

# 01 INTRODUCTION

In February 2004, English Partnerships, on behalf of Ashford Borough Council and Ashford's Future, appointed a consultant team led by Urban Initiatives to commence work on the Greater Ashford Development Framework (GADF). This commission comprises a masterplanning exercise to direct the growth and change of Ashford in a clear and comprehensive manner.

The challenge is to expand the town by 31,000 homes and 28,000 jobs by 2031 within the aims and ambitions of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Sustainable Communities Plan. It recognises Ashford's strategic location within Europe, the South East and Kent. This is afforded by the Ashford International station on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL) with services to London, the north of France and Paris as well the planned domestic passenger links to London in the future.

This section outlines the structure and purpose of the Report, it introduces the Brief for the Greater Ashford Development Framework and its relationship to the government's Sustainable Communities Plan.

## 01.1 THE REPORT

This Final Masterplanning Report reflects a summary of the range of studies, consultation events and decision-making undertaken over the programme of work during the course of 2004 and early 2005.

This section deals with the focus, structure and content of the report. It shows how the report relates to the brief and other supporting documents

In addition to this Masterplanning Report, a further report on Design Codes that defines the core qualities of the Masterplan is currently under preparation.

Details of support information and key background documents are listed in the 'Reference' section of the Appendix.

### Focus of Report

The structure of the report reflects the process undertaken by the Team to meet the 4 stages of the Client's Brief for the preparation of the Greater Ashford Development Framework, which included:

**Stage 1:** Familiarisation, Team Capacity Building and Initial Visioning

**Stage 2:** Design Workshops, Spatial Options and Growth Area Model

**Stage 3:** The Formation of a Strategic Plan

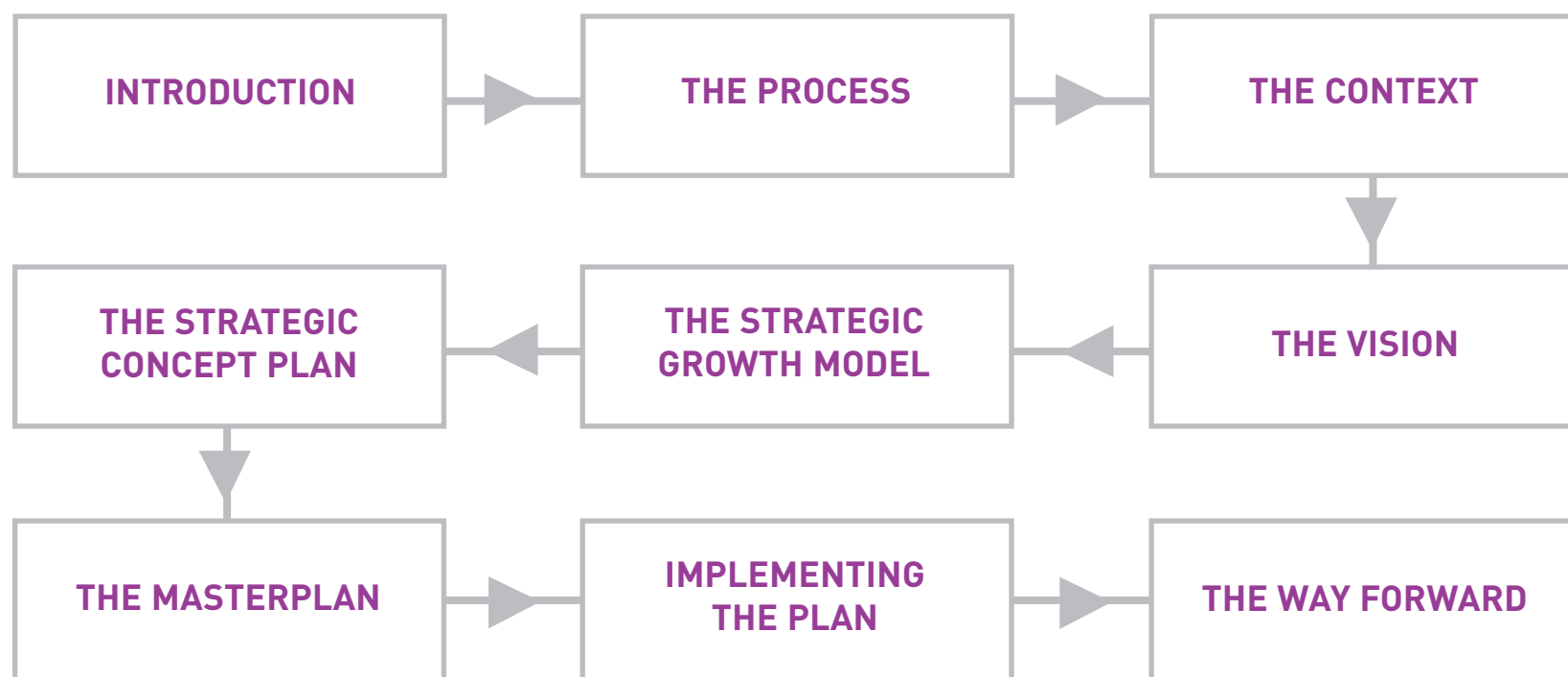
**Stage 4:** The Aspects of Delivery and Consolidation

