



ROCHESTER
BRIDGE TRUST

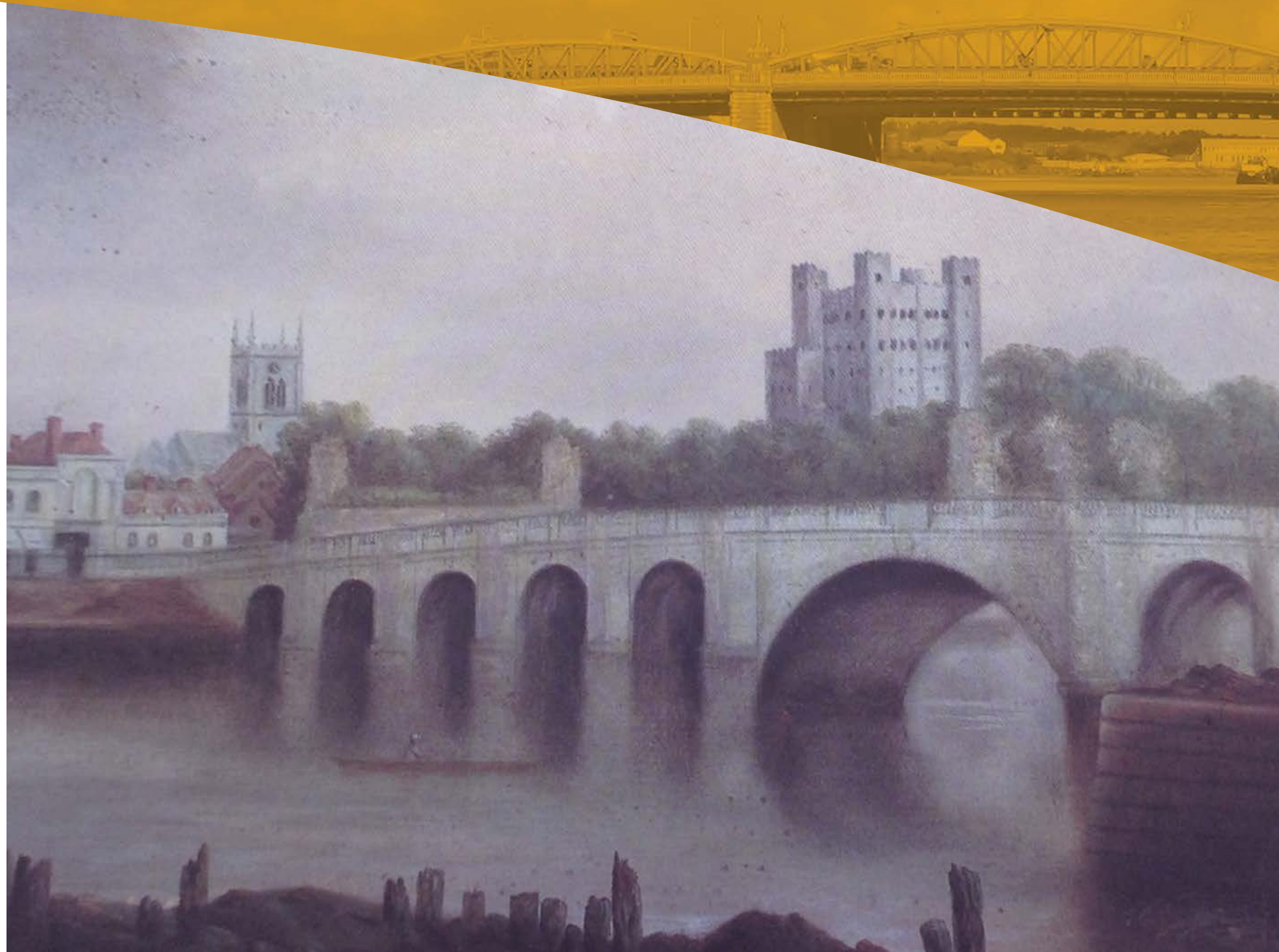


Bridge Heritage Quarter

A vision for Rochester's
historic waterfront

An introduction to Rochester's bridges

For nearly two millennia there has been a strategic crossing of the River Medway, on the route from London to the Kent coast, between the sites which are now known as Rochester and Strood. For 620 years, the Rochester Bridge Trust has been an integral part of the story of that crossing.



