



Birchington Parish Council

The Birchington Place & Belonging Project

Business Case

Business case field	Detail
Applicant	Birchington Parish Council
Funding sought	£20,000 capital funding
Project type	Public realm, heritage interpretation, wayfinding, seating and gateway identity
Primary outcome	Improved public spaces and stronger pride in place
Key partner	Birchington Heritage Trust
Document status	Draft business case for funding submission

1. Executive summary

The Birchington Place & Belonging Project seeks £20,000 capital funding to deliver a coordinated package of public realm improvements across Birchington. The project will provide historical information boards commissioned from a suitable community group, parish-branded benches, directional finger posts and character "Welcome to Birchington" gateway signs on the A28 village boundary.

The project will improve the village centre experience, support local businesses, make walking routes clearer and more accessible, strengthen heritage interpretation and reinforce Birchington's identity as a distinctive and welcoming village.

The community group will advise on how the finger posts and information boards could be configured and co-ordinated to provide a heritage trail through the parish. This will allow the capital works to function not only as individual improvements, but as the basis of a connected route that links the village centre, conservation area, recreation spaces, coastal routes and other places of interest.

2. The case for change

Birchington has a strong local identity, a historic core and an active community. However, the village centre and key routes would benefit from clearer wayfinding, better seating, more coherent public realm treatment and stronger interpretation of local heritage. Existing routes between the railway station, commercial centre, heritage assets, community facilities, recreation spaces and coastal destinations are not always clearly understood by visitors or occasional users.

The project responds to the need for a stronger sense of arrival, better public realm consistency and a more visible celebration of Birchington's heritage and community identity. It is designed as a deliverable first phase rather than a comprehensive redesign of the village centre.

A heritage trail approach will increase the value of the investment by connecting the information boards and finger posts into a coherent visitor and resident experience. Rather than providing isolated signs, the project will help people follow Birchington's story across the parish, encouraging exploration, walking, learning and linked visits to local businesses and community assets.

3. Strategic fit

The project is strongly aligned with national, district and local strategies. It supports pride in place, public space improvement, village centre vitality, heritage interpretation, sustainable movement and local distinctiveness.

Policy / strategy	Business case fit
Pride in Place Impact Fund	Improves public spaces through seating, wayfinding, interpretation and gateway signs; supports high street and village centre revitalisation.
Thanet Local Plan 2020	Supports local vitality, heritage interpretation, local distinctiveness, sustainable movement and public realm quality.
Thanet District Council Corporate Plan	Contributes to a thriving place, environmental protection, cleaner and better cared-for public spaces and partnership working.
Birchington Neighbourhood Plan	Supports heritage, character, commercial area vitality, public realm improvement, movement and community-led projects.
Birchington Recreation Strategy / Leisure and Recreation Assessment	Improves access, routes and rest points connecting the village centre, open spaces, coastal routes and recreation assets.
Le Vaillant Owen commercial area review / commercial centre evidence	Provides a deliverable first phase of coordinated public realm improvement for the commercial heart of the village.
Birchington Conservation Area Assessment and Management Plan	Improves interpretation, supports sensitive public realm design and reduces avoidable clutter by reusing existing signage infrastructure.

4. Options appraisal

Option	Description	Assessment
Option 1: Do nothing	No capital investment in information boards, benches, finger posts or gateway signs.	Does not address public realm, wayfinding, identity or heritage interpretation needs. No improvement to pride in place.
Option 2: Single intervention only	Fund only one element, such as benches or heritage boards.	Would provide some benefit but would not create a coordinated village identity or address multiple public realm needs.
Option 3: Coordinated Place & Belonging package	Deliver boards, benches, finger posts and A28 gateway signs as one coordinated project, with a suitable community group advising on how boards and finger posts can be configured as a parish heritage trail.	Preferred option. Provides visible, integrated benefits for public spaces, heritage, movement, commercial vitality, village identity and the creation of a coherent heritage trail experience.
Option 4: Larger public realm scheme	Comprehensive redesign of Station Road / The Square public realm and highways.	Potentially beneficial but outside the scale, timescale and funding envelope of this £20,000 capital bid.