The focus of this Final Masterplanning Report is to:

- Establish a strategic vision of growth;
- Provide a background to the process followed;
- Define a strategic model for growth;
- Review options for growth and the evolution of the preferred option;
- Develop a Working Masterplan;
- Develop a implementation strategy to deliver the Masterplan.



Ashford from the east, showing Ashford International Station in the middle



## Content of Report

### The Process

This provides an overview of the primary public consultation programme including the Eastwell Manor Workshop in April, the Public Exhibition in May and the July Workshops.

### The Context

The context for growth and change in Ashford is outlined. This includes the background to the agenda for 31,000 houses and 28,000 jobs in Ashford. It sets out the policy context for how this agenda should be developed.

### The Vision

The scale of the growth challenge is explored in terms of key qualities that should accrue with growth. The key theme of 'The Great Town and the Great Garden' is developed.

### The Objectives

The primary objectives for growth in Ashford are explored, from the perspective of each 'workstream' or specialist area of interest.

### Developing a Model for Growth

The potential development of Ashford is reviewed. The local plan and sites with consent for development are reviewed alongside 'best practice' principles.

### Three Growth Scenarios

Three scenarios for growth including a 'Dispersed Model', a 'Decentralised neighbourhood Model' and a 'Compact Model' are reviewed. There is an overview of the preferred compact model for growth.

### Key Concepts

This section deals with the key concepts that contribute to the compact urban model and establishes of the primary components of the plan.

### The Evolving Plan – Four Options

The key aspects of the plan are developed. Four options or variants of the plan are assessed.

### The Preferred Strategic Options

This involves an assessment of the preferred option arising from the consultation process and ongoing technical studies.

### The Working Masterplan

The details of the Plan are developed and refined and the key early concepts are reinforced.

### Implementation

The key phasing and delivery issues are examined.

### The Way Forward

The early framework for delivery is explored.

### Appendices

The plan and schedule are provided.

## 01.2 THE CHALLENGE



### Background

The Regional Planning Guidance for the South East (RPG9 March 2001) identified Ashford as one of the growth areas in the South East. It did not state how much Ashford should grow but that the local authorities, with regional and central government partners, should carry out a study to assess the scope for growth and how to achieve it.

The Ashford's Future Study (Halcrow, 2002) was published in December 2002. It concluded that within the period to 2031, Ashford has the capacity to provide an additional 31,000 homes and 28,000 jobs. More importantly, the study also concluded that achieving this quantity of development would be conditional on the necessary social, community and physical infrastructure being in place at the right time as well as for a step change to be made in terms of the quality of the town centre and developments being planned in and around the town. The Council's approach to the Government's growth agenda are embodied in the following guiding principles set out in autumn 2002 by the Ashford's Future partners which guided the Ashford's Future Study (Halcrow, 2002) and the GADF.

