

Ashford Borough Council and Strategic Partners



Ashford's Future

Ashford's Capacity: A Handbook for Change

December 2001



Levett-Therivel
sustainability consultants





Ashford's Future

Ashford's Capacity: A Handbook for Change

December 2001

Halcrow

in association with



Levett-Therivel
sustainability consultants



Roger Tym
& PARTNERS

Halcrow Group Limited

Vineyard House 44 Brook Green London W6 7BY
Tel +44 (0)20 7602 7282 Fax +44 (0)20 7603 0095
www.halcrow.com

Halcrow Group Limited has prepared this report in accordance with the instructions of their client, Ashford Borough Council and partners, for their sole and specific use. Any other persons who use any information contained herein do so at their own risk.

© Halcrow Group Limited 2001/2002

Draft prepared 21.12.01
Revised draft prepared 10.01.02
Final draft prepared 08.02.02
Final prepared 28.03.02

Contents

Introductory Notes

What Matters

Urban Housing Capacity
Regional Economic Balance
Employment Growth commensurate with Housing Growth
Growth Sectors
Ability to Attract Inward Investment
Speculative Office & Industrial Development
Skilled Labour Force
Town Centre Retail Development
Biodiversity
Water Resources
Water Quality
Flood Plain
Sustainable Waste Management
Agriculture
Landscape
Energy Efficiency
Air Quality
Historic Environment
Town Centre
Eurostar International Passenger Services
CTRL Fast Domestic Services
Regional Rail Network
Access to Europe & London
M20, Junction 10
Radial Approaches to Ashford
Strategic Connections
Local Public Transport Services
Safe Attractive Walking & Cycling Environment
Affordable, decent housing
Local Health Services
Social Services
Schools
Libraries
Arts and Culture
Community Spirit and Social Inclusion
Towards A Framework for Change

Ashford's Future

Halcrow, in association with Cluttons, John Thompson & Partners, Levett-Therivel and Roger Tym & Partners, was commissioned in August 2001 by a partnership led by Ashford Borough Council to carry out a capacity assessment and strategy for the future growth of Ashford in Kent – Ashford Regional Planning Guidance Study, known as “Ashford's Future”.

The partnership comprises:

- Ashford Borough Council (ABC)
- English Partnerships (EP)
- Environment Agency (EA)
- Government Office for the South East (GOSE)
- Housing Corporation (HC)
- Kent County Council (KCC)
- Learning & Skills Council (LSC)
- South East England Development Agency (SEEDA)
- South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA).

The Consultant Team has been working closely with ABC on a weekly basis and with the Client Project Team on a monthly basis.

This is the **second report** to the Partnership Steering Group, providing details of the capacity of what matters for Ashford's quality of life. The report is designed as a handbook which can be added to and enhanced as part of the study's iterative process. It is hoped that this will be a **practical tool** for social, health, education, business, environmental and transport planners from a wide variety of organisations and agencies.

Purpose of the Study

The overall aims of the study are clearly set out in the Study Brief February 2001 and the Consultants Brief May 2001. Crucially, the

study has been initiated by the latest Regional Planning Guidance for the South East (RPG9) and is required to feed into its next review. Concurrently, the outputs of Ashford's Future will also feed into the imminent reviews of the Kent Structure Plan and Ashford Borough Local Plan. It is intended to:

- Engender commitment among the partners and other agencies and enabling organisations
- Provide certainty to residents and businesses
- Provide clarity to investors and developers
- Develop consensus among all stakeholders.

The Study and Consultants Briefs require 6 outputs:

<i>Output</i>	<i>Stage indicator</i>
1. Capacity assessments	
2. Capacity conclusions	⇐ we are here
3. Sustainable transport framework	
4. Sustainable growth proposals	
5. A plan for urban renewal in Ashford	
6. Implementation proposals	

Briefly, the overall objectives are stated as:

- To arrive at a realistic view of the appropriate scale of future of growth at Ashford
- To arrive at a clear and achievable basis for developing the first review of the Borough Local Plan
- To take forward the new planning agenda¹
- To engage the local community in a positive change and the parallel and complementary process of preparing the Council's Community Strategy

¹ This will need to take into account the Green Paper on the future of the planning system published in December 2001.

- To identify practical and realistic ways of delivering urban renaissance and new development
- To produce an output that all the partners can support and help to implement (Study Brief, February 2001).

Significantly, the study is a holistic spatial development study, encompassing all factors that form quality of life – environmental, social, economic and transport aspects. The study approach therefore is deliberately unconventional.