Soon after the invasion of 43AD, the Roman Army built probably its first major bridge in Britain across the River Medway on Watling Street. There, a fort and settlement developed which grew over the centuries into the city of Rochester. The route across the bridge became a major road for trade, pilgrimage, diplomacy and the movement of armies.

When, in 1381, the much-repaired Roman Bridge collapsed in winter storms the need for a replacement crossing was urgent. Two veterans of the Hundred Years' War volunteered to organise and fund a new bridge.

In 1399, by letters patent of Richard II, a charity was formed to care for this new bridge and ensure a crossing was provided to the travelling public in perpetuity.

Originally titled the Wardens and Commonalty of Rochester Bridge, the charity is now known as the Rochester Bridge Trust.

More than six centuries later, the Trust continues its original role, now providing two substantial road bridges and a service bridge at no cost to the public. Its work is funded by a property portfolio that was originally established thanks to endowments from medieval benefactors.

The Rochester Bridge Trust is the only surviving independent medieval bridge trust which still provides major bridges in this way.

The Trust in Rochester

As well as maintaining the bridges at Rochester, the Trust supports other charitable projects.

Education

- The founding of grammar schools for girls in both Maidstone and Rochester and, more recently, the Bridge Wardens' College at the University of Kent
- An award-winning education initiative encouraging the learning and study of civil engineering and agriculture through scholarships, events and the development of original and free resources

Community

- Supporting community organisations with links to the River Medway, from funding boats for local youth groups to supporting the restoration of heritage vessels
- Specialist projects such as the Medway Aircraft Preservation Society's restoration of a Shorts Scion Floatplane, celebrating an historic River Medway-based industry



Heritage

For more than a century, grants from the Trust have helped fund restoration of historic structures across Kent and Medway, including:

- Works to Rochester Guildhall's bell tower and Rochester Cathedral
- Investigation of the rare 16th century wall paintings uncovered in Eastgate House
- Repairs to many historic buildings and structures, including churches and war memorials

Other grants support initiatives to communicate the history of the county to visitors:

- Exhibits at Fort Amherst

- Publication of conference proceedings on the 1667 Dutch Raid on the Medway

The Trust is always seeking opportunities to blend its commitment to preserving the built environment with its other projects and operations:

- Supporting the restoration of Bridge Wardens' College – a listed building – at the Chatham Historic Dockyard, prior to establishment of the college
- Internal renovation of St Andrew's House, a Grade I-listed building which was formerly the Deanery and Theological College for Rochester Cathedral

The association of the Trust with some of Rochester's most iconic

buildings goes back many hundreds of years. The Rochester Guildhall, Gordon Hotel, Crown Inn and Abduction House all once formed part of the property portfolio funding the maintenance of the bridges.

In 2014, the City of Rochester Society presented an award in recognition of the Trust's contribution to conservation work in Rochester over the previous century.

As an organisation with more than 600 years of history – and custodianship of a range of historic structures including the 14th century Bridge Chapel, the Grade 2-listed Victorian Bridge Chamber and Grade 2-listed Old Bridge – the Trust is keen to preserve and enhance the heritage of the local area.