Although the Ashford's Future Study is not a formal policy document it was carried out with the detailed participation of the Government Office, Regional Assembly, County and Borough Councils. The approach taken has moved away from a top down approach to planning. The Ashford's Future Study has fed into a number of policy documents with its conclusions being reflected in:

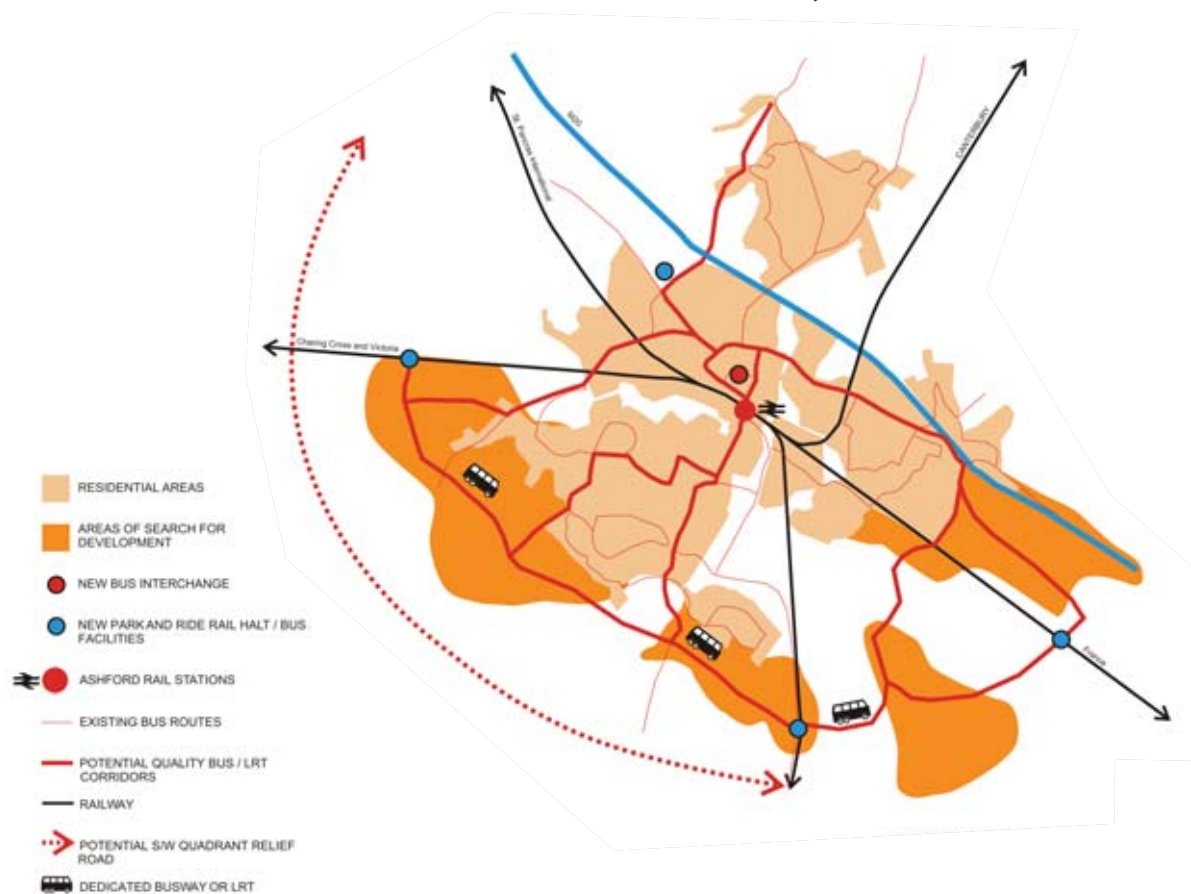
- Sustainable Communities in the South East, building for the future (ODPM February 2003)
  - The Governments action plan for creating sustainable communities;
- Regional Planning Guidance for the South East Chapter 12 - Ashford Growth Area (Government Office for the South East July 2004);
- Draft Kent and Medway Structure Plan (September 2003).