This Handbook

This report, designed as a “handbook”, presents the outcome of the Quality of Life Capital approach we have taken to this study, identifying capacity thresholds and issues that will help define “growth”. As a loose leaf format, it is designed to be updated and added to during the course of the study and beyond. The final section attempts to make sense of all the features identified as mattering to Ashford’s quality of life and what, in broad terms, are their collective implications under different levels of urban change.

The main section is set out in a common format, with each **main feature (what matters)** clearly displayed on the bottom right hand corner of the page. The text is generally divided up as follows:





Benefit/ Service	The headline/ key benefit or service that the main feature provides (or ideally provides) for Ashford’s quality of life.
Other/ Sub-Benefits	Other relevant benefits and services.
Who Does this Matter To/ At what Scale/ Level of Importance?	To whom does the Benefit/ Service matter; at what geographical scale does it matter.
Trend/ Is there Enough?/ Future Threats	Commentary on the key trends, deficiencies and surpluses and the factors that are likely to affect this capacity in the future. Wherever known, thresholds are given.

Substitution Options/ Opportunities	Are there alternatives to the benefit/ service, or alternative ways of achieving the benefit/ service? This section attempts to outline ways in which innovations can introduce more sustainable means achieving the benefit/ service over the long term.
Good Practice Example	In some cases, where appropriate, good/ better practice examples are given of the alternatives/ innovations.
Management Aims and Implications	Draft aims for policy and strategy, legislation, and management are set out; implications for different agencies are also included in this section. In some case, specific measures and mechanisms for achieving these aims are spelt out, along with an anticipated timeframe.
Headline Indicator	Monitoring is critical to ensure that the handbook is kept up-to-date and checked against performance over time (beyond this study process); the headline indicator(s) is key “performance” indicator to enable improvements to quality of life to be measured.
Key Links	Connections with other features identified through the Quality of Life Capital approach are highlighted here to assist cross-referencing between linked aspects of Ashford.

The symbols in the top right of each sheet are a ready-guide as to how each benefit/ service helps define the scope for growth. In order to enable clarity in decision-making and to facilitate the conclusions as to Ashford’s capacity for growth we have organised what matters

INTRODUCTORY NOTES

(Ashford's capital) according to the benefits which matter most to the future of Ashford. These benefits have been divided into the following themes, according to their main implications for capacity:

Theme	Defining Principles	Symbol
Benefits affecting the Scale of future growth	These are benefits which are derived from "finite" capital sources. They provide the parameters within which development could occur, and require offsetting actions	
Benefits affecting the Location of future growth	These benefits are locationally specific and provide key indicators of where future development could be located. This includes consideration of where benefits are substitutable	
Benefits which have implications for Policy/ Investment (Cost)	Particular policy measures/ key investments are required to guarantee these benefits, for example investment in particular facilities or infrastructure. These cannot be separated as investment decisions are often tied to policy context and political support	
Benefits which have implication for Design of development	In order to ensure these benefits are enhanced/ retained, particular design measures are required.	

Most benefits have implications for more than one theme, but it is the main implications of these benefits for Ashford's capacity which form the organising principles. Although not a specific organising principle, where a particular benefit has implications for the timing of future

development, this is also indicated by this clock symbol: 

Progress since First Report

The Capacity Assessments Interim Report (31 October 2001) provided a comprehensive overview of the economic, environmental and social capital of Ashford, outlining progress on the assessment of its capacity. The Steering Group identified a number of key areas which it was concerned should be explored further, namely the issue of flooding and water resources, economic growth potential and the European connection.

The Consultant Team has since endeavoured to tackle these and other aspects of Ashford's Quality of Life. This has included sounding boards and discussions with water resource agencies, transport providers and commercial property agents, for example.

Our focus on those aspects which we identified at the Interim Report stage – key "determinants" of Ashford's scope for growth – means that we are confident that we have arrived at conclusions that are capable of driving the visioning stage, incorporating an urban renaissance and sustainable transport strategy, and the Sustainable Growth Options.