5. Preferred option

The preferred option is Option 3: a coordinated Place & Belonging package. This option provides the best balance of impact, deliverability, affordability and strategic fit. It creates a visible improvement for the village while remaining proportionate to the available £20,000 capital funding.

Within this preferred option, the advice of a suitable community group will help ensure that the heritage boards and finger posts are located, sequenced and interpreted in a way that can support a parish heritage trail. This adds strategic value by turning the funded assets into a connected place-making and visitor-route proposition.

6. Benefits and beneficiaries

Benefit	Beneficiaries	How the benefit will be delivered
Stronger pride in place	Residents, community groups, Parish Council	Gateway signs, branded public realm and heritage interpretation will reinforce local identity.
Improved visitor experience	Visitors, local businesses, tourism and hospitality	Finger posts and information boards will make destinations easier to find and understand.
More inclusive public realm	Older people, disabled people, families, pedestrians	Benches will provide rest points and make walking routes more usable.
Support for the village centre economy	Traders, shoppers, hospitality businesses	Better wayfinding and more attractive public spaces will encourage linked trips and dwell time.
Heritage learning	Residents, schools, visitors, heritage groups	Information boards will explain key places, buildings and stories.
Environmental and practical sustainability	Community and public bodies	Reusing existing sign posts and fittings will reduce waste and avoid unnecessary new street clutter.
Civic and cultural recognition	Twinning representatives and the wider community	Gateway signs will reference La Chapelle-d'Armentières and celebrate community links.
Heritage trail potential	Residents, visitors, schools, walkers, local businesses and heritage groups	The community group will advise on how finger posts and information boards can be configured and co-ordinated to create a parish heritage trail.
Longer dwell time and linked visits	Village centre traders, hospitality businesses, visitors and community venues	A heritage trail can encourage people to explore beyond a single destination, linking the station, village centre, conservation area, coast, recreation spaces and heritage assets.
Education and interpretation	Schools, families, residents, visitors and community groups	A trail structure can support themed learning, guided walks, QR-linked content and future community heritage activities.

7. Economic, social and environmental value

Economic value

The project will support the village centre by making it easier for residents and visitors to find shops, services, hospitality businesses and visitor destinations. Better seating and wayfinding can increase dwell time and encourage linked trips between the railway station, commercial area, heritage sites, recreation spaces and the coast.

Social value

The project will improve everyday public spaces, strengthen community pride and make local history more visible. Benches will support inclusion by helping people who need places to rest while walking around the village.

Environmental value

The project will encourage walking, reduce the need for short car trips between local destinations and reuse existing A28 sign posts and fittings where practical. Durable and repairable materials will help reduce whole-life costs and waste.

8. Financial case

The project requests £20,000 capital funding. The indicative budget is proportionate and scalable, allowing final quantities to be adjusted after quotes while preserving the overall project purpose.

Budget item	Indicative allocation
Heritage research, writing, image sourcing and content preparation by a suitable community group	£3,000
Design, manufacture and installation of historical information boards	£5,500
Parish-branded benches, foundations and installation	£4,500
Finger posts / directional wayfinding, manufacture and installation	£4,000
A28 'Welcome to Birchington' gateway signs, including design, manufacture, adaptation of existing posts/fittings, installation and reference to La Chapelle-d'Armentières twinning	£2,000
Permissions, mapping, contingency and minor enabling works	£1,000
Total funding requested	£20,000

The project is capital in nature. Ongoing maintenance will be managed through agreed Parish Council arrangements and any relevant landowner or authority agreements.

9. Commercial and procurement case

The project can be procured through a proportionate quotation process reflecting the scale and nature of the works. Specialist heritage content will be commissioned from a suitable community group. It will also advise on how the finger posts and information boards could be configured and co-ordinated to provide a heritage trail through the parish, including advice on themes, sequencing, connections between locations and opportunities for linked interpretation. Fabrication and installation will be procured from suitably experienced suppliers.

- Suppliers will be assessed on value for money, durability, design quality, delivery timescales and maintenance requirements.
- Permissions and technical requirements will be confirmed before final orders are placed.
- Gateway signage will be designed to meet relevant highway safety requirements and use existing infrastructure where possible.
- The project will maintain an audit trail of quotes, supplier decisions and any changes to scope.