The Study will also be reflected in the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy and along with the Greater Ashford Development Framework masterplanning will form the basis for the preparation of the Ashford Borough Local Development Framework.

### Guiding Principles

The partners to the study have agreed a set of guiding principles which should be used to inform the masterplanning and spatial development of Ashford. These are taken from page 4 of the Overarching Report. Again, although these principles are not intended to constrain creativity or innovative solutions. They need to be considered as a guide for the masterplanning process.

- To ensure that growth and change takes place in a sustainable way
- To make optimum use of the existing urban area including development and redevelopment opportunities, both to meet the needs of the growing population and to minimise the quantity of greenfield land needed for development
- To centre growth on the existing town, encouraging high quality urban design, making use of the infrastructure and investment that is already in place and the opportunity sites within the town centre
- To develop an urban renaissance at Ashford, and ensure higher standards of urban design in new development
- To plan growth around a 'sustainable transport model' centred on public transport nodes, walking and cycling
- Use housing and employment densities as a tool to maximise the accessibility of public transport and the quality of service that is provided



A Schematic Plan for Growth in Ashford linked to Sustainable Transport (Halcrow, 2002)

- To relate the housing growth to reasonable expectations of growth in the local economy as well as the number of jobs that are likely to be created
- To ensure that the benefits of growth at Ashford meet wider objectives of helping to regenerate East Kent
- To ensure growth at Ashford does not undermine other regional and sub-regional economic regeneration policies (including Thames Gateway and East Kent Priority areas)
- To ensure the protection of designated areas of countryside of national, countywide and strategic and local importance and be sensitive to the importance of local countryside character
- To respect the need to work within environmental constraints imposed by flood risk, water supply limits, water and air quality standards
- To reflect the need to minimise waste and encourage recycling as a key issue in the design and implementation of development
- To protect village communities from the potential negative effects of development
- To make optimum use of any greenfield land that needs to be developed.
- To ensure the provision of relevant community infrastructure

### Sustainable Communities Plan

The Sustainable Communities Plan (ODPM, February 2003) identifies the importance of Ashford and the other growth areas in delivering the Government's planning and housing agenda in the South East. This is not just an issue relating to the quantity of development but more importantly its quality. The Growth Areas are clearly seen by Government as providing the opportunity to bring together best practice and innovation in all aspects of community development, planning and design - providing a test bed for ideas and approaches that can then be used elsewhere.

The Sustainable Communities Plan sets a challenging and exciting agenda for the growth of Ashford. The following section is taken from the Plan.

This broad agenda is one shared by all of the partners represented on the Ashford's future delivery Board, including Ashford Borough Council and Kent County Council - the local planning authorities.

The agenda has formed the starting point for the preparation of Greater Ashford Development Framework. It has moved away from being concerned just with constraints and land uses towards creating and delivering a successful community.

In the spirit of the Communities Plan and considering the need to deliver development in Ashford that is of a significantly higher quality than achieved in recent years, the work being carried out as part of the GADF process is being required challenge current policies and practices. This includes the approach to what in the past have been considered as absolute constraints (such as flood plain) and to the approach and mechanisms required to deliver development.

