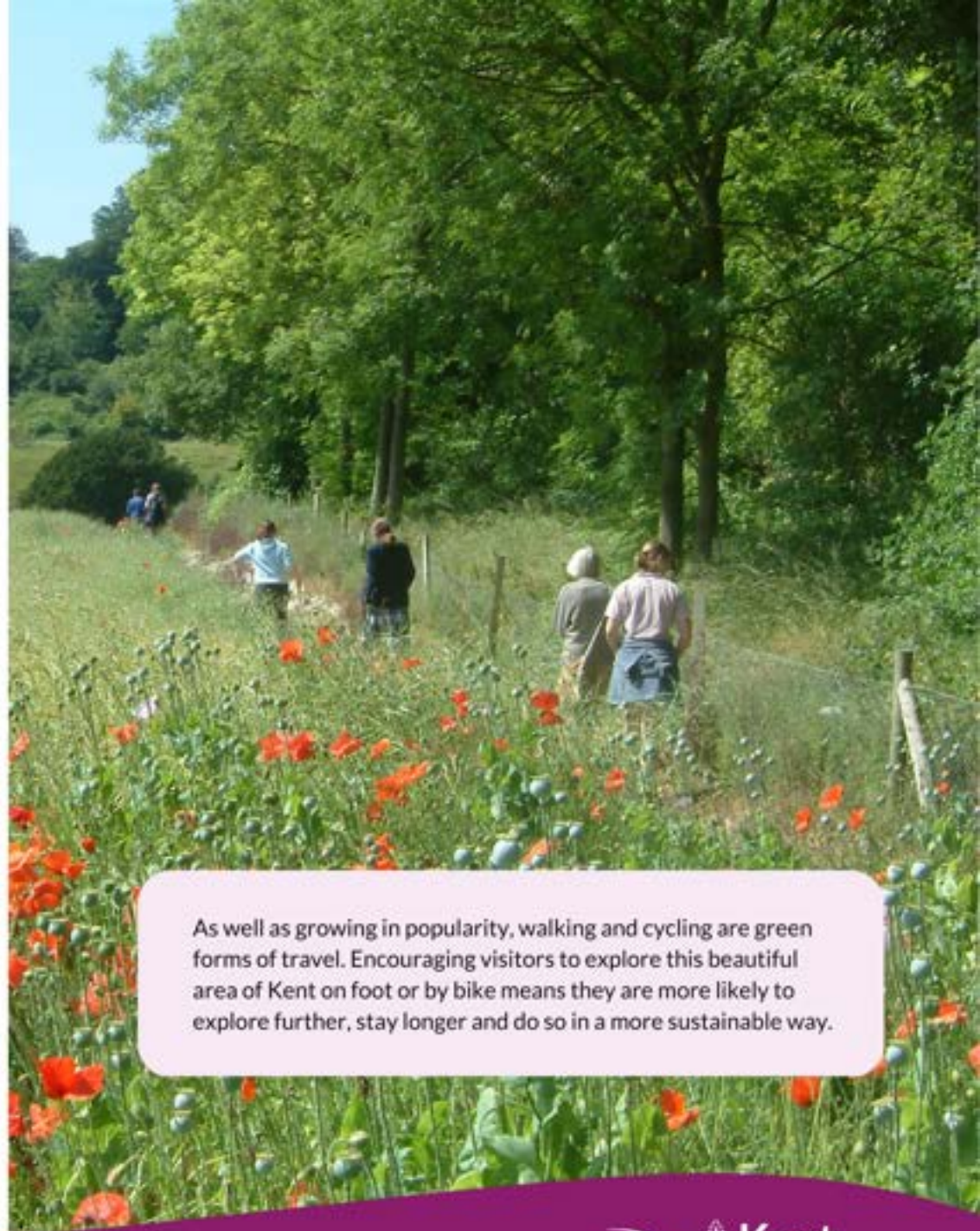
The [North Downs Way](#) extends from Farnham in Surrey through the county to Dover, following an ancient pre-historic route, and includes the Pilgrimage Route. It's one of 17 National Trails, and intersects with the new [England Coast Path](#).

[National Trails](#) are long-distance walks through some of the very best landscapes the UK has to offer. They have been designated by the Government and are managed to a set of Quality Standards that set them above other routes.

