

Civic and Educational Quarter

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Existing Character and Land Use

This proposed urban quarter lies within three existing character areas as defined in the Ashford Town Centre Character Appraisal (November 2005). These are East Hill, Tannery Lane and Memorial Gardens.

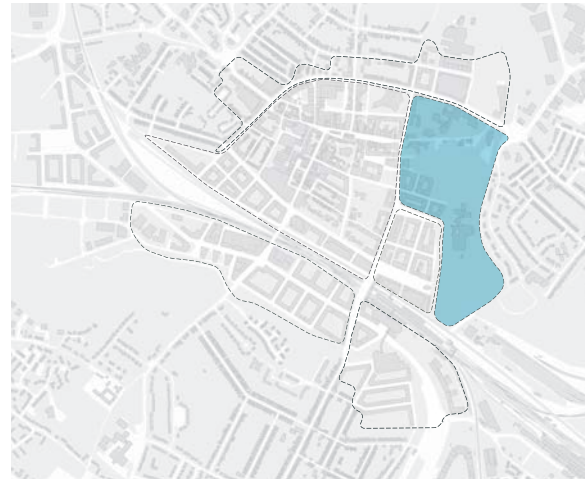
East Hill

Prior to the construction of the ring road, East Hill (located at the eastern end of the High Street) acted as a primary entry route into the town centre. It also linked the town's population and markets with important local services such as the town mill and river. Buildings within East Hill are predominantly historic, high quality detached villas dating from 18th and 19th centuries. They are built on large private plots with are now mostly used by educational institutions for playing fields or car parking.

The street itself retains a number of features of historic importance such as the high boundary walls and the raised balustrade pavement on the north side of the street.

Mature tree canopies, which overhang the street from behind the high boundary walls, and important long views eastwards towards the Kent countryside are other characteristic features.

The main negative attribute of this character area lies at the western end of East Hill, where Station road has severed the historic link into the High Street, and creates a barrier to movement between the two.



Location map



East Hill, Ashford, 2005

Tannery Lane

This area is historically associated with small-scale industry, particularly tanning, from which the principal street takes its name. Redevelopment as a commercial area in the late twentieth century has a strong influence over its current character. The area is dominated by modern boxy office buildings of poor architectural quality, and a public realm designed to serve vehicular movement consisting primarily of access roads, service areas and car parking.

The large expanse of private land means that the majority of this area is impermeable to east-west movement between the Town Centre and the River.

Memorial Gardens

This area has always been characterised by open green space, and today represents the only significant public open green space in the town centre. From the late medieval period the land was cultivated as allotments before being landscaped and laid out as the Memorial Gardens in 1923. This formal municipal park character remains today and is characterised by dense mature tree and shrub planting surrounding open areas of amenity grass, a network of footpaths, bedding displays and war memorials. Views are predominantly internalised by the dense boundary vegetation, except for a key view towards St. Mary's church tower from the northern half of the Gardens.

Although the boundary planting helps to create a tranquil setting, especially against road, the poor visual and physical connections into the space creates an isolated under-utilised resource.

Proposed Character and Land Use

The Civic and Educational Quarter is characterised largely by the existing uses and built form in this area. Thus, new development will be limited to the southern area where the built form will provide a transition from the Commercial Quarter in the south to the varied collection of buildings to the north.

The proposed development shall continue the urban grain set out for the Commercial Quarter, creating strong east-west links between the town centre and the river. The current lack of architectural definition around Tannery Lane will provide opportunities for bold, contemporary architecture.

Uses will be predominantly residential with a range of cultural and retail uses fronting onto Memorial Square.

The vision for Station Road as a vibrant '21st Century High Street' will continue through from the Commercial Quarter. However, the scale and proposed uses of development either side of the road will change. The central section around Memorial Square will comprise cultural and leisure uses alongside retail at ground floor, and the upper section around East Hill will be characterised by smaller scale buildings, with retail focus at ground floor.



- Principal Routes
- Secondary Routes and Spaces

Public Realm Vision

Physical and Visual Connections: The long established East Hill has a unique charm creating an opportunity to celebrate historical Ashford with improved connections across Station Road, re-establishing links with the High Street.

Redevelopment in the southern part of the quarter will allow the redevelopment of a new urban space (Memorial Square) aligned to provide strong connectivity through the Memorial Gardens, helping to link the Town Centre Core with the river and the Stour Centre. Streetscape improvements along Station Road and the introduction of new development with positive street frontages on both sides of the road will also help to break the collar of the existing ring road allowing the town to extend eastwards.