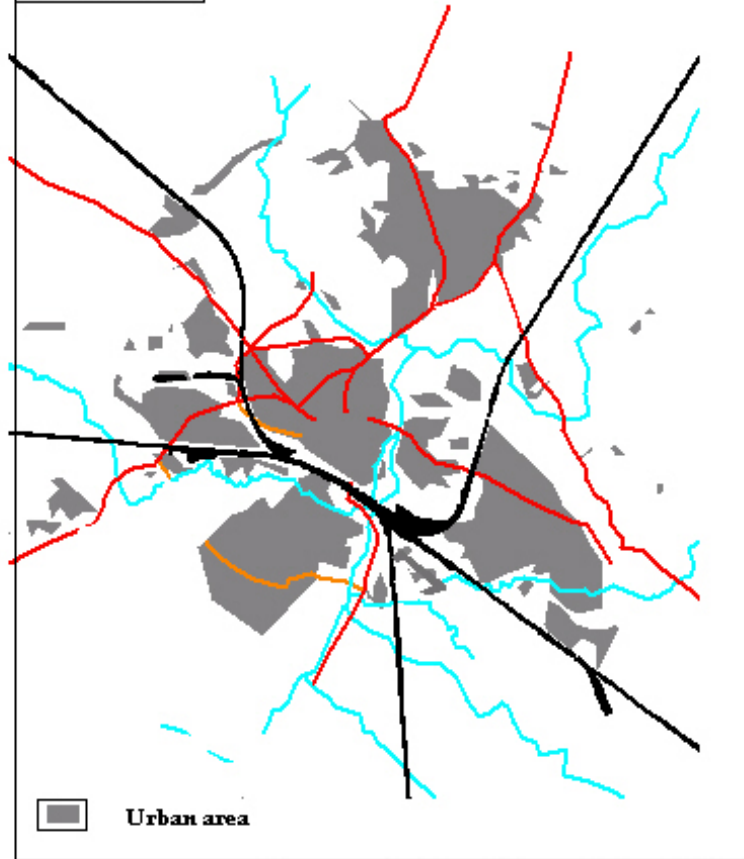
The Nature of Capacity

It is not the intention of this study to arrive at a definitive, single figure for how much housing and employment development Ashford can accommodate: any attempt to do this would be arbitrary, misleading and contrary to the ethos of the Quality of Life Capital approach.

The complex interaction of different features and their benefits and services, the economic uncertainties of the longer term, and the inherent political and value judgements that will need to be made about priorities means that setting out the "state of play" and implications of a range of future directions for the town is, in our view, a more appropriate and transparent way forward. Capacity is defined both by the present looking forward, "what is" (current capacity), but also by the future working back, "what could be" (vision/goals).