As with all complex projects there are difficult decisions that need to be made and a balanced approach needs to be taken to different objectives and policy choices. However, the work is being carried out within the context of a Strategic Environmental Assessment. This considers a wide set of environmental, social and economic issues to ensure that the decisions made through out the process are informed by an understanding of their environmental impact. [See Section 02.3 that refers to the latest SEA document to be published]

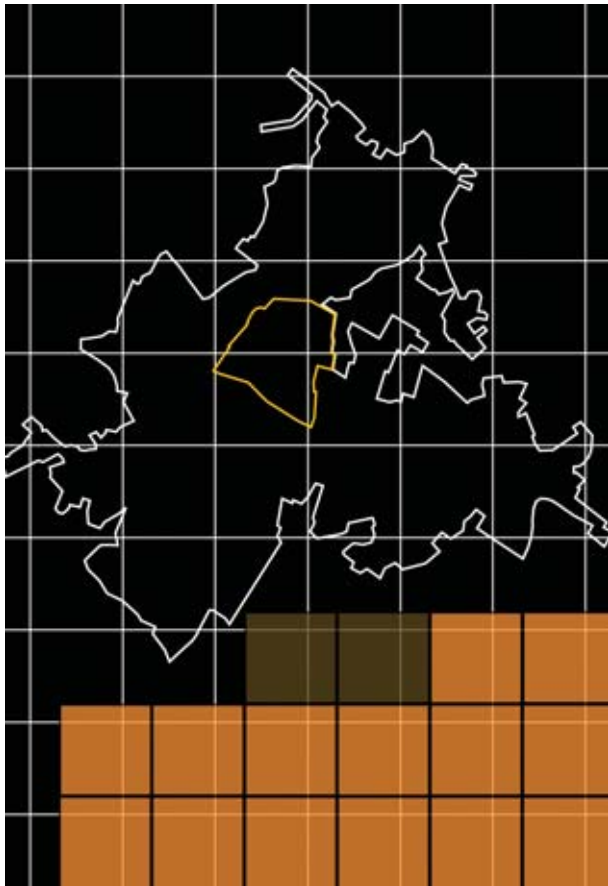
**Set out below are some of the most important requirements of sustainable communities. This text was the product of discussions in a sub-group of the Central Local Partnership between the LGA and Central Government.**

### What makes a sustainable community?

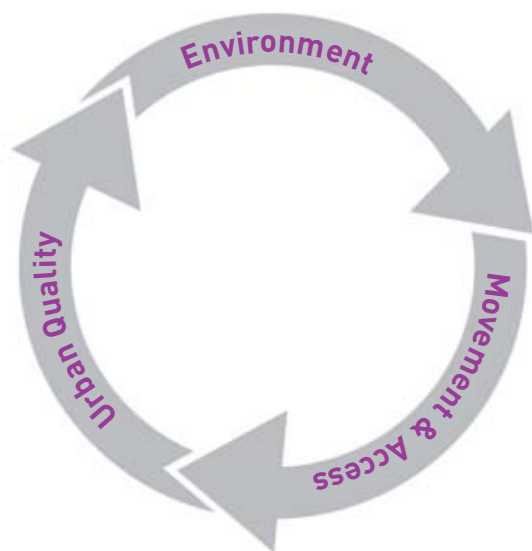
Some of the key requirements of sustainable communities are:

- A flourishing local economy to provide jobs and wealth;
- Strong leadership to respond positively to change;
- Effective engagement and participation by local people, groups and businesses, especially in planning, design and long term stewardship of their community, and an active voluntary and community sector;
- A safe and healthy local environment with well-designed public and green space;
- Sufficient size, scale and density, and the right layout to support basic amenities in the neighbourhood and minimise use of resources (including land);
- Good public transport and other transport infrastructure both within the community and linking it to urban, rural and regional centres;
- Buildings -both individually and collectively - that can meet different needs over time, and that minimise the use of resources;
- A well-integrated mix of decent homes of different types and tenures to support a range of household sizes and incomes;
- Good quality local public services, including education and training opportunities, health care and community facilities, especially for leisure;
- A diverse, vibrant and creative local culture, encouraging pride in the community and cohesion within it;
- A "sense of place"; and
- The right links with the wider regional, national and international community.





Ashford will need 14 square kilometres if it builds its housing requirement at the lowest level of PPG3 densities. Locating jobs in out of town locations will need a further 2 square kilometres



Balancing competing agendas

## The Challenge of Growth and Change

The brief for the Greater Ashford Development Framework is to qualify where and how 31,000 houses and 28,000 jobs could develop in Ashford over a 30-year period.

"more than half of all new housing is built at less than 20 dwellings per hectare. That represents a level of land take which is historically very high and which can no longer be sustained" (PPG3, DETR, 2000).

This is true in Ashford where existing housing areas fall well below the required density for sustainable development and fail to provide the opportunity for sustainable public transport or local convenience retail. This coupled with the fact that most other standard volume housing types in the UK achieve the same result suggests that new housing types need to be developed that are suitable and appropriate for urban extension projects. Housing in Ashford can be broadly shown to be:

Model Type (Estimated Density/DPH)	Units per hectare	Habitable Rooms per Hectare	Parking; On - Plot
Low - density detached houses 'enclave' layout	10	80	2-4
Semi - detached houses, street - based layout	16	96	1-2
Semi - detached houses, Cul - de - sac Layout	30.8	154	1

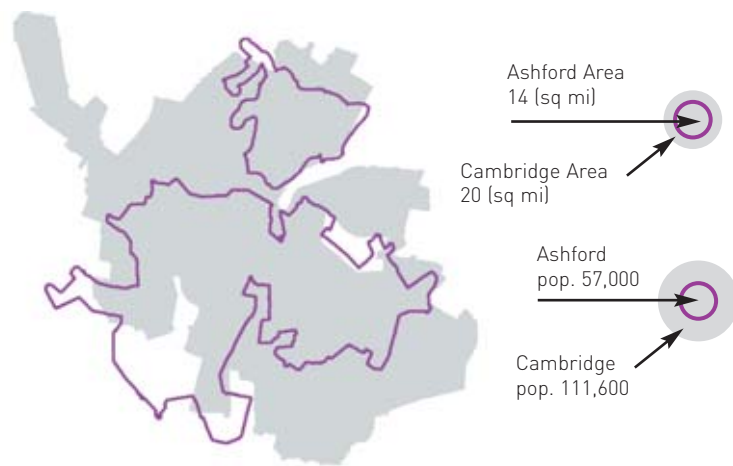
Even if Ashford were to build at the lowest levels of density as anticipated in PP3, using traditional housebuilder approaches, it would require a land take in excess of 16 square kilometres to deliver the anticipated 31,000 homes and 28,000 jobs.

In light of this and as part of this project, we feel it will be critical to work with volume houses builders at Ashford to remodel traditional housing types and their urban design to create new housing typologies and urban layouts that respond to place, relate to public transport and provide enough footfall to sustain local centres/shops and community facilities. In this respect the Council's successful use of Enquiry by Design and the national Design Coding pilot project at Ashford Barracks should be seen as an indicator of Ashford's commitment to good urban design.

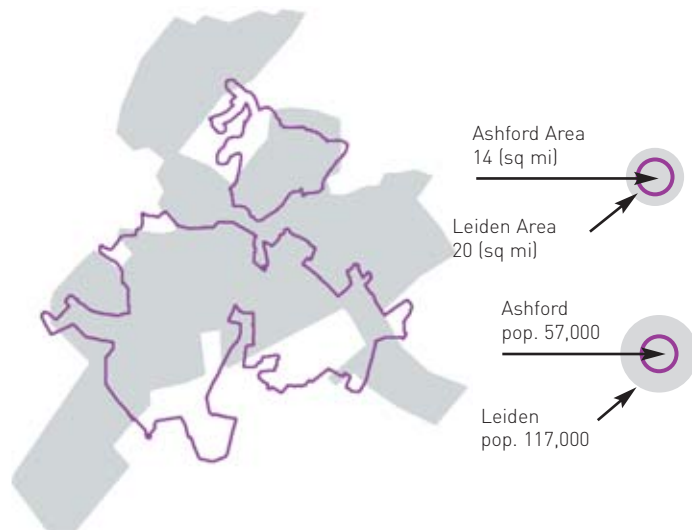
### Balancing competing agendas

Growth of this order will involve a balance of critical, sometimes competing agendas:

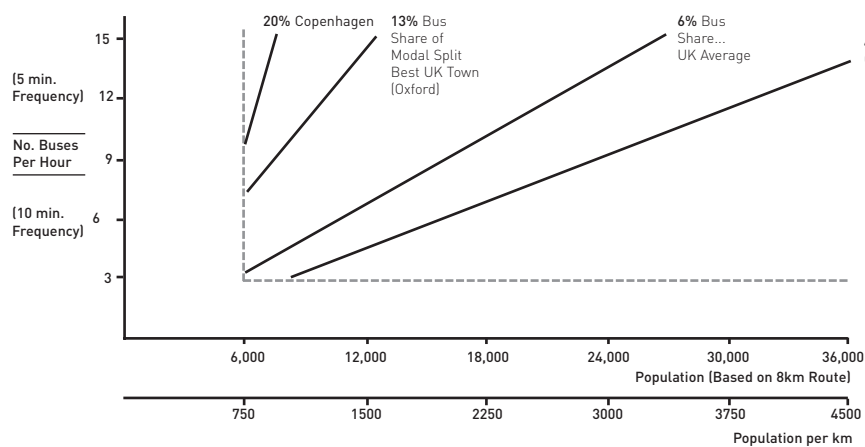
- **Environmental**
  - The need to protect and enhance the qualities of the environment
  - The need to minimise the impacts of growth on the environment
- **Movement and Access**
  - The need to improve and sustain natural and regional links
  - The need to establish a viable public transport network
  - The need to promote opportunities for walking and cycling
- **Urban Quality**
  - The need to attract a range of economic and job opportunities
  - The need to deliver and sustain social and cultural assets
  - The need to create positive places for communities to engage in



Cambridge City Comparison (Existing Ashford footprint shown in purple)



Leiden City Comparison (Existing Ashford footprint shown in purple)



Relationship between population, modal split and 'variable' bus frequencies for planning services in developments

## Scale Comparisons

In order to understand the implications of this scale of growth, we analysed a basic physical comparison between towns of a scale to which Ashford could grow. These included Cambridge (population 111,600), Chelmsford (population 100,000), Bruges (population 116,246) and Leiden (population 117,000).

At a basic level this comparison gave an understanding of comparative footprints of towns of a similar population size. It also suggests the positive features and investment that a town or city of a certain scale is able to attract. In addition examples were selected to showcase how low lying settlements can be characterised through their relationships to water. There is good historic precedent that shows how potential risks of flooding have been harnessed through the creation of dykes, canals and retention areas that generate high quality living environments.

It is at the level of modal shift to public transport that the greatest challenge lies. The graph below shows where Ashford is relative to the best UK cities (Oxford) with Ashford only achieving 4% of the bus share (2% less than the UK average). If Ashford were to move to an Oxford target it would require 13%. This would require a major investment in public transport provision in the town, but this could be planned in at the outset, avoiding many of the current problems facing places like Oxford.

**The challenge to create a development framework that meets the requirements of Sustainable Communities Plan as well as the targets set out in the Ashford's Future Study (Halcrow, 2002) is considerable. The last time that we planned on this scale was at Milton Keynes where the bulk of land was controlled by the public sector. This plan will need to be delivered with the clear co-operation of many. It will require changing the hearts and minds of many players: the community (both old and new), the housebuilders, the infrastructure providers and the funders, to name a few.**

**In order to fully understand the challenge, we need to understand the place and how it can accommodate this scale of growth and change.**