Interpersonal Connections: Memorial Gardens will be retained as an important green open space for informal recreation and contemplation - a 'green oasis'. Subtle interventions such as improved natural surveillance from adjacent development and enhanced access into the gardens will help improve the sense of security and increase use. In contrast to the peaceful retreat provided by the Gardens, Memorial Square will become the primary focus of activity for this quarter. It is envisaged as a predominantly pedestrian environment able to accommodate a range of activities associated with the proposed arts and cultural uses in adjacent buildings. A busy daytime space with buskers, performance artists and outdoor cafes serving the commercial quarter lunchtime economy.

Environmental Connections: Improved east – west connections with the River Stour. Potential exists for expression of these connections in the treatment of Memorial Square with opportunities for a water feature which perceptually reinforces the links down to the River. The collection and channelling of rainwater run-off from new development fronting onto Memorial Gardens could be expressed visually as part of this connection.

Cultural Connections: Laid out as a simple, flexible space, Memorial Square will present opportunities for temporary performances and exhibitions. Public art opportunities include the exploration of connections between old and new. New architecture and public realm should be unashamedly bold and contemporary as a celebration of an Ashford renaissance.



Memorial Gardens as a 'green oasis'




Public art revealing old and new




Temporary performances and exhibitions




PRINCIPAL ROUTES













 Station Road - tree lined 21st Century High Street

SECONDARY ROUTES + SPACES

 Memorial gardens retained

 Minor roads and small street trees

MISCELLANEOUS

-  New development
-  Existing buildings
-  Key active frontages
-  Private land
- Location of low key art interventions:**
 - 1  Transform vehicular turning head into new space. Integrated art-work celebrates junction of the new and old High Streets
 - 2  Retain existing raised ballustrade and replace railings
 - 3  Include the Flour Mill in any future Arts and Heritage trail
-  Possible location for relocated bank from St. Georges Square
-  Improved access to the gardens
-  Key views to be retained
-  Boundary vegetation thinned to improve natural surveillance from new residential frontages. Opportunities for drainage ditches to collect roof water run off and provide subtle definition between private and public domain at the edges of the gardens.
-  Opportunity for water feature

Design Principles

Principal Routes

Station Road – 21st Century High Street

- A two way high street with the consistent and coordinated approach to the organisation of the street and the features within it continuing through from the Commercial Quarter to establish a common language along the length of Station Road.
- Improvements to the crossing points at the junctions with Tufton Street, Memorial Square and East Hill shall investigate the use of raised tables which function as shared surfaces with surface materials extended across Station Road so that the cross routes take visual precedence over the road.



Strong, consistent edge treatment



Crossing points at junctions



Crossing points at junctions

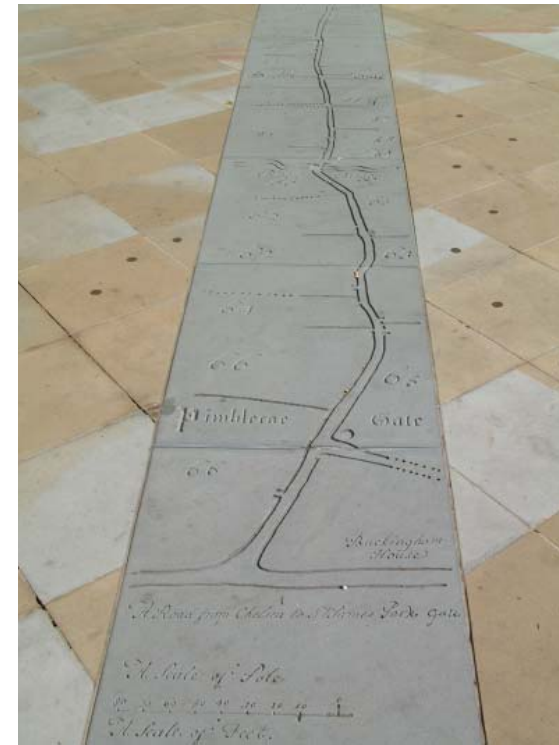
Secondary Routes and Spaces

Mace Lane/Wellesley Road

- This junction marks the transition between Outer Ashford and the Town Centre when approached by vehicle from the Northeast. Dominated by a landmark of the 60's in Charter House, with its surrounding gardens active frontages are planned for the remaining three sides of the square.
- A raised road surface i.e. granite setts (cobble) to distinguish area and slow traffic. Pedestrian and Cycle crossings picked out in diamond sawn setts only.
- Opportunity for transformational artwork on south west corner where road sweep reduced.



Flush surface to create integrated street surface



Small scale art interventions

Secondary Routes and Spaces

Minor roads

- Shared surfaces with nominal kerbs and /or contrasting materials to define carriageways and pavements.
- Simple uncluttered streets.
- Small trees located along east-west aligned streets only, to define 'green-links' down to the



Simple, uncluttered streets



Contrasting materials defining carriageway and pavement