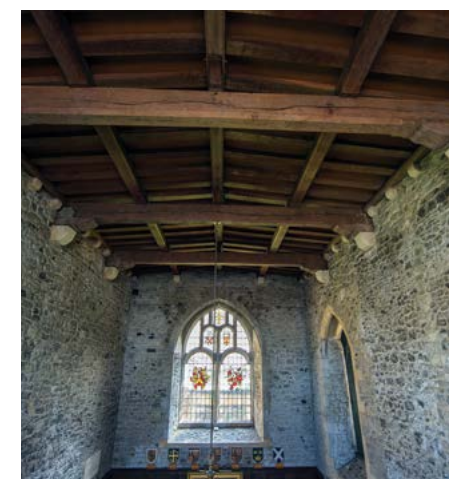
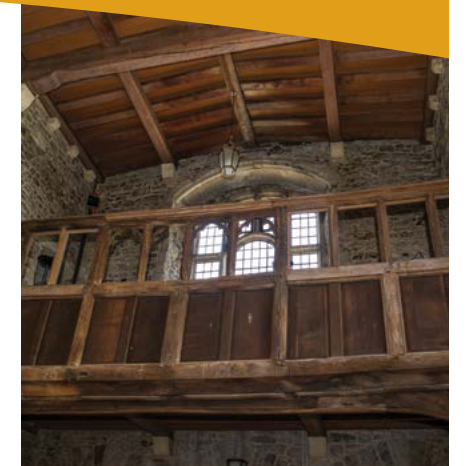
Heritage on the river bank

The medieval Bridge Chapel is one of a handful of medieval bridge chapels which survive in England, while the Victorian Bridge Chamber is the administrative base of the Trust and houses an extensive and unique archive.

The buildings are to be refurbished to make them more accessible with significant discreet and high-standard upgrades to the building systems. These improvements will enable the Trust to open the buildings for more public access, exhibitions and events, while preserving their historic fabric and outward appearance.

It is the Trust's ambition for the buildings to become a venue for learning and for celebrating the history of Rochester's bridges. An archive study space would be created to facilitate better access to the archives and collections for visiting researchers.

Since its foundation in the late 14th century, the Trust's main centre of administration has continued on the same site, adjacent to the river and overlooking the bridges. Today there are two connected buildings which the Trust aims to make more widely accessible as the focus for a Bridge Heritage Quarter.



Bridge Heritage Quarter

The history of the bridges, Esplanade and historic buildings facing the river are waiting to be more widely discovered. Improving the accessibility of the fascinating story would complement existing plans for the redevelopment and regeneration of the Rochester and Strood riversides.

Visitors to Rochester often turn back before they reach the river end of the High Street. This means they miss the chance to explore the bridges, views of the river and the Esplanade and do not become aware of the Bridge Chamber and Chapel, or the story of the Trust and its part in the history of Rochester.