You can now also enjoy the North Downs Way by bike with the launch of the new [Riders Route](#).

Other bucket list-worthy national cycling routes, such as the National Cycle Route 1 from Dover to the north of Scotland, roll through Kent, as well as several regional and local routes. The Crab and Winkle Way, the Viking Coastal Trail and the Kent Coastal Castles Rides are great for day-tripping bikers and hikers.

Discover more of Kent's routes on [Explore Kent](#).



As well as growing in popularity, walking and cycling are green forms of travel. Encouraging visitors to explore this beautiful area of Kent on foot or by bike means they are more likely to explore further, stay longer and do so in a more sustainable way.

## 02. Why walkers and cyclists?





## Why walkers and cyclists?

Walking and cycling are the two most popular outdoor pursuits[1] and they are growing markets.

Even before COVID-19, the number of people spending time outdoors was already increasing[2]. The pandemic bolstered appreciation for the countryside with people visiting for various reasons, from mental or physical health to finding something for all the family to do and meeting up with friends and family safely. Since restrictions were lifted, people have continued to find nature, wildlife and visiting natural spaces to be important to their wellbeing[3].

Walking and cycling tourism can encourage visitors to explore less-visited areas, stay longer and help increase visitor numbers during the autumn and winter shoulder season. Experiencing an area on foot or by bike allows visitors to become more immersed in the environment, promoting interaction between visitors/tourists and the local landscape, communities and nature.

[1] VisitEngland Discover England Fund Research Outdoor Activities (2018)

[2] Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (2019)

[3] The People and Nature Survey for England: Year 2 Annual Report (2022)

## The value of walking in England



### 4 billion visits

In 2018 adults in England took nearly 4 billion visits to the natural environment.

### 20 million

The Kent Downs AONB welcomes 20 million visitors per year.

### 54% to 65%

2/3s adults say they spend time in the natural environment at least once per week. This has increased over the last 10 years from 54% to 65%.

### 300%

During COVID 19 visitors to Kent's Public Rights of Way and Country parks increased by 300%.



### 6.14 billion

Walkers in the countryside spend around £6.14 billion a year.



## Tourism

### 1.5 billion spend

directly attributable to walking and hiking by domestic visitors is £1.5 billion.



### 35%

of domestic trips involve outdoor activities, of which the most popular is walking.

### 3.54 nights

Trips to countryside destinations are longer than other destinations (3.54 nights compared with 3.37 nights).

Average spend on this type of break is higher than the average £274 vs £245 (£69 per night).

### 37%

For international visitors walking and hiking accounts for 37% of all visits, very similar to domestic.

### Day trip spend is average £35.8

## The effect of COVID on rural tourism



### popular destination

In September countryside was the most popular type of destination for domestic holiday makers.

### holiday makers

Outdoor areas and leisure activities most popular intended destination for domestic holiday makers (more than wellbeing, indoor or ents).



The value of the walking and cycling market is huge, and by recognising walkers' and cyclists' needs and motivations, you help them feel welcome and provide a hassle-free experience. This can lead to better reviews, increased spend and repeat visits.



### 03. Walker and cyclist profiles



# Who are walkers and cyclists?

Here is a broad outline of the different types you might encounter:

	ENTHUSIAST	ADVENTURER	EXPLORERS	DAY TRIPPERS
<b>Walkers</b>	Driven by completing a challenging distance, Enthusiasts tend to follow a linear route. National Trails are a draw. Enthusiasts make up about 10% of all walkers. They prefer budget accommodation and may not stay more than one night. While they are harder to engage with other activities besides walking, they do need refreshment stops and will take in important places of interest.	Adventurers are driven by – and primarily interested in – more challenging outdoor activities such as rock climbing and windsurfing. They may combine walking and cycling with this, especially cycling that is more challenging. Adventurers tend to be younger, pre-children.	Explorers are slightly older (approx. 45+) and either have older, grown-up or no children. They still want a challenge, but want to combine it with comfort or a treat. Explorers can be a couple or, increasingly, groups of friends. They are looking for shorter walks of under 5 miles. Walking is part of the experience rather than the sole experience, therefore itineraries that include interesting walks, places to visit or things to do plus refreshment are appealing.	The Day Trippers category includes families and casual walkers out for leisure and quality family time. Multi-generational groups tend to be Day Trippers, so catering should include something for everyone.
	TOURING	ENTHUSIAST	CASUAL	DAY TRIPPERS
<b>Cyclists</b>	Touring cyclists tend to be on long linear or circular journeys. Generally, they stay a minimum of one night, travel by bike or combine with train, and carry everything with them.	Enthusiasts tend to bring their bikes in the car for a short break of mountain biking or road cycling.	Explorers are slightly older (approx. 45+) and either have older, grown-up or no children. They still want a challenge, but want to combine it with comfort or a treat. Explorers can be a couple or, increasingly, groups of friends. They are looking for shorter walks of under 5 miles. Walking is part of the experience rather than the sole experience, therefore itineraries that include interesting walks, places to visit or things to do plus refreshment are appealing.	(including for events) As well as more casual cyclists out for a short cycle that they feel safe doing, this category includes cycling clubs, such as those from South London. They're all likely to stop for coffee and cake!

OTHER
<p><b>GROUP TRAVEL</b> Driven by completing a challenging distance, Enthusiasts tend to follow a linear route. National Trails are a draw. Enthusiasts make up about 10% of all walkers. They prefer budget accommodation and may not stay more than one night. While they are harder to engage with other activities besides walking, they do need refreshment stops and will take in important places of interest.</p> <p><b>DOG OWNERS</b> Many walkers are dog owners, so being dog friendly will increase your appeal. If you are a dog-friendly provider, make that crystal clear on your website. Some ideas for being dog friendly include providing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water and food bowls for each pet</li> <li>• An area where dogs can be 'toiletted' with suitable disposable equipment</li> <li>• Dog-cleaning facilities</li> <li>• Storage for animal crates</li> <li>• A secure exercise area</li> <li>• Details for local vets, pet supplies, walks and other places that welcome dogs</li> </ul>

The walking and cycling sector is diverse. The more you recognise and understand the many different types of walkers and cyclists, the more effectively you will be able to cater for their varying needs.

## 04. Needs and adjustments



## Key needs for walkers and cyclists

Be aware of the various needs of walkers and cyclists so you're prepared to make them as welcome as possible. Here are some of the basic expectations they may have of your business, and easy ways for you to meet them.

### Local route knowledge

It is important for you to know your local walking and cycling routes, and be able to suggest a few of varying terrain and difficulty levels for the different types of walkers you may encounter.

For example, a good walk for Explorers is usually less than 5 miles and includes great views, options for interesting things to see or do, and refreshment stops midway or at the end. Enthusiasts are more interested in where the next stop may be on the North Downs Way or other long-distance routes.

To brush up on your local routes see:

- Explore Kent: [explorekent.org](http://explorekent.org)
- [North Downs Way](#)
- Ordnance Survey maps and app
- Apps such as Kent Connected (which also shows public transport links), OutdoorActive, Kamoot, All Trails and others





## Local area knowledge

For many visitors, walking and cycling is just part of a wider visit. By helping them discover what else is available locally, you make the area even more appealing and encourage longer stays. You could create a few suggested itineraries for walkers and cyclist that cover their other interests alongside popular walking and cycling trails. See our website [www.kentdowns.org.uk](http://www.kentdowns.org.uk) to explore some local itineraries.

Other interests for walkers and cyclists include:

- Culture and heritage: Major visitor attractions and less well-known sites such as churches, archaeological sites and sculptures, as well as places associated with artists, writers, historic figures or ways of life.
- Nature and wildlife: Local nature reserves, important natural habitats, and opportunities to spot wildlife, from bird hides to guided tours and safaris.
- Local life: Farmers markets, events and festivals.
- Food and drink: Recommended restaurants, pubs and cafes as well as local and sustainable farm shops and producers.
- Gardens and parks.
- Wellbeing activities: Yoga, spas, forest bathing, meditation.
- Other outdoor activities: Walking tours, watersports, boating, horse-riding.

## Your location

Make it easy to find your business by including driving, walking and public transport directions on your website. You could include links to local bus and train timetables. If you're hard to find, consider apps such as what3words to help pinpoint your location accurately. Include information about what makes your area special, and indicate if you are in the Kent Downs or along the North Downs Way.