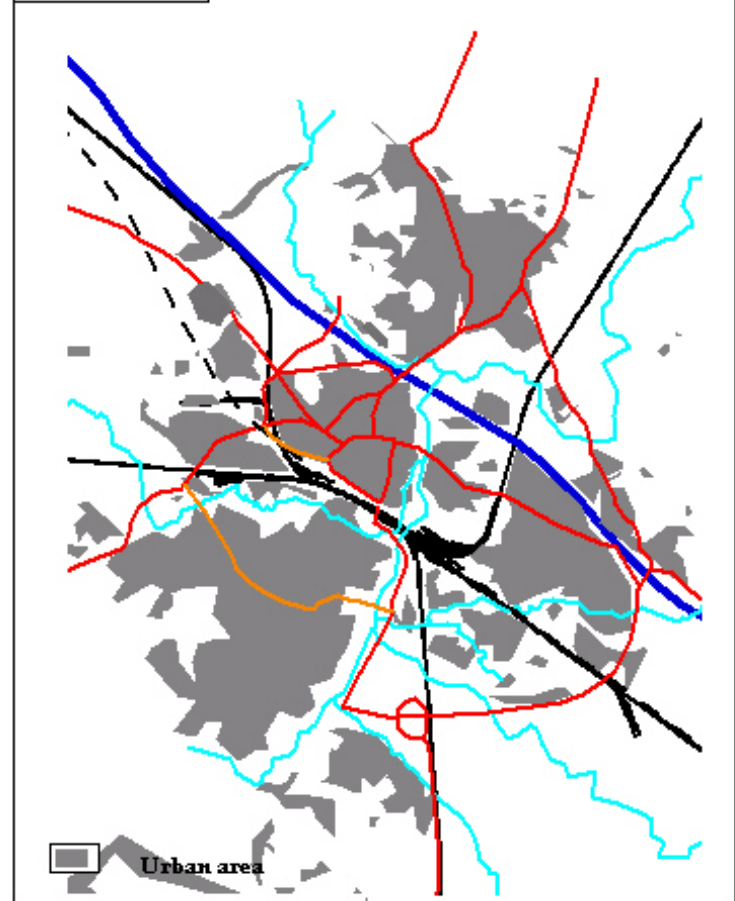
INTRODUCTORY NOTES

Ashford 1963



Source: Ashford Town Map, 1963

Ashford 2001



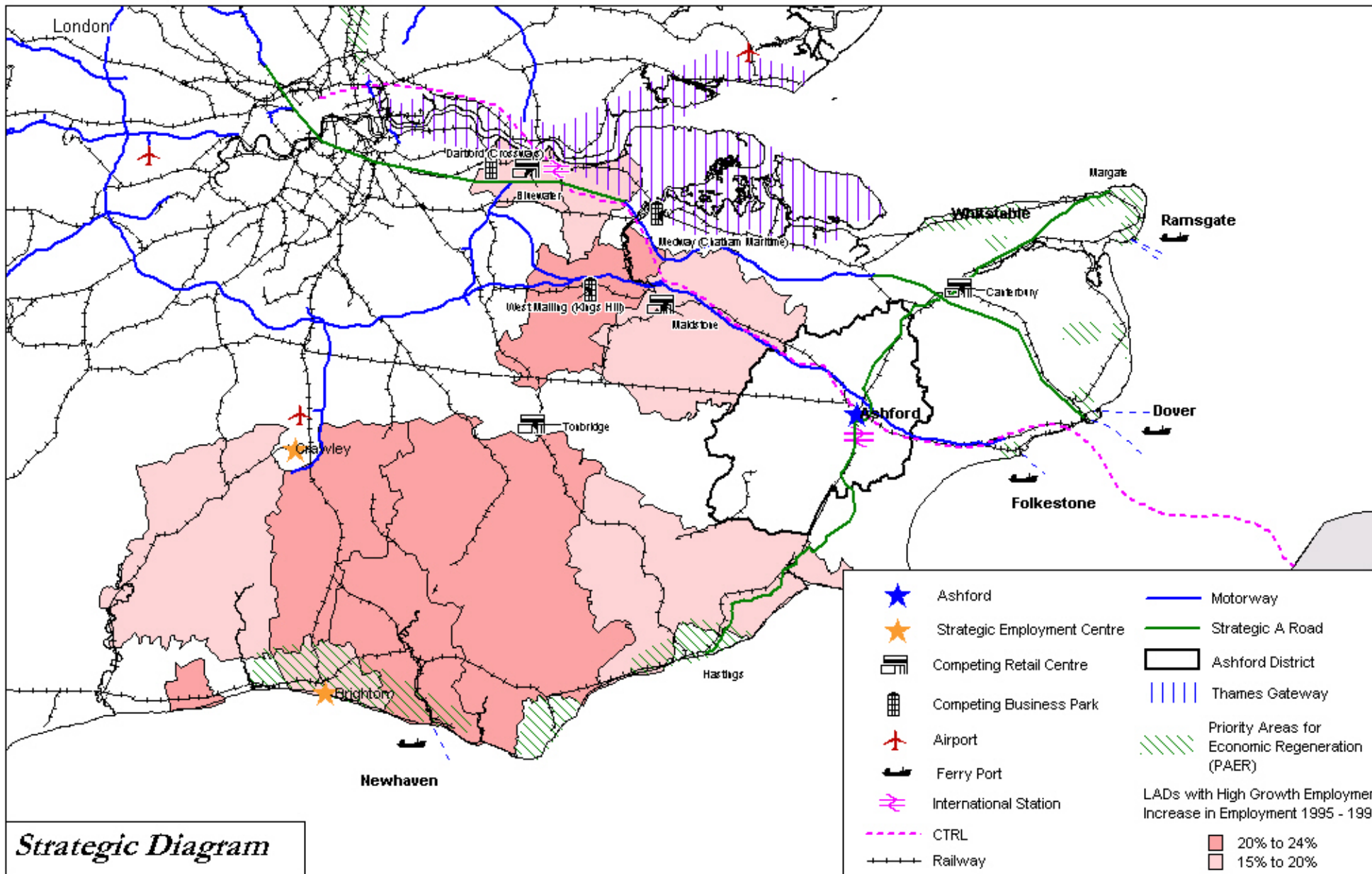
Source: Ashford Borough Council

ASHFORD'S FUTURE
Ashford's Capacity : A Handbook for Change

January 2002

Licence No: LA077038
Reproduced from the 2001 Ordnance Survey mapping
With the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's
Stationary Office (C) Crown Copyright and
May lead to prosecution or civil proceedings

Halcrow



Strategic Diagram

ASHFORD'S FUTURE
Ashford's Capacity : A Handbook for Change

January 2002

Licence No: LA077038
 Reproduced from the 2001 Ordnance Survey mapping
 With the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's
 Stationary Office (C) Crown Copyright and
 May lead to prosecution or civil proceedings



The visioning stage of the study will therefore define options for the future, a decision of which will then need to be made as to which direction to pursue. Vision, backed by commitment and leadership, can achieve positive results and engender a climate of increased certainty among those who will invest their skills, finance and livelihoods in Ashford's Future.