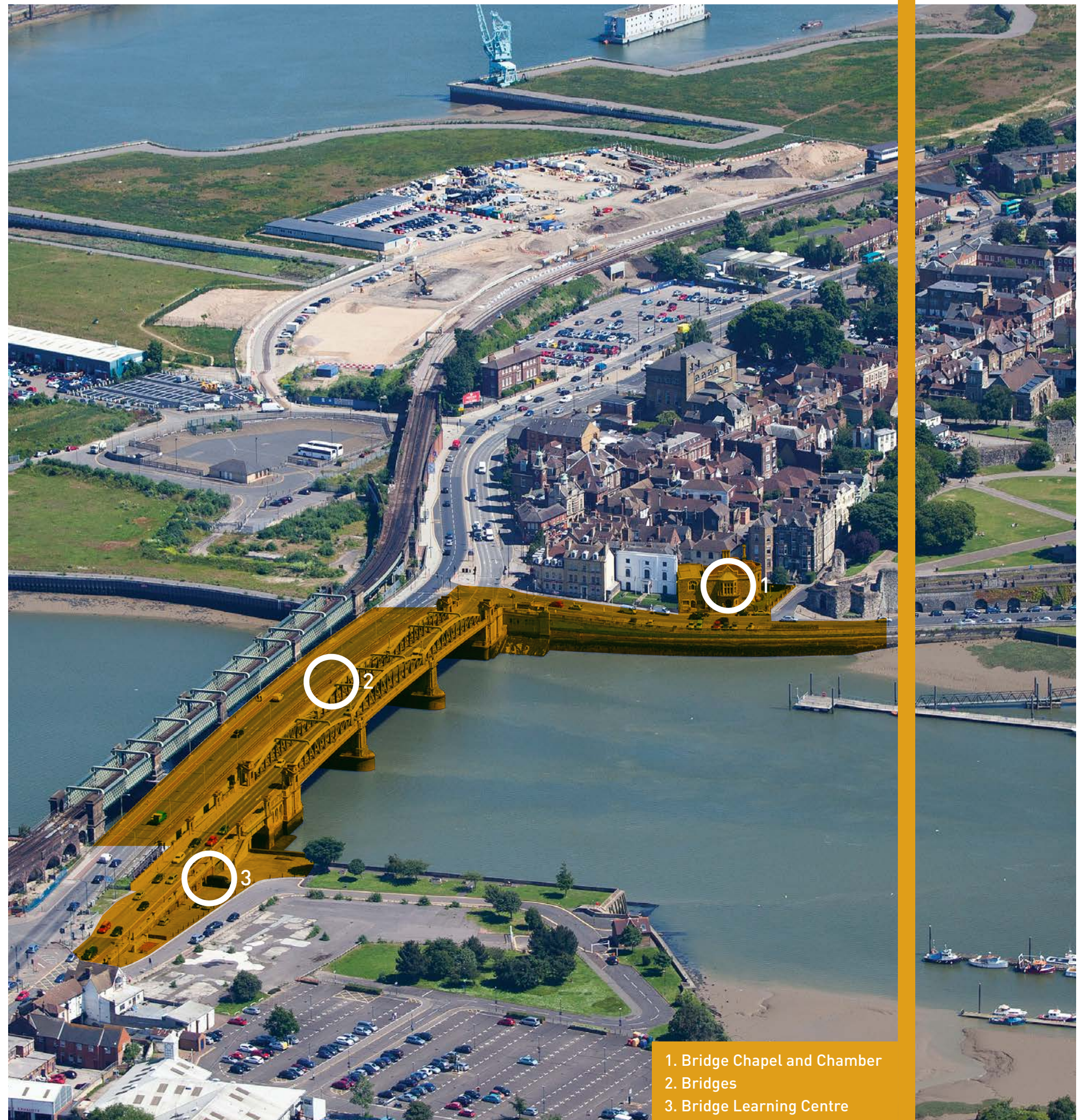
The Trust aims to add an attractive new dimension to the city's heritage offering, building on its own commitment to education. Opportunities will be created to connect the bridge and river with the rest of Rochester's historic attractions by working with other organisations to signpost visitors to the additional features of interest.

The plans include a dedicated Bridge Learning Centre within the structure of the Old Bridge. Subject to planning permission, this could include:

- A specialist classroom
- A second room of hands-on activities and interactive exhibits
- A base from which to host escorted bridge tours, including hard-hat tours of private areas
- Secure outside space for extended learning
- Further opportunities for self-guided bridge tours using new technology

The aim is to encourage people to find out more about the bridges and the work that goes in to managing and maintaining safe and usable river crossings.

The Trust is looking forward to bringing the bridges back to their rightful place at the heart of the story of Rochester.



1. Bridge Chapel and Chamber
2. Bridges
3. Bridge Learning Centre

Rochester's bridges today and tomorrow

The Trust is at an exciting new phase in its history of preserving and promoting Rochester's built heritage, in the form of a multi-million pound refurbishment of Rochester's bridges and the part of the Esplanade it owns.

The refurbishment is an opportunity to carry out significant maintenance and improvements, including:

- Repairing and replacing components to ensure the bridges remain safe and usable for the long-term
- Improving features such as the ornate lighting:
 - Renovated and upgraded
 - Better performance with minimal environmental impact
 - Lanterns faithful to the design of the original Victorian gas lamps
 - Discreet LED lighting to enable the Old Bridge to be illuminated in different colours
- An enhancement scheme for Rochester Esplanade beside the Old Bridge which creates a space to linger and enjoy the river views and uses street features to tell the story of the bridges
- Public engagement to inform and educate the community:
 - An education programme to engage with young people
 - Activities to inspire the next generation of civil engineers
 - Talks and displays to keep the community updated

Public communication about the project is being carried out through the refurbishment pages on the Trust's website, social media, engineer-led tours and a series of lectures and exhibitions.



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