## Weather

There's no such thing as bad weather just the wrong clothing - but it always appreciated if you make sure people are warm and cosy (or cooled down) on arrival! Have a list of suggestions for alternative, easier routes or indoor activities ready in case the weather is too bad for longer-distance walking or cycling.



## Suggested adjustments

Here are some suggestions for easy, low-cost adjustments you can make to improve your provision for walkers and cyclists. This is not an exhaustive list but it should give you some inspiration. You could also research other walking- and cycling-friendly businesses for ideas and check out the various accreditation schemes for walker- and cyclist-friendly businesses (see Further Resources).

### For everyone: A warm and empathetic welcome, whatever the weather!

Before arrival: Ensure information about walking and cycling in the area is available online.

At your venue provide:

- Maps, access to route information, recommended routes
- Space for drying outdoor clothing and footwear
- Boot scrapers, and/or access to water and a stiff brush for cleaning
- Free refills for water bottles, and hot water for flasks
- Somewhere safe to store backpacks
- First aid kit for minor scrapes (you do not have to administer) and details for nearest doctor, physio etc
- Wi-fi throughout so that routes can be researched online



### Specific provisions for cyclists:

- Knowledge of local cycle routes and their level of difficulty
- Knowledge of nearest cycle repair shops
- Nearby cycle hire
- A safe place to lock up bikes (consider lockable and well-lit storage if overnight)
- Bike washing facilities such as access to a hosepipe
- Basic tools such as a puncture repair kit and pump
- Signposting to laundry facilities

## Suggested adjustments

### Go the extra mile for walkers and cyclists

#### Comfort

- Epsom salts for baths and foot spas
- Book ahead massages or treatments
- Foot coverings (slippers) or fluffy mats
- Boot- and bike-cleaning services
- Onsite laundry facilities
- Sell basic walking and cycling supplies such as socks, hats, gloves, capes, water bottles, energy gels etc

#### Food and drink

- Walkers and cyclists may not be able to fit in with your meal times. Try and be flexible
- Early or packed breakfast (from 7am)
- Packed lunches with local produce and drink (at a charge)
- Special walker- or cyclist-themed big breakfasts, Ploughmans or hearty dinners

#### For cyclists

- E-bike charging
- Mechanical knowledge
- Roadside support
- Bike hire – either from yourself or by pre-arrangement with local company



### How to encourage longer stays and higher spend

- Get to know your visitors' plans when they get in touch and suggest a rest day and extra night for walkers/cyclists on linear routes.
- Network with other local businesses to develop itineraries and the local walking/cycling offer so that visitors have a reason to stay 1 or 2 days longer.
- Pass on your local knowledge to visitors and send them to places you rate highly.
- Offer transport options so visitors can do a linear or circular route in another location.
- Make contact with walking/cycling tour providers to offer your accommodation or businesses.



## 05. Marketing



## Marketing

Social media and online marketing has transformed how visitors make decisions about their trips, from researching and planning to booking to recommending their experiences afterwards. It's relatively easy for businesses to reach visitors directly in a cost-effective way, and visitors can easily share their tips, recommendations and experiences. Here are some manageable tips for improving your online presence for walkers and cyclists.

Here are some manageable tips for improving your online presence for walkers and cyclists.



## Create engaging content

- Ensure your website reflects your personal story. The more personal and unique you can make your business, the more people will trust and remember you so share why you set up your business and what you think is special about it.
- Post engaging stories on your social media channels and your blog (if you have one) about the walking and cycling routes in your area, what there is to see, and local events such as farmers markets or walking festivals so that visitors can see what else there is to see and do in the area.
- On your website, clearly state your location, whether you are on popular walking trails, and further information about the local walking and cycling offer.
- Inspire potential visitors by using images that reflect the experience of walking and cycling – landscapes, local life and people in walking/cycling gear for example.
- Research your SEO keywords – use phrases like 'cycling in Kent', 'best walks in Kent', 'best pub/tours/accommodation for walkers and cyclists', 'North Downs Way', 'Kent Downs' and 'Kent countryside' etc.
- Highlight your facilities for walkers and cyclists.
- Make it as easy as possible to make a booking, or contact you – the fewer clicks the better.
- Also make it easy for visitors to find you physically! Use apps such as what3words to help accurately pinpoint your entrance.
- Analyse the websites of similar businesses in other areas of the country, particularly around national trails and national parks, for ideas.
- Include links to other websites that target walkers in your website content, and ask for a reciprocal link. The more links point to your website, the more likely it is that potential visitors will find you online.



## Promote your business

- Social media is one of the most cost-effective ways to promote your business as it directly reaches people who are already interested in walking and cycling. Choose your channels carefully – Facebook, YouTube and Instagram are still the most popular platforms
- It's better to have fewer accounts that are well managed. Link your Instagram and Facebook accounts to save time by automatically cross-posting.
- Create content related to walking and cycling in your area for your social media channels. Post stories about hidden history and gems, best views, great places for walkers and cyclists to tuck into tea and cakes or enjoy a local ale for example. Try and take good quality pictures that depict walkers and cyclists.
- Like, comment on and share other people's posts related to walking and cycling. Encourage your visitors and guests to tag you in their posts. Social media should be a two-way conversation rather than a one-way transmission of information.
- Take part in online conversations about cycling and walking to plug yourself into the active and close-knit cycling and walking communities.
- Be proactive about asking your walking and cycling visitors for reviews on sites such as TripAdvisor, Google and your social media profiles, and take the time to respond to your reviews. Don't forget to share the best ones!
- Keep your personal and business accounts separate and follow relevant businesses or people.
- Be aware that with increased social media activity comes a higher expectation for response, so be prepared to interact with your audience.
- Interact (tag, comment, like, share) with relevant national and local organisations such as Kent Downs, National Trail, Explore Kent and Cycling UK, for example, together with other businesses in the local area, and any tourism groups such as Visit Canterbury or White Cliffs Country. You may also have a local tourism group that is well followed already. If not, consider setting up your own!
- Post to local community groups – they often have friends and family to stay and are looking for things to do.
- To achieve maximum visibility of your posts, time them for when your audience is most likely to be looking at their phones (check your Instagram dashboard for account insights) and be present to respond to questions, queries and comments.
- Comment on and like other people posts to help increase your visibility on your chosen social media platform(s), within walking and cycling networks.
- Use relevant hashtags to help people not already in your network find you.
- Consider paid Facebook ads, but always check return on investment. Social media posts may be enough.
- Join the Cycling UK Cyclists Welcome Directory.
- Get accredited and listed by a relevant accreditation scheme (see Further Resources for more details).
- Find out if there are local walking and cycling groups in your area and ask them to come to you and share their experiences online. Network with other businesses and share their information reciprocally.
- Gather customer email addresses and communicate regularly (check that you have permission). Email is a hugely effective marketing tool.
- If you are on the North Downs Way National Trail you can add your details to the website: [National Trail North Downs Way](#) – click on 'add information' in the top menu and register.

## Continuously review your online processes

- Monitor what is working and what is not. Ask people where they heard about you. Ask for feedback on services. Use quotes from good reviews and post high ratings from TripAdvisor, for example.
- Check Google Analytics (a free service) to see where website traffic is coming from. Monitor increase in followers and which posts they responded to.
- Keep updated and see what people are talking about by subscribing to popular walking/cycling magazines and websites.
- Ask your customers what they thought and what they could improve. Either face to face, or a short on site or follow up survey.



## 06. Putting it all together



## Putting it all together



### Understand

Understand your audience



### Research

Research your routes, the surrounding area and wider offer



### Review

Review your facilities offer using the checklist (on the following page)



### Update

Update your website, social media channels and any other listings



### Promote

Promote your facilities for walkers and cyclists

## Walkers and cyclists checklist

STANDARD LEVEL OF SUPPORT	ALREADY HAVE	WANT TO DO
Friendly environment, a warm welcome		
Staff briefed in welcoming walkers and cyclists		
Accommodate cyclists' and walkers' kit during their visit		
Basic first aid essentials available for visitors <i>(you are not expected to provide first aid just offer supplies)</i>		
Willing to refill water bottles/flasks free of charge with hot/cold water		
Boot scrapers, water and stiff brush		
Cycle stands or secure structures where bikes can be chained up		
Personal knowledge of local routes		
Free wi-fi		
Information available such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Ordnance Survey maps</li> <li>• Local area maps and leaflets, walks and cycle routes (for reference or for sale)</li> <li>• Local places to eat, stay and visit</li> <li>• Details of local cycling and walking supplies, repairs and hire</li> <li>• Details for local public transport and taxi facilities</li> <li>• Weather information</li> </ul>		
Easy to find, with clear directions and travel information available online		

ENHANCED SUPPORT	ALREADY HAVE	WANT TO DO
Extra comforts such as mats, bath salts, foot spas etc		
Themed food and drink offer		
Puncture repair kit and bike tool kit		
Bike-washing facilities		
Boot-cleaning materials and kit		
Overnight lockable cycle storage		
Lockable backpack storage		
Baggage transfer service		
Provision of packed lunches/breakfasts		
Guided tours		
Inspirational magazines and books		
Visitor book with route feedback		
Laundry facilities		
Network with other businesses		
GPS units		
Bike hire		
Raincoats		
Showers		



Use this space for your own additional notes/ideas/research

## 07. Further resources and contact information



## Further resources and contact information

Cycling UK

[cyclinguk.org](https://www.cyclinguk.org)

[experience@cyclinguk.org](mailto:experience@cyclinguk.org)

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Explore Kent

[explorekent.org](https://www.explorekent.org)

[explorekent@kent.gov.uk](mailto:explorekent@kent.gov.uk)

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Kent Downs AONB

[kentdowns.org.uk](https://www.kentdowns.org.uk)

[mail@kentdowns.org.uk](mailto:mail@kentdowns.org.uk)

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North Downs Way National Trail

[nationaltrail.co.uk/en\\_GB/trails/north-downs-way](https://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/en_GB/trails/north-downs-way)

[pete.morris@kentdowns.org.uk](mailto:pete.morris@kentdowns.org.uk)

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[kentdownsaonb](https://www.facebook.com/kentdownsaonb)



[kent\\_downs\\_aonb](https://www.instagram.com/kent_downs_aonb)



[KentDownsAONB](https://twitter.com/KentDownsAONB)



## Further resources and contact information

### Cyclist accreditation schemes

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#### Cycle Friendly Places

Cycle Friendly Places helps hospitality and accommodation business in Kent get accredited as a cycle-friendly place, for free.

Designed by Cycling UK, the accreditation scheme makes it easy for small and medium-sized businesses to be recognised as cycle friendly, and for local and visiting cyclists to find them.

As well as being officially accredited, your business will receive free publicity to the 71,000-member base, free equipment to help make your business more bike friendly, a listing on Cycling UK's county map (used by cyclists planning their trips), and online training opportunities and guides.

Find out more and apply [experience.cyclinguk.org](http://experience.cyclinguk.org)

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#### Cyclists Welcome

VisitEngland's Cyclists Welcome is for accommodation businesses. The scheme both helps you ready your accommodation for visitors on two wheels and shows potential visitors that your accommodation is well equipped for cyclists.

Find out more and apply [visitenglandassessmentsservices.com/our-schemes/welcome-schemes](http://visitenglandassessmentsservices.com/our-schemes/welcome-schemes)

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### Walkers accreditation schemes

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At the moment, the Kent Downs AONB and Explore Kent do not run accreditation schemes. Instead, we hope to encourage a broad range of businesses to review and promote services to walkers.

If you would like to be accredited as a walker-friendly business, these national schemes may be of interest.

#### Walkers Welcome

Visit England's Walkers Welcome scheme is an additional assessment for accommodation businesses who are already quality assessed by VE, or who are in the process of applying for their quality rating.

Find out more and apply [visitenglandassessmentsservices.com/our-schemes/welcome-schemes](http://visitenglandassessmentsservices.com/our-schemes/welcome-schemes)

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#### Walkers are Welcome

The Walkers are Welcome Scheme is for towns and villages who, collectively would like to be welcoming to walkers.

Find out more [walkersarewelcome.org.uk](http://walkersarewelcome.org.uk)

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#### Kent Downs AONB business support

If you would like to know more about the Kent Downs AONB business support, including more resources and networking with other businesses in the Kent Downs and along the North Downs Way please visit our business pages

[kentdowns.org.uk/business-resources](http://kentdowns.org.uk/business-resources)

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