Report audience

This handbook has been specifically designed to be published for public consumption, following approval by the Steering Group.

Introducing Ashford

There has been a 25% increase in the area of built-up urban land in Kent over the last 30 years (see the Kent Biodiversity Action Plan); this is reflected in Ashford, as illustrated by the difference between Ashford in 2001 and in 1963 (see Plan). Ashford has been identified as a growth pole in Structure and Local Plans for many years, reflecting the town's unrivalled communications links and its potential to provide spin-off benefits to the deprived economies of other parts of East Kent.

Key facts of Ashford Borough and town are:

- Ashford has been an important market and farming centre since the 12th century and in the second half of the 19th century rapidly developed as the heart of the South Eastern Railway Company's network
- The town remains at the centre of the Kent communications network, now with unparalleled access to international road and rail networks via the Channel Tunnel (which post-2007 will provide a new 37-minute fast link to London)
- Ashford has continually experienced periods of major growth, the most significant of which was post-1957 with the completion of the Ashford bypass and the signing of a London Overspill Agreement to build 5,000 new homes over 15 years (the vast proportion of which make up the Stanhope Estate)

- The town is an important local service centre, providing retailing, commercial services, health and education facilities, in addition to major industrial areas serving national and international markets; it boasts an International Passenger Rail Station, a general hospital and Designer Outlet Village
- The Borough's environment is diverse and a majority of its area is countryside; most of which has been formally designated either for its high quality landscape or nature conservation value
- Given its countryside, agriculture is the principal land use in the borough
- The East and Great Stour rivers, which join in the heart of Ashford, contribute to significant green open areas and natural green corridors within and through the town
- Many open areas along the rivers have remained undeveloped because of their susceptibility to flooding, a significant local constraint to development.

Ashford's strategic context is illustrated in the **Strategic Diagram**.

Policy and Wider Context

The long range time horizon of this study means that understanding the current and emerging policy context is essential to gain an understanding of the future direction and trends in planning. This is particularly true of national and international policies and strategies which take time to filter down to the long term regional and structure planning frameworks. Key trends with which Ashford's Future should be particularly concerned include:

- The fundamental objective of achieving sustainable development through planning and transport strategies which reduce urban sprawl and promote alternative, more sustainable land use patterns and which work towards a reduction in climate change
- As part of this, managing resources more prudently and efficiently, including most notably the re-use of previously developed land

INTRODUCTORY NOTES

- The fundamental objective of achieving sustainable development through planning and transport strategies which reduce urban sprawl and promote alternative, more sustainable land use patterns and which work towards a reduction in climate change
- As part of this, managing resources more prudently and efficiently, including most notably the re-use of previously developed land
- An increasing move towards integrated spatial development strategies, not restricted by traditional land use planning techniques
- Community, environmental and transport strategies which contribute towards a stable economy and sustainable growth
- The promotion of comprehensive planning strategies aimed at achieving social and functional diversity within urban areas, including tackling social exclusion.



Ashford is strategically located on the rail network between London and other European centres

The study is being developed within a myriad of mutually reinforcing national, regional, county and local plans and strategies. Further commentary on these and, importantly, the implications of Ashford's Capacity on these are given in the "Towards the Framework for Change" section concluding this handbook. Some selective thoughts on this, however, are given below:

Level	Issues/implications
European	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The trend of globalisation and European integration is increasingly putting the emphasis on <i>urban regions</i> as mutually reinforcing economic powerhouses and locations for sustainable communities. Should Ashford see it itself as a "spoke" in the London urban region or otherwise?
National	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of planning obligations and likely requirement for significant infrastructure investment (reflected in the Planning Green Paper) • Legislative/ administrative changes, e.g. Water Act
Regional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M20 corridor's role in taking heat off M4, M3, M23 corridors? • Impact of growth of Ashford on numerous other priority areas in Kent – Thames Gateway, Assisted Areas and PAERs – should regional strategy target fewer areas for priority investment? • Regional water supply/ demand constraints
County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of growth of Ashford on other economic priority areas in Kent • Effect of Planning Green Paper proposals, which comprise major changes to the strategic planning system • Lack of clear hierarchy of urban areas/centres – should there be a more focused approach to regeneration and investment, targeting fewer areas? • Waste management strategy

INTRODUCTION