10. Project Management

The project will be managed by Birchington Parish Council with clear responsibilities for delivery, approvals, budget control, risk management and stakeholder engagement.

The management approach will include a specific design and content workstream for the heritage trail opportunity, ensuring that siting decisions for finger posts and information boards are considered together rather than in isolation.

Stage	Key activities	Output
Initiation	Confirm scope, governance, site list and budget controls.	Project initiation record.
Design and content	Commission heritage content, develop design concepts and obtain community group advice on heritage trail configuration, sequencing and coordination between boards and finger posts.	Design, interpretation and heritage trail configuration pack.
Approvals	Confirm landowner, highway and conservation requirements.	Permission and approval record.
Procurement	Obtain quotes and appoint suppliers.	Supplier orders and delivery schedule.
Delivery	Manufacture and install public realm assets.	Completed capital works.
Evaluation	Collect feedback, photographs and reporting evidence.	Close-out and evaluation report.

11. Risks and mitigations

Risk	Rating	Mitigation
Permissions delay	Medium	Begin discussions early with Thanet District Council, Kent County Council and landowners.
Highway constraints affecting A28 signs or finger posts	Medium	Undertake early site checks and design gateway signs to meet highway safety requirements.
Conservation or public realm concerns	Low / medium	Use sensitive design, appropriate materials and careful siting.
Cost inflation	Medium	Keep the project scalable and adjust quantities while protecting quality.
Vandalism or accidental damage	Medium	Use robust materials, secure fixings and routine inspections.
Accessibility concerns	Low / medium	Ensure benches, boards and finger posts do not obstruct footways and are readable and usable.
Heritage content delay	Low	Agree a clear brief, timetable and sign-off process with the community group.
Visual clutter	Low	Use coordinated design and repurpose existing posts/fittings where possible.
Twinning reference design not agreed in time	Low	Agree simple wording and visual treatment early with relevant local representatives and sign supplier.
Heritage trail configuration becomes too complex for the funding envelope	Low / medium	Keep the funded works focused on core capital items, with community group advice used to make siting and sequencing trail-ready without requiring extensive additional infrastructure.

12. Success measures

- Capital works delivered within the £20,000 budget.
- 4-6 historical information boards installed, subject to final procurement.
- 4-6 parish-branded benches installed, subject to final procurement.
- 3-5 finger post installations completed, subject to final procurement.
- A28 gateway signs installed using existing posts/fittings where possible.
- Gateway signs include appropriate reference to La Chapelle-d'Armentières.

- Positive feedback from residents, businesses, visitors and community groups.
- Improved clarity of routes between the station, village centre, heritage assets, recreation spaces and coast.
- Community group advice received on how the information boards and finger posts could be configured and co-ordinated as a parish heritage trail.
- Project assets are capable of supporting a heritage trail, including linked interpretation, guided walks or QR-based digital content.
- Before-and-after photographs evidence visible public realm improvement.

13. Conclusion and recommendation

The business case seeks approval of £20,000 capital funding for the Birchington Place & Belonging Project. The project is deliverable, proportionate and strongly aligned with strategic and policy objectives.

The project will create a lasting improvement to how Birchington looks, feels, welcomes people and tells its story. It offers a practical first phase of place-making investment with clear public benefits and a strong local partnership base.

By incorporating suitable community group advice, the project will also create a stronger legacy. The funded assets can become the foundation for a parish-wide heritage trail that encourages walking, supports local businesses, promotes learning and presents Birchington's heritage as a connected story rather than a series of isolated points of interest.

Source references

The following sources informed this document:

- Pride in Place Impact Fund prospectus
- Thanet Local Plan 2020
- Thanet District Council Local Plan update page
- Thanet District Council Corporate Plan 2024-2028
- Le Vaillant Owen commercial area review
- Birchington Leisure and Recreation Assessment
- Birchington Conservation Area Assessment and Management Plan:
- Thanet District Council, Birchington Conservation Area Appraisal update
- Birchington Heritage Trust newsletter (No.64) reference to twinning: