



# ASHFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

## LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

CORE STRATEGY PREFERRED OPTIONS



# ASHFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

## LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

### CORE STRATEGY PREFERRED OPTIONS

## SENDING US YOUR COMMENTS

Please let us have your responses to this Options Report. Bear in mind the following guidelines:

- **Please make it clear which of the Council's 'preferred options' you are commenting on – the options are identified in bold text and are numbered for easy reference.**
- You are encouraged to contact us by e-mail please, but any of the methods listed below are acceptable. If you need to send us plans/ illustrations/ documents then it would be helpful if you could send two copies and also e-mail us an electronic version.
- It would help us if you could put your comments on this easy to use response form – either send us hard copy or use the on-line version at [www.ashford.gov.uk](http://www.ashford.gov.uk).
- If you need advice on making your comments then please e-mail us or phone 01233 330642 / 330213

**By E-mail:** [ashfordldf@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:ashfordldf@ashford.gov.uk)

**By Post:** LDF Comments  
Planning & Development Unit  
Ashford Borough Council  
Civic Centre  
Tannery Lane  
Ashford  
TN23 1PL

**By Fax:** 01233 330682

All comments must be received by 26<sup>th</sup> August 2005

Large print copies and audio copies of this document can be made available by telephoning the Planning and Development Unit on (01233) 330229. Also call this number if you would like a copy of this document to be translated.

# ASHFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

## LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

### CORE STRATEGY PREFERRED OPTIONS

CONTENTS	PAGE NO:
<b>PART 1</b>	<b>WHAT IS A LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK?</b>
•	Understanding the parts of the Local Development Framework 4
•	The work programme – the Local Development Scheme 5
•	Saved policies from the Borough Local Plan 6
•	Sustainability appraisal 6
•	Community involvement – Having Your Say 7
<b>PART 2</b>	<b>THE CORE STRATEGY AND THE WIDER PICTURE</b>
•	The wider national and regional context 8
•	Links to Ashford’s future and masterplanning 10
•	Links to the Community Strategy for the Borough 10
<b>PART 3</b>	<b>CORE STRATEGY OPTIONS</b>
1.	Overall Vision for the Borough 11
2	The Spatial Strategy for the Borough 12
•	The broad distribution of development 12
•	Ashford Town Centre 18
•	Ashford Urban Area 21
•	The Growth areas around Ashford 23
•	Tenterden, the villages and rural areas 26
3	Making Quality Places: Design and Sustainability 30
4	Making Quality Places – how can we make sure that the delivery of the LDF meets expectations? 37
5	Policy Issues 43
<b>APPENDIX</b>	<b>55</b>

## PART 1 - WHAT IS A LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK?

The Ashford Local Development Framework (LDF) is the new term used for a collection of formal planning policy documents, which will guide the future planning of the Ashford Borough for the period up to 2021.

The Local Development Framework replaces the old system of local plans. The Government set out in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 a new system based on a number of key principles, including:

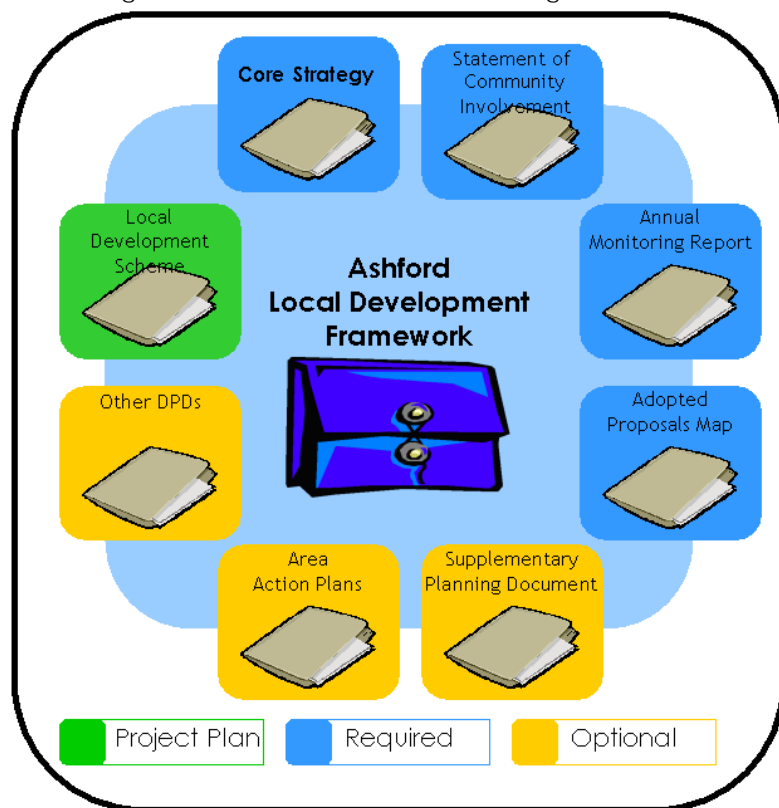
- **Flexibility**, responding to changing local circumstances and ensuring that plans are prepared and reviewed quicker than the current system;
- **Strengthening community and stakeholder involvement**, setting out a clear commitment to public involvement in a formal document called the Statement of Community Involvement;
- **Front loading**; taking decisions early in the preparation of these planning policy documents seeking consensus early on;
- **Sustainability appraisal**, ensuring that the framework contributes to the achievement of sustainable development;
- **Programme management**, managing the whole local development framework process through a project plan (Local Development Scheme).;
- **Soundness**, produced upon a robust and credible evidence base.

### Understanding the parts of the Local Development Framework

The Local Development Framework is a portfolio of documents called Local Development Documents (LDDs). Some will be statutory development plan documents whilst others will be Supplementary Planning Documents. When combined all these documents will set out the key elements of the planning framework and policies for the borough whether this be at a more strategic level or at an area specific level. To ensure that the policies

and proposals set out in the Local Development Framework contribute to the ideal of sustainable development, every Development Plan Document will be subject to a "Sustainability Appraisal" (SA), incorporating the requirements of the EU Directive on "Strategic Environmental Assessment" (SEA).

Central to this portfolio is the **Core Strategy**, which sets out the overall vision for the Borough and is the basis for later Local Development Documents.



Component	Description
Local Development Scheme (LDS)	<p>A public statement identifying which LDDs will be produced and when</p> <p>A starting point for the community and stakeholders to find out about the Council's planning policies</p> <p>Outlines the details of and timetable for the production of LDDs over a 3 year period</p>
Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)	<p>Explains to stakeholders and the community how and when they will be involved in the preparation of LDFs</p> <p>Details the steps and standards that the Council will take to facilitate community involvement</p>
Core Strategy (CS)	<p>Contains a clear vision for the area</p> <p>Includes generic development control criteria against which proposals can be judged</p> <p>Has regard to urban capacity studies and reflects the results of SA/SEA</p>
Proposals Map	<p>Illustrates all the LDF policies and proposals in a way that can be understood by the community and stakeholders</p>
Area Action Plans (AAPs)	<p>Focus upon implementation</p> <p>Providing an important mechanism for ensuring development of an appropriate scale, mix and quality for key areas of opportunity, change and conservation</p>
Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs)	<p>Intended to elaborate upon the policy and proposals in DPD</p> <p>Their weight as a material consideration will reflect their status as part of the LDF</p>
Annual Monitoring Reports (AMR)	<p>Assesses the implementation of the LDS and the extent to which policies in LDDs are being achieved</p> <p>Reviews actual plan process over the year compared to the targets and milestones for LDD preparation set out in the LDS</p>

## The work programme – the Local Development Scheme

A project plan setting out which documents the Council expects to produce and when has been produced – this is the Local Development Framework Scheme <sup>1</sup>.

The Scheme sets out the 'first tranche' of Local Development Documents that will be prepared by the Council:

- Core Strategy Development Plan Document
- Ashford Town Centre Area Action Plan DPD
- Phase 1 Urban Development Sites and Infrastructure DPD

Other planned Local Development Documents include:

- Town Centre Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document
- Phase II Ashford growth Area Action Plan DPD
- Phase III Tenterden and Rural Site Allocation DPD

<sup>1</sup> Approved by GOSE April 2005 and available on the Council's website ([www.ashford.gov.uk](http://www.ashford.gov.uk)).

- Phase IV Site Allocation DPD
- Generic DC Policy DPD

The LDF Scheme outlined the importance of additional resources to deliver this programme. It emphasised that it is the national growth agenda which has dramatically increased the scale of growth to plan for in Ashford and the complexity and breadth of plan making required. The additional costs of growth require a sustained injection of Government funding to support this process. The Council will not let the quality agenda slip in the interests of pursuing rapid growth. That would benefit no one in the long term and would not meet the Government's own clear agenda set out in the Sustainable Communities Plan.

Regular LDF monitoring and review are key aspects of the new planning system. The Council is required to produce an Annual Monitoring Report to assess how we are delivering our project plan (LDS) and whether we are achieving the policies that we have set out in our Local Development Documents. In preparing the Annual Monitoring Report the Council will develop a monitoring system that meets expectations of Government and enables a strong and relevant evidence base to be gathered on the delivery of the LDS and LDD policies.

### **Saved Policies from the Borough Local Plan**

The Ashford Borough Local Plan was adopted in June 2000 and covers the period to 2006. The impact of the new Planning Act (2004) is to automatically "save" all its local plan policies until September 2007. Additionally, the policies included in the Kent Structure Plan 1996, the Kent and Medway Structure Plan (when adopted later this year) the sections of the Kent Minerals Local Plan and the Kent Waste Local Plan are also "saved" by this process. Over the coming years, Local Development Plan Documents will be produced to replace the saved Local Plan policies and proposals. As each new Development Plan Document is adopted, the policies, proposals and supporting text in the Local Plan it replaces will be withdrawn.

### **Sustainability Appraisal**

Local development documents must contribute to the achievement of sustainable development<sup>2,3</sup>. In addition the Council is required to carry out a strategic environmental assessment<sup>4</sup>. Sustainable Development is a key element of the Core Strategy and all other Local Development Documents. Broadly this encompasses:

- Social Progress which meets the needs of everyone
- Effective protection of the environment
- Prudent use of natural resources
- Maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment

The process of an SA/ SEA requires an examination of the condition (or baseline) of the Borough as it is today together with how it may change in the future. It also involves the identification of the key issues, which could affect the sustainability of the Borough. Using this information it is possible to develop sustainability objectives and indicators against which policies and proposals in the LDF can be tested and amendments made to policies so that they become more sustainable. These objectives and indicators can also be used to monitor the LDF once it is adopted. The Council has prepared a Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report that provides useful background.

A parallel process of SA/SEA has been set up to run alongside the creation of the Core Strategy and each of the subsequent Local Development Documents. At a more detailed level the same approach has been applied to the Greater Ashford Development Framework as it has evolved. The SA/SEA for this options stage of the Core Strategy and for the GADF will be published alongside this report to inform the public participation stage.

<sup>2</sup> Planning Policy Statement 12 Local Development Frameworks

<sup>3</sup> Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, s39

<sup>4</sup> European Directive Strategic Environmental Assessment Regulations 2004

## Community Involvement – Having Your Say

The Options Report is the second stage in a lengthy process to adoption – the timetable envisaged is as follows but this will depend on the volume of public comment received and the revenue resources available:

- Pre-options consultation
- **Core Strategy 'Preferred options' - public participation (minimum 6 weeks)**
- Submission of Ashford Borough Core Strategy DPD to the Secretary of State – March 2006 – public participation
- Examination by independent Planning Inspector(s) – September 2006
- Inspectors' Report published – March 2007
- Adoption – May 2007

The Core Strategy will be tested for its soundness by a Planning Inspector at a public examination. The Inspector will consider all representations and any changes suggested and produce a report with recommendations for changes. These recommendations will be binding and must be incorporated into the DPD.

The Council is required by law to prepare and maintain a statement to be known as its Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)<sup>5</sup>. Its aim is to ensure that all sections of the public, including local groups and organisations, are actively involved throughout the process of preparing any Local Development Document contained within the Local Development Framework, including both Development Plan Documents and Supplementary Planning Documents. The aim of the Statement of Community Involvement is to help ensure community input to and ownership of the Local Development Framework. It also aims to improve overall representation and involvement across all sections of the community.

### *Pre-Options Stage consultation*

This is not the start of the debate about the future planning of the Borough. In many places over many months there have been debates that will help to shape the LDF. Some examples include the workshops and consultation stages that have helped to shape the Borough's Community Strategy; the time taken by local communities all over the Borough to produce 'wish lists' <sup>6</sup>, Village Design Statements, Parish Plans and other appraisals; and the extensive range of stakeholder workshops and presentations held on 'greater Ashford' and town centre masterplanning.

The Statement of Community Involvement provides more details of these. The outputs have helped to shape the Council's ideas and will have a major influence of the submitted version of the Core Strategy next year.

### *Getting involved in the Core Strategy Options*

This options report will be summarised in a more digestible form and there will be wide public participation. The full documents, including the supporting Greater Ashford Development Framework, will be available when the participation stage begins.

***Included with this document is a comments form explaining how you can send us your views. If it is missing or you need another copy please contact Vivienne Wolfe-Murray on 01233 330239.***

<sup>5</sup> Statement of Community Involvement, submitted April 2005, <http://www.ashford.gov.uk/pages/planning/sci.jsp>

<sup>6</sup> Essentially a snap shot audit of local attitudes to development and the facilities needed in rural communities

## PART 2 - THE CORE STRATEGY AND THE WIDER PICTURE

The Core Strategy will set out

- The Council's vision for the future of the Borough, reflecting the views of local people and the Community Strategy.
- The spatial strategy for the Borough, tackling the Ashford growth area, the town centre, the rest of the urban area, the peripheral growth areas around Ashford, and Tenterden, the villages and rural areas.
- How Ashford is to deliver quality places with the highest possible standards of design and sustainability up to 2021.
- The core topic policies on a range of subjects, including for example, housing, economy, flooding and strategic open space, needed to deliver the overall vision.
- Broad locations for the housing and other strategic development needs such as employment, retail and transport development.
- How the Council will monitor and deliver the Local Development Framework by setting clear objectives for implementation.

It will also draw on those national and regional strategies that have implications for the future of the Borough, most notably the effect of the Sustainable Communities Plan and Regional Planning Guidance 9.

### The wider national and regional context

#### *National Policy*

National planning policy is set out in a series of Planning Policy Statements (available on the web site of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister). These are gradually replacing the previous Planning Policy Guidance Notes. Planning Policy Statement 1 is something of a 'parent' document and sets out the core role of the planning system – to deliver sustainable development.

PPGs and PPSs are supplemented by circulars setting out policy on detailed issues. Guidance and best practice advice is also issued on key requirements of the LDF system, such as carrying out a sustainability appraisal. A raft of other Government policy guidance is relevant when considering the future of the Borough – from social inclusion policies to renewable energy targets – several key sources are identified in this report.

#### *Regional and county level policy*

Regional planning policies are also relevant. Under the Local Plan system these were set out in Regional Planning Guidance, with RPG9 being the relevant guidance for the South East. RPG9 was adopted in 2001 and sets out policies for the period to 2016.

Under the new planning system, introduced by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, RPG9 has become the initial Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS). A replacement RSS, known as the South East Plan, is being prepared.

RPG9 sets out policies for the whole of the South East region<sup>7</sup>. It covers a range of key regional policy concerns, including:

- The desire to achieve an urban renaissance and focus development on brownfield land in towns and cities
- Providing for the housing needs of the region
- Ensuring the region is strong economically
- Transport policy
- Policies to promote leisure and tourism

<sup>7</sup> RPG 9, SEERA [http://www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/our\\_work/planning/area\\_studies/ashford\\_strat.html](http://www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/our_work/planning/area_studies/ashford_strat.html)

- Protecting the region's natural and historic environment
- The South East's relationship with other UK regions
- Particular areas within the region requiring special policy measures (such as Priority Areas for Economic Regeneration)

The section of RPG9 relating to Ashford<sup>8</sup> was altered in 2004 to take account of Ashford's designation as a growth area. The alterations to RPG9 set out the following key principles for the development of the Ashford Growth Area. These must form the basis for the approach in the Council's LDF Core Strategy.

The scale of growth which is required at the Ashford Growth Area in the period to 2016 is based on the findings of the capacity study carried out by consultants for the Council and its Ashford's Future partners<sup>9</sup>. This was not a masterplan but an assessment of the capacity of the area to accommodate growth in terms of its environment, its economy and its community.

	2001-2011	2011-2016
<b>Housing</b> – of which up to 30% should be affordable	<b>7,900</b>	<b>5,200</b>
<b>Jobs</b>	<b>5,900</b>	<b>4,400</b>

RPG 9 also includes important policies on a range of issues – including sustainability, development quality and the timely provision of a range of infrastructure.

At a county level the Structure Plan has recently been reviewed and the new version has been the subject of an Examination in Public – its adoption is anticipated very shortly<sup>10</sup>. The Structure Plan provides part of the framework for the preparation of the LDF and the revised Structure Plan covers the period from 2001 to 2021. It sets out the level of housing required at both the Ashford Growth Area and the rest of the borough in the period from 2001 to 2021. The requirement for the growth point is consistent with RPG9 and Scenario B of the Ashford's Future study.

	2001-2006	2006-2011	2011-2016	2016-2021	2001-2021
Housing required	3,500	5,000	5,500	6,000	20,000 <sup>11</sup>

Under the new planning system, the Kent and Medway Structure Plan is saved for 3 years from the date when the revised Structure Plan is adopted (later this year). However, as soon as the replacement RSS (the South East Plan) has been adopted it will replace the Structure Plan and RPG9. Structure Plans will no longer be a part of the new planning system.

### *The new Regional Spatial Strategy*

Taken together, the RSS and LDF will constitute the statutory development plan for Ashford Borough. The draft South East Plan (RSS) sets out an overall regional strategy for the South East and considers a range of regional issues affecting the regional development of the South East, including

- Housing
- Economy and tourism
- Transport and communications
- Managing natural resources
- Countryside and landscape management
- Town centres
- Social, cultural and health issues

<sup>8</sup> Attached as appendix

<sup>9</sup> Ashford's Future – A Handbook for Change, Halcrow, 2002

<sup>10</sup> Documents can be viewed with an update on the latest position at <http://www.kmsp.org.uk/>

<sup>11</sup> Of the 20,000 dwellings to be provided from 2001 to 2021, 18,500 will be at the Ashford growth point with the remaining 1,500 being in the rest of the Borough.

- Policies for sub-regions within the South East which have similar issues to address. East Kent and Ashford (primarily the Growth Area) is one such sub-region

The draft South East Plan (RSS), published for consultation in January 2005, sets out 3 options for the scale of growth across the South East from 25,500 homes each year to 32,000. There are two options for how this growth could be distributed – a ‘*continuation of existing growth pattern*’ or a ‘*sharper focus*’ option – this would involve concentrating growth in the several sub-regions identified in the RSS with less development elsewhere.

Regardless of which option for scale or distribution of growth is pursued, the Council has argued in its response to the draft South East Plan that the agreed scale of development at the Ashford Growth Area (as established by the Halcrow Report and subsequently reflected in the Sustainable Communities Plan, RPG and the KMSP) cannot not be increased and must be an integral component of whichever option is pursued.

## Links to Ashford’s Future and masterplanning

The Core Strategy will be the basis for the LDF for the whole Borough. The Council has always stressed that the national growth area agenda applies to Ashford town and its immediate surrounding areas – there is no suggestion that development needed to meet the growth area requirement should be ‘spread’ around the Borough.

Many people will have been involved in or read about the masterplanning work that has been going on to explore how the levels of growth required in Ashford could be planned for. This work has been commissioned by the Ashford’s Future Delivery Board<sup>12</sup> and has been published<sup>13</sup> to co-incide with this options report.

The options report picks up many of the themes in the masterplanning work and it is therefore helpful to have the supporting reasoning of the consultant team. Responses to this consultation should, however, focus on this Options Report and issues of principle dealt with in it, not on the detail of the masterplanning.

## Links to the Community Strategy for the Borough

The Community Strategy sets out a vision for the Ashford community produced by a range of key local agencies – including for example the police, Primary Care Trust, Borough Council and the voluntary sector. It covers the period from 2004 to 2014 and seeks to actively involve the community in planning for its future needs. The Community Strategy covers a range of topics including:

- Health and social care
- Lifelong learning
- Transport
- Housing and the environment
- Social inclusion
- Prosperity
- Community safety
- Leisure and culture

The Community Strategy is accompanied by an Action Plan. Many of these actions have spatial implications and it is the role of the LDF to address the spatial aspirations of the Community Strategy.

<sup>12</sup> An informal partnership working together to help deliver the planned growth made up from a variety organisations from local and national Government; key public agencies and representatives from the private sector.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Greater Ashford Development Framework’, Urban Initiatives and others, May 2005

## PART 3 – CORE STRATEGY OPTIONS

### 1. Overall Vision for the Borough

The adopted Borough Local Plan <sup>14</sup> sets out a clear set of aims – or guiding principles - for planning the Borough – these are listed as Guiding Principles 1 – 13 <sup>15</sup>. There is no obvious reason to depart from this general approach – they remain valid as a basis for the Core Strategy of the Local Development Framework. These aims sit within an overall vision for the distribution of development that concentrates growth at Ashford where the services, jobs and transport links are concentrated. Elsewhere in the Borough the emphasis is on small-scale change designed to protect the quality of the Borough’s environment and heritage balanced with the need to help foster strong local communities with limited growth in the most suitable locations.

It is worth exploring what issues have emerged since the plan was adopted in 2000 that might create the need to alter or expand this vision:

- Most significantly, the emphasis on Ashford as one of the identified growth areas for the south-east in the Government’s Sustainable Communities Plan. At the outset the Council established a set of objectives <sup>16</sup> to guide the work on Ashford’s Future when the Study Brief was set for the initial Halcrow report in May 2001. These objectives have been consistently restated and applied since – first, when the Council decided its preferred position on the options for growth set by Halcrow (October 2002), and then in setting the brief (2003) for the masterplanning work to be carried out by the Urban Initiatives led team. Meeting these objectives is central to the Council maintaining its commitment to the growth agenda – it is only acceptable on this basis and formal review of progress will be needed.
- The emphasis on the Community Strategy and the role of the Local Strategic Partnership in setting a broader, community agenda to help create strong and flourishing communities to live in as an essential complement to the physical construction of new places. The Local Development Framework and the Community Strategy are closely inter-related.
- Increasing involvement of local communities in setting the agenda for their communities. In 2002 the Council tested public reaction to the Ashford growth area agenda. Overwhelming all other concerns were the need to improve the quality of the town centre and the attractions it offers, and strong feelings that infrastructure needed was lagging behind population growth and the demand for a whole range of social and physical facilities. In rural settlements the use of ‘wish lists’ has been pioneered to inform the LDF; many communities have carried out appraisals to identify various needs (including for local needs housing), and some are preparing Parish Plans drawing together this work. Recognition of the importance of this work is needed – it cannot dictate how plans for the Borough are made, but it can have a significant influence on decisions.
- Growing attention and commitment to delivering more sustainable forms of development – for example, the growing emphasis on the importance of brownfield development and housing density; the introduction of Strategic Environmental Assessment and more broadly based Sustainability Appraisals; and stronger Government policy advice in Planning Policy Statements (e.g. PPS 1, PPS 12 and PPG 25).
- One theme linking many of the above is a commitment within the Council, the Local Strategic Partnership and the Ashford’s Future Board to deliver excellence in Ashford – to try to make Ashford the test bed for quality, innovation and public involvement in decision making.

#### Options considered

There seems little sense in exploring options that depart from the existing well-founded objectives of the Borough Local Plan unless there is compelling reason. These are outlined in the Guiding Principles and Design Principles sections of the Plan. They have been rigorously tested through the Plan preparation and inquiry process and remain a sound basis for planning the Borough. None have seriously been questioned in

<sup>14</sup> Ashford Borough Local Plan, June 2000

<sup>15</sup> Guiding Principles 1 – 13 from the Borough Local Plan appended to this report

<sup>16</sup> Council’s key principles to govern Ashford’s Future work appended to this document

operation since then and there have been no changes in the Council's corporate policy that would invalidate any of them.

At a more detailed level, there is inevitably a wide variety of possible variations to the *emphasis* of these guiding principles – in particular to reflect changing emphasis in the national, regional and local situation since the Borough Local Plan was prepared.

### The Council's preferred option – **1** – Overall Vision for the Borough

The preferred option is to retain the general approach set by the existing Plan's Guiding Principles and Design Principles but to update and amend these as necessary and, in particular, to reflect:

- A) The objectives the Council has set for the Ashford's Future capacity study (the 'Halcrow' report) and masterplanning (the Greater Ashford Development Framework);
- B) The main issues emerging from community involvement in planning in the urban and rural areas of the Borough;
- C) The need to reflect national policy guidance and trends;
- D) The need to relate the Local Development Framework very closely to the Borough's Community Strategy

## 2. The Spatial Strategy for the Borough

This section of the Options Report first explains the broad approach to the distribution of development in the Borough and introduces the masterplanning work carried out by consultants for the 'Greater Ashford' area, including the town and its surrounding area. Each broad area of the Borough is then considered - different issues arise in each and a different policy approach will be needed in the LDF:

- Ashford Town Centre
- Ashford Urban area
- The growth areas around Ashford
- Tenterden, the villages and rural areas

### 2.1 The broad distribution of development

The approach to planning over three decades in the Borough has been to concentrate growth at Ashford as the major centre in the Borough best provided with jobs, facilities and transport to sustain growth. The vast majority of new housing and employment space over that time has been in Ashford. Tenterden as the second largest centre is small in relation to Ashford and this, together with its exceptional heritage importance, has resulted in steady but relatively low levels of growth. In the larger villages the same general picture of modest, 'organic' change over time applies.

The same general approach is proposed in future – given the importance of reducing energy use and the need for sustainable development the rationale is stronger than ever. That is not to deny the need in some cases for modest growth to help sustain local communities – but the emphasis must be on organic change of an appropriate scale and pace. This is explained in more detail below.

The designation of Ashford as a growth area, confirmed in the Government's 'Sustainable Communities Plan', does not alter this emphasis. The growth area is firmly based on Ashford town and its immediate surrounding area. As will become clear below and from the consultants' report, the model for growth proposed is a compact one that attempts to make best use of land in the existing urban area and hence to reduce impact on surrounding countryside and communities.

### *The Greater Ashford Development Framework*

In February 2004, English Partnerships, on behalf of Ashford Borough Council and Ashford's Future, appointed a consultant team lead by Urban Initiatives to work on the Greater Ashford Development Framework (GADF), the intention being to develop a comprehensive masterplan to direct the growth of the Ashford urban area. The key challenge being to expand the town by 31,000 homes and 28,000 jobs over the period to 2031 in line with the Sustainable Communities Plan.

But this was not a masterplan just about numbers. The Council set a list of key objectives for the work covering a range of qualitative issues and concerns expressed by local people. The masterplanning was to tackle a wide and inter-related set of issues – including transport (public and private), water issues (waste water, flooding and water supply), economic issues and environmental issues. The masterplan output was to be sufficiently clear to provide a broad basis for detailed work on the LDF that would follow. Only at that stage would detailed development boundaries and proposals be drawn up and formally proposed with the statutory public consultation and examination to follow.

### **Options considered**

The process used by the consultants and the story of how the project has unfolded is documented in detail in the GADF report. Using an innovative process of community stakeholder involvement, Urban Initiatives developed a Strategic Growth Model for Ashford to meet the requirements of the Sustainable Communities Plan. It had to quantify the landtake requirements, to think strategically about where this land could best be allocated and what form the new development should take. The assessment by stakeholders had supported "in principle" a Compact Growth Model. This model attempted to make very best use of the existing land in the urban area and to create a densely developed, 'urban' centre, whilst achieving high quality environments. High density development and uses generating high levels of activity – jobs, local shops and services, eating and drinking places – would be concentrated along a simple public transport route able to provide high frequency, reliable and excellent quality trips, most likely a guided bus system. By doing this sufficient trips would be generated to sustain a public transport network linking an expanded town centre to key development areas within the town and a series of peripheral district centres.

The Compact Growth Model evolved through testing and retesting of all the strands of masterplanning activity into a physical plan based around a clear "Urban Structure" relating the role of the major movement networks and places of significance and a "Green Structure" that would protect and enhance the primary natural and other green areas. A number of possible options were developed and changes were made to take forward the growth model into the consultants' preferred option.

Urban Initiatives developed a phasing strategy to implement the Preferred Option. The GADF includes three phasing period, 2001 to 2011, 2011 to 2021 and 2021 to 2031. The LDF Core Strategy covers the period to 2021. The consultants' Preferred Option and the phasing plans for the period to 2021 are included in this report – a wide range of other supporting information is included in the GADF Final Report <sup>17</sup>.

---

<sup>17</sup> Greater Ashford Development Framework – Final Masterplan Report, May 2005

## The Council's preferred option – 2 – The broad distribution of development

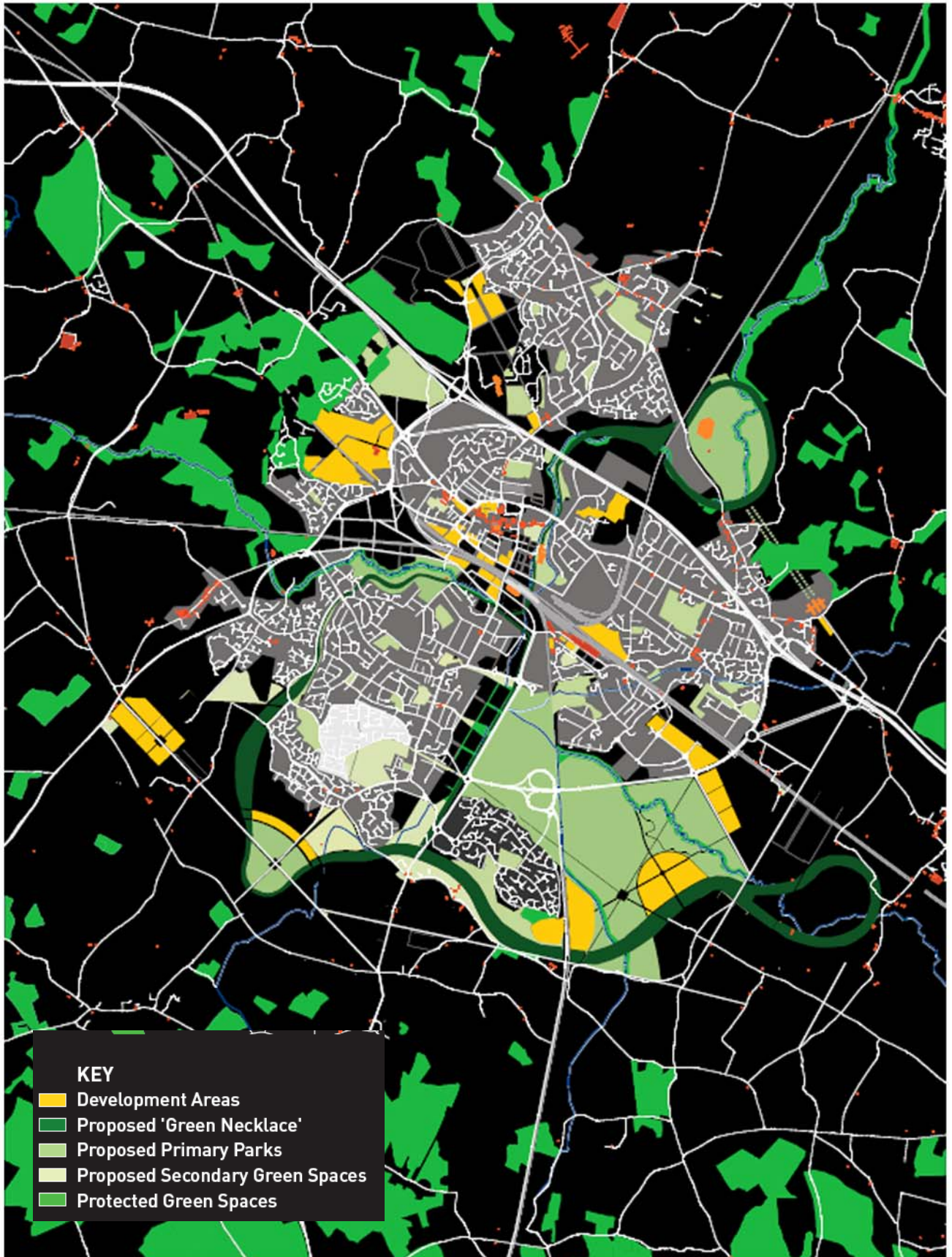
The consultants' work has spanned many months and included a vast amount of source material – listed in the appendix to the GADF Final Report. A large number of stakeholder groups and local representatives have been involved in challenging and helping to shape the masterplan as it has emerged. Given the scale of development proposed and the inevitable concerns people will have it will always be difficult to endorse every aspect of the 'preferred option' the consultants' have arrived at.

It is important to remember that the purpose of agreeing an options report is to start a wider debate on the Council's approach to its LDF – not to reach a fixed set of ideas or conclusion. On the basis that the preferred masterplan represents the conclusion of a long, thorough and independent process it seems reasonable to conclude that this should be broadly endorsed as the Council's 'preferred option' for the spatial strategy for the Ashford growth area. This will now be open to comment and representations from all sides and the Council will formally consider all of these and amend its preferred approach where necessary. Only then will the Council move to a submitted version of its Core Strategy for the Local Development Framework.

The Plans that follow show how the masterplanning envisages two phases of development in the period to 2021 – this is the timeframe for the Local Development Framework. The third plan shows how this planned growth could fit into an even longer time horizon – taking the masterplan to 2031.

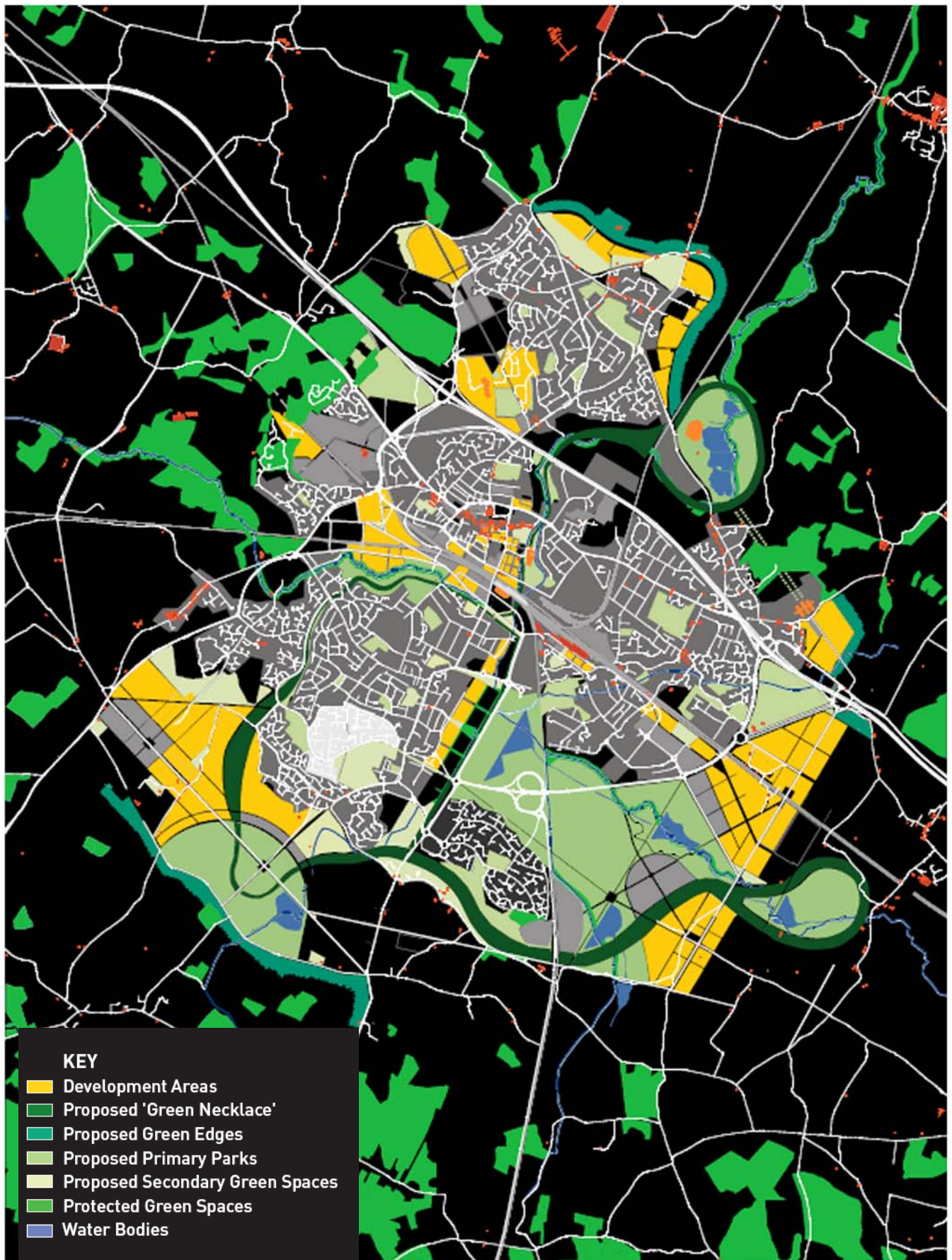
The Plans show a broad pattern of development – they should not be interpreted as detailed proposals. This detail can only be developed in subsequent work on LDDs such as Action Area Plans for the growth areas – options reports and full participation will be needed for each of those.

Responses to this consultation should focus on this Options Report and issues of principle dealt with in it, not on the detail of the masterplanning.



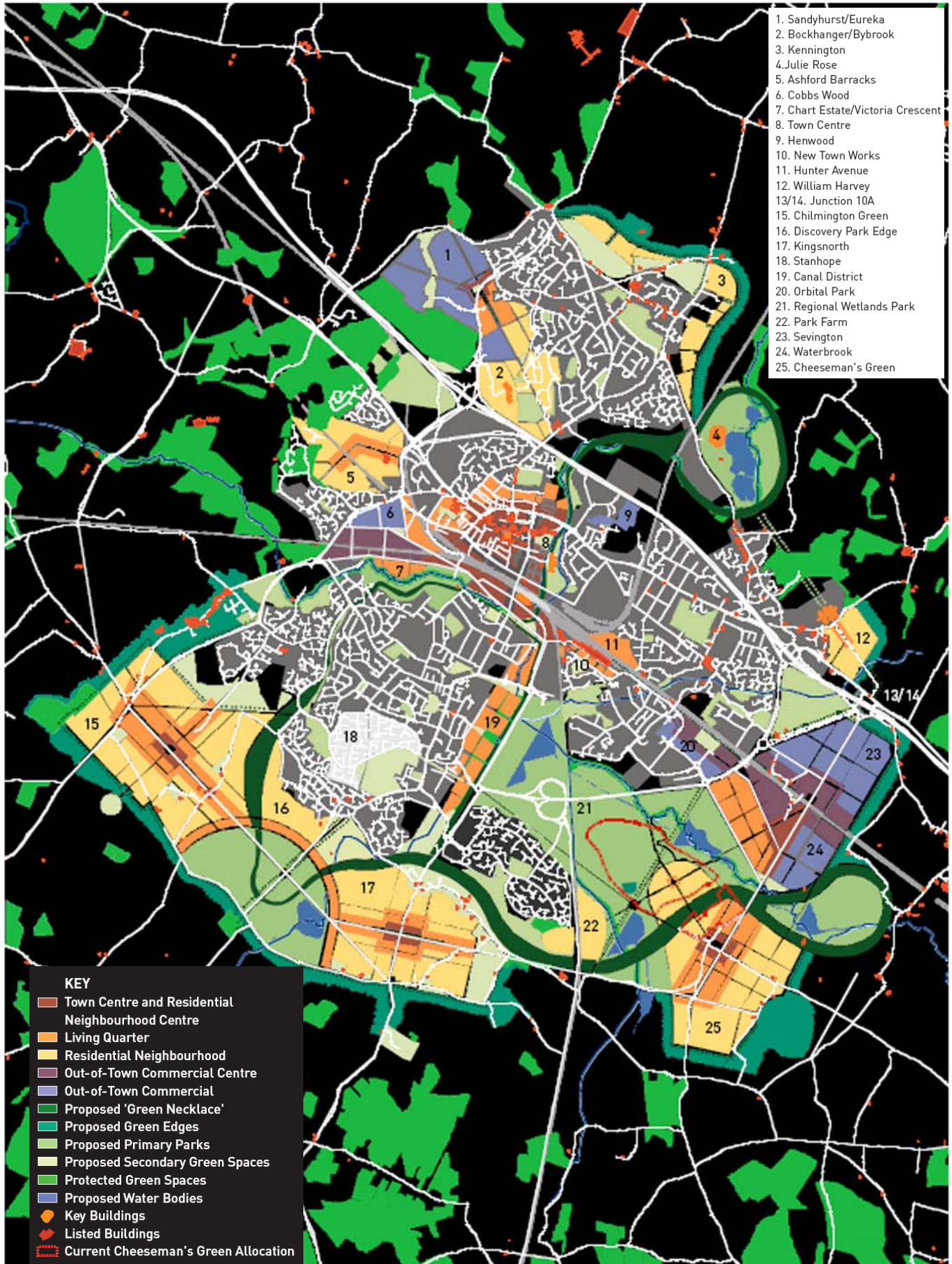
Ashford Local Development Framework: Core Strategy Options report

Phase 1 development 2001 - 2011



Ashford Local Development Framework: Core Strategy Options report

Phase II development 2011 - 2021



Greater Ashford Development framework 2001 - 2031

## 2.2 Ashford Town Centre

Ashford town centre must play a crucial role in delivering sustainable growth to Ashford and the whole Borough. Its success in providing a large proportion of the new jobs required to support Ashford's population growth will determine in large part the overall success of the growth strategy contained in this LDF and in the years to follow. It will need to function as an employment, retail, leisure, service and civic centre for a population base near double the existing level. At the same time, it needs to draw upon the historical and geographical elements that provide the basis for the attractive parts of its character today. This integration of new and old and the delivery of a step change in the economy of the town centre are major challenges for the LDF.

The Core Strategy will:

- Confirm the role of the town centre within the overall strategy for the development of Ashford;
- Establish the broad quantum of development that should be accommodated within the town centre within the LDF period, including the phasing of such development, with an indication of development to follow in future years;
- Identify the key infrastructure requirements necessary to allow the town centre to function in a sustainable manner whilst accommodating significant levels of new development;

The Council will be producing a Town Centre Area Action Plan as its next DPD and it will be for the AAP to consider and identify specific sites and policies to guide the detail of new schemes in the town centre.

### *Key Issues*

In order to fulfil its role within the overall development strategy, Ashford town centre needs to achieve a step change in its economy in order to enable it to compete with other towns in Kent and further afield in the rest of the UK and even in the near Continent. Whilst Ashford has been relatively successful in attracting new residential development in recent years, it has struggled to attract similar levels of investment in new employment and supporting retail and leisure facilities. Changing this pattern is fundamental to Ashford's future and the delivery of sustainable development here. The opportunities provided by the CTRL and high-speed services to London from 2009 are ones that must be maximised.

The expansion of the retail and leisure offer in the town centre and the creation of a place that thrives outside of office hours will be the key criteria on which the success of the town centre strategy will be judged. Major projects such as the extension to the County Square shopping centre and the Discovery Centre can provide the catalyst for this expansion and the LDF needs to adopt a proactive stance in bringing forward other key sites and projects. The LDF must also set a benchmark for high quality development in the town centre as this will not only improve the overall environment but will create the conditions for new investment in a virtuous circle.

Movement and transport issues are also critical to the future development of the town centre. For many years the constraints imposed by the physical barriers of the Ring Road, railway and rivers have served to frustrate and complicate the delivery of new development. Making these into positive assets that encourage and focus new development is a major challenge for the LDF and delivery agencies, whilst also recognising that the road network has an important role in enabling people to get to and from the town centre whether that is by car or on public transport.

### *Policy Background*

The strengthening of the town centre's role and the proposal that it is the focus for significant amounts of new development is entirely consistent with the Government's planning guidance on town centres in PPS6.

The RPG9 chapter on the Ashford Growth Area recognises the importance of the town centre within the spatial strategy for the whole town - not only an area for early opportunities to be realised but also as a area for urban renaissance that will improve the public realm and create new opportunities that can act as a showcase for future development. As such, it is important to give priority to bringing forward the redevelopment of the town centre as one of the first phases of development in Ashford.

The Council's current planning policies relating to the town centre in the Borough Local Plan also reflect the general approach in Government planning guidance by making the town centre the focal point for major new retail, leisure and commercial development. The 'Employment Core' policy (ET3) specifically requires higher density commercial development to be located close to the railway stations.

### **Options considered**

For the key elements of this urban strategy, some alternative options have been considered.

#### *Timing of development in the town centre*

Given the scale of development proposed in Ashford in the LDF period and beyond, should development be focused on the town centre (as part of the existing urban area) in advance of peripheral greenfield extensions to Ashford?

The town centre will play the key role in providing the jobs to support and complement the major population growth the town will experience. It will also be the location for some considerable amount of new residential development itself. The town centre is the most accessible and sustainable location for new development and significant areas of brownfield land could be brought forward within a relatively short timescale. Whilst the commercial market in particular will have a major influence on how quickly new jobs can be delivered, it is important that key structures necessary to enhance the vitality and viability of the town centre are planned for as a priority.

The managed release of land for development is expressly supported in Government planning guidance and it is the Council's preferred strategy to focus activity initially primarily on brownfield land opportunities within the town.

#### *Amount of development in the town centre*

If a significantly enhanced role for the town centre is assumed, this could be achieved by various amounts of new development and different mixes of new development.

The town centre provides the focal point for many social and economic activities and is very well served by rail, road and public transport. In addition, there are significant areas of land that are available for redevelopment in the relatively short term. Government planning guidance and existing Local Plan policy both promote the role of town centres. Therefore, the Council regards the Ashford town centre as the appropriate location for significant quantum of new development over the LDF period.

It is generally felt that mixed-use developments provide a better way of enabling integration and vitality into an area and this is an important principle for the town centre. The provision of considerable numbers of new dwellings is a way of introducing a bigger resident population to the town centre that will help to sustain a wider economic base. It is proposed that around 2,500 new dwellings should be provided in an expanded town centre up to 2021, with the potential for around a further 1,000 units in the decade to follow.

In the commercial sectors, adequate provision for major expansion is necessary. This could focus on retail, leisure and office sectors. Market advice suggests that the office market in Ashford will take time to grow and the influence of the CTRL links will need to be established. There should not be unrealistic expectations and a recognition that other, more peripheral locations may be sought after by some companies seeking an Ashford location. A focus, at least initially, on the retail and leisure markets appears to be most appropriate for job creation. As such it is proposed that around 94,000 sq.m. of retail/leisure floorspace and 85,000 sq.m. of new office floorspace be proposed in the town centre to 2021.

In addition, it is clear from the economic analysis supporting the GADF work that the skills base of the Ashford economy needs to be substantially improved to support the proposed increase in jobs in Ashford. To this end, additional provision for Further and Higher Education within the town is required and a town centre location for this is proposed as part of the LDF strategy. The Discovery Centre is an exciting and iconic project that can help to change perceptions of what Ashford has to offer and set a quality standard for new development. The LDF will need to embrace the essential need for a mix of uses, especially at ground floor level, to create quality urban streets and a really attractive and vibrant enlarged town centre.

### *Key infrastructure*

The delivery of substantial amounts of new development is dependent on the implementation of key transport infrastructure within a movement framework. Options for the key elements of this in respect of the town centre have been considered.

The Ring Road plays a key role in the future of the town centre. In its current form, the Ring Road has a car-dominated environment that creates a major constraint to the expansion of the town centre. Developments do not front the Ring Road and pedestrian activity and flows are low. However, it does provide lots of traffic capacity and enables relatively easy vehicle access into the town centre. In recent years, several options for changing the Ring Road have been suggested including severing it in certain places, reversing the flows on it or creating two-way movements in place of the existing one-way system.

Changing the role of the Ring Road is vital in improving the image of the town centre and creating development opportunities alongside it. Currently, much of the traffic that uses the Ring Road is merely 'passing through' the town and paradoxically, its capacity only encourages more traffic to use it for this purpose. The one-way system also requires longer traffic movements than is necessary. The opportunity exists to make the Ring Road a proper 'street' with active frontages that will alter its role from a road 'around' the town centre to one that goes 'through' the town centre whilst also 'calming' at least parts of it by reducing the extent of the carriageway.

Options considering the downgrading of Elwick Road and Station Road have been considered together with ideas to improve Ring Road junctions. The Council's preferred option is for the Ring Road to become a two-way street around its whole length in order to reduce journey distances to all parts of the town centre and to focus on the downgrading of Elwick Road in particular. This will open up and enhance the development potential of the sites south of Elwick Road and is consistent with the general southern extension of the town centre. Station Road would become the primary link for vehicles that do need or wish to pass through the town centre. A more detailed assessment of these options will be in the Council's Town Centre Area Action Plan.

In order to enable the Ring Road to play this new role, an alternative route for through traffic is necessary. A link road that can act both as a traffic distributor and as a key access to new development should be created. At present, all traffic must go over Beaver Road bridge and around the Ring Road and so a solution that avoids this is the key. The Victoria Road area is likely to be the focus for significant redevelopment and a significant area is already allocated for such in the existing Local Plan. The creation of a link through this area, initially to the west and eventually to Templar Way, appears to be the only realistic solution that can provide a ready alternative to the Ring Road and to help cater for additional traffic that will arise with growth. The detailed alignment and timing of this link needs to be worked up in due course and will be considered through the Town Centre Area Action Plan.

Linked to the issue of vehicle movement around the town centre is the need to provide for adequate car parking – especially to serve the needs of shoppers who are so important to the town's economy. In the long term, improved public transport and Park and Ride will be able to cater for many people's needs but, for the foreseeable future, relatively high levels of car access to the town centre will continue to be important. The pressures arising from additional traffic will be eased if car parking is carefully located in relation to the new proposed movement system – and as a principle moved outside the existing ring road where possible to simplify traffic movements and make better use of precious town centre space. A new route through the Victoria Road area provides an opportunity to serve new car parking to meet some of the town centre's needs.

### The Council's Preferred Option – 3 – Ashford Town Centre

Priority will be given to bringing forward redevelopment opportunities in the town centre in advance of major releases of greenfield land on the periphery of Ashford.

The town centre should be expanded to accommodate up to 2,500 new dwellings, 94,000 sq.m., of new retail / leisure floorspace, 85,000 sq.m. of new office floorspace by 2021. Priority needs include a new FE/HE campus, the Discovery Centre and a mix of leisure, retail and other active uses at ground floor level to help bring activity and add real character to well designed urban streets.

The transport and movement strategy for the town centre shall include the provision of a new strategic east/west link through the Victoria Road area and the phased implementation of two-way traffic flow on the Ring Road. Car parking provision should be made in a way that best complements the new movement patterns whilst providing easy access on foot to the town centre.

### 2.3 Ashford Urban area

This part of the Core Strategy relates to the urban area of Ashford outside the town centre and land at the margins of the urban area – it does not include the major areas of peripheral growth.

The existing Local Plan has sought to promote a range of development opportunities, for housing, economic development and mixed uses, both within and on the edge of the existing urban area of Ashford whilst protecting key areas of environmental value. Over the last decade the majority of development has taken place on sites on or close to the edge of the urban area but the increasing national emphasis on urban intensification and better use of brownfield land, and the development industry's response to that, has begun to change that balance. Sites such as Bushy Royds and the Barracks have made an increasing contribution to the overall supply picture.

A fundamental objective of the Council's planning strategy for the urban area is to ensure that Ashford's growth brings improvements to the quality of life within the existing urban area. This was re-inforced and strengthened by stakeholder input to the GADF masterplanning process where a strong view emerged for a compact, denser town centre with better facilities and more development and activity, providing that this brought with it overall improvements to the quality of the town.

As a general principle this 'mend before extend' approach and the Government policy on use of brownfield land suggests a strong priority for early phasing of development in the urban area ahead of peripheral development. This needs to be qualified to some extent, however, by the need to provide a range of growth opportunities – both in terms of the location and style of new homes and new workplaces – to best enable the market to respond to the growth targets that have been set for the town.

The masterplanning work went on to tackle neighbourhoods of the town that needed some investment and regeneration to help them perform better, and ways of helping to integrate the town better. Areas such as Stanhope and Bybrook are often perceived as being relatively isolated from the town around them – sometimes this separation is about people's attitudes, sometimes it is physical barriers such as road layouts and levels of access to surrounding areas and facilities. In some parts of the town physical separation by floodplain or railway lines adds to an overall impression of a sometimes disjointed place. The consultants work on masterplanning tried to respond to these issues.

The peripheral nature and relatively low density of much recent development has not made it easy to provide integrated, high quality public transport services and everyday services and employment are not necessarily readily accessible from people's homes. It is an obvious general rule that the more people that live in easy walking distance of public transport routes and local shops and services, the more likely they are to thrive. Without such facilities the danger is that a relatively characterless place is created with high levels of car dependence, creating further pressure on road networks and adding to congestion and atmospheric pollution.

For a whole range of reasons compact growth within and close to urban centres makes good sense and can help create a better quality of life. It is crucial that the dispersed development patterns of the past are rectified if Ashford is to grow sustainably. A key challenge for the LDF is to prioritise addressing the problems of the existing urban area. The urban area is a key hub of services/infrastructure and employment so it is crucial to ensure that its capacity to support further development is improved early on. Past experience shows that this can not be done by simply allocating sites for development within the existing urban area and hoping that they get developed first – more direct control over phasing will be needed.

The review of the Local Plan offers the opportunity to consider how the urban area can be developed more sustainably. That is not just about making space for more development – parallel policies are needed to deal with the transport and environmental issues arising and investment needed in a range of improved facilities as well as improvements to the environment of the town.

#### **Options considered:**

##### *Phasing*

When should land within the urban area be released for development? One option would be not to phase the release of land – however, as past experience has shown this will not necessarily lead to land within the urban area being prioritised for development and will not help to achieve Government and regional policy for brownfield development. The compact model recognises that if Ashford is to sustainably support the scale of growth proposed, the existing urban area needs to be improved and fully integrated with peripheral growth. Key to the compact model is a ‘mend before you extend’ approach. The mend before you extend approach enables key improvements to the quality of the urban area and its infrastructure to be made early on, so that it is better placed to support peripheral growth.

The approach taken by the masterplanners is to use two broad phasing periods to cover the LDF period – 2001-2011 and 2011 – 2021. More sophisticated phasing would be hard to justify given the inevitable uncertainties that exist with any development programme over a series of sites, some of which will be relatively complex. Bearing in mind the points above about the importance of development within the urban area, sites which are likely to be available should be included in the first phase of the LDF. The arguments for this are strongest on key town centre sites that will help to regenerate the town centre and on brownfield sites that can help to reduce land take needed elsewhere. The argument becomes weaker at the margins of the town and on greenfield sites.

This general approach needs to be balanced with the need to provide a degree of variety and choice both for the development industry as provider and the public as consumers. Another key issue is the potential need to ‘over-supply’ in terms of allocated land against the target to allow for some sites that might not come forward in the period in question – this is tackled in the delivery section below.

Finally, development proposals that bring forward key elements of infrastructure that are important steps on the ‘critical path’ to providing the range of improvements needed in the town must be accorded a degree of priority. There may be instances where proposals are of such importance that the Council is willing to consider approving them in advance of the full LDF framework being in place and finally adopted. There is, of course, an established route for doing this by advertising such proposals as formal ‘departures’ from the adopted Plan alerting the Secretary of State to ‘call in’ such schemes if s/he chooses.

##### *Delivering high quality places and helping to ‘mend’ underperforming areas*

A key objective of the strategy for the urban area is to improve its quality. This requires a range of measures include raising design standards, increasing density and applying challenging sustainability standards to new development (see the section on design below).

For the urban area as a whole there are several recurrent key themes that will help to deliver quality places – these include:

- Creating mixed use places where a range of activities take place – including local jobs, services and facilities – with a decent environment. These are some of the essential building blocks of a strong community with its own identity – not just a housing estate;

- Linking the parts of the urban area together and providing a high quality public transport system so that people can easily access the town centre with its wider range of jobs and attractions and other 'higher order' facilities such as major parks, sporting and leisure facilities;
- Helping to achieve a 'step change' in areas where there are existing social and environmental problems. By looking at how these areas as part of a wider plan they can often be helped to 'work better' – for example, by injecting new development and activity to help sustain local shops and services, and by improving links to the areas around so people have better access to a wider range of choices in jobs and services. Planning for the Government's growth agenda in Ashford will fail unless we help to alleviate existing problems and spread the benefits of growth more widely to help tackle disadvantage.

The GADF shows how the above issues have been reflected in a spatial masterplan and the phasing tables indicate the estimated levels of housing and employment development. Included within this broad-brush approach are assumptions about the space needed for local open spaces and other facilities. Examples of the different types of sites identified include:

- *Sites which are already being developed or have permission* – such as the Barracks and the extension to Park Farm
- *New housing opportunity areas* – such as north of Kennington abutting the urban area
- *Regeneration areas* – including Newtown Railway Works, the Bockhanger/ Bybrook area and Stanhope

#### **The Council's preferred approach – 4 – Ashford Urban area**

**On phasing and delivery - to adopt the broad phasing approach suggested in the GADF report but to seek to bring forward brownfield development at the earliest opportunity. Where development proposals come forward that will provide key infrastructure early this is an important issue that the Council will need to consider as part of the overall merits of the scheme and could justify support for a 'departure' application in advance of the completion of the LDF process.**

**Broadly endorse the GADF masterplan and work up the proposals it includes in more detail so that they can be examined properly and tested fully in the subsequent stages of the LDF process. The general approach should be based on using a mixed use approach where needed, creating better linkages between areas and targeting attention to tackle the particular needs of areas currently performing less well.**

## **2.4 The Growth areas around Ashford**

Given the scale of growth envisaged for the town it was always inevitable that there would be a considerable 'green field' requirement. Even with the very compact model developed by the consultants a significant proportion of the overall housing growth requirement to 2021 – some 50% - is proposed in three peripheral settlements adjoining the town. The nature and location of these has changed considerably as the masterplanning has evolved but two core principles have always been applied:

- The growth areas need to be of a size to have good prospects of creating a sustainable balance of homes, jobs and local services and the quality of place and living environment that comes with that. Considerable work now exists on what level of growth will reasonably support different services and this is drawn on in the consultants' report. This has led to three growth areas being identified of a size between 4 – 6,000 homes centred on a strong local high street with the vast majority of residents within 800m walking distance;
- The need for growth areas to 'anchor' the public transport system – it is crucial that increasing numbers of residents are attracted to public transport. This will only happen with a high quality system with a reliable, high frequency service. Placing growth areas as 'anchors' to each end of a simple public transport corridor is a key way of enabling the maximum number of people who can

to use it. Only if a major shift in modal split of this sort happens will the masterplan succeed – without it the prognosis would be likely to be excessive congestion or a major road building programme with severe consequences for existing communities and the environment of the town.

Each of these growth areas is centred around a 'High Street' running through the area with higher densities and more activity along its route. This will carry relatively high levels of traffic but in a carefully designed road system giving pedestrians and cyclists as much attention as vehicle traffic. The High Street will also allow bus 'penetration' to the heart of the area in the most direct way making services more viable. The conventional solution in recent years has tended to be the high capacity, high speed ring road – around the edge of the development area. This solution tends to generate more traffic but also bypasses the shops and local services in the area and by reducing passing traffic and easy access tends to make it harder to achieve viable mixed use and the variety that helps to make successful places.

Each growth area includes space for green areas and a range of local facilities within the development area. A sustained programme of investment in infrastructure will be needed on and off site. On site this will include the usual facilities for open space, schools, etc but will also need to cover the creation of local jobs if these places are to be strong local communities. Developers of these areas will need to take a broad approach to the creation of new communities in the widest sense but will also need other infrastructure providers to play their part.

Infrastructure is a key concern for local people – Ashford's recent history has been one of infrastructure lagging behind development. It is also a concern of landowners and developers that strategic investment is made in key infrastructure to enable their developments to come forward in a timely, phased way. Whilst developer contributions and a strategic tariff arrangement (discussed in detail below) will provide for much of this infrastructure – other public sector funding will be needed from a range of Government departments and agencies and from service providers. Sustainable places will not be made if infrastructure is out of step with needs – indeed development is likely to be held up and the Communities Plan targets frustrated. The conventional system has not succeeded – in the context of much larger growth proposals the problems will be far more acute. The Council's commitment to the growth agenda includes the pre-condition that a proper way forward is found to tackle these issues.

Growth areas also need to relate well to the strategic green spaces around them – for example, the river corridors and new parkland proposals. Just as important is the need for clear 'edges' to major developments and for these to be dealt with positively – including the urban fringe where town gives way to countryside. This needs positive, adequately funded, management proposals and detailed plans will need to be drawn up to work up how this can best be achieved.

Another important issue is the need for these areas to relate successfully to the urban area they adjoin – sensitive planning here can help to improve conditions for existing residents, for example, by providing access to improved services, facilities and public transport.

Finally, in terms of the detailed nature of the final development, the consultants have been working on a parallel 'design code' to support the GADF work – this is not site specific but outlines good practice rules for creating high quality places from physical design to street planning and layout and a sustainability specification for new buildings. The detail of this is for subsequent, detailed LDF documents but the general approach is an important way to seek to establish quality and sustainability standards. This will help make sure that when development actually comes to be designed in detail and built, standards do not slip. A similar approach has been piloted – as part of a national ODPM project – at Ashford Barracks.

## **Options considered**

The various options considered, from the very first stages at the Eastwell Manor workshops, are summarised in the GADF Final Report. Submissions have been made by interested parties during the process – including parish councils, landowners and developers. Many meetings and workshops have been held and information passed to the consultant team for them to evaluate. The consequences of agreeing with many of these suggestions would have been either less compact or more sporadic patterns of development. Both these consequences tend to conflict with the core aims of compactness agreed by stakeholders, the benefits of a scale of settlement supporting a real mix of uses that make interesting places and the need for

a radical change in modal split to favour public transport.

Apart from the 'viable scale' of the growth areas, issues of structure are important – the way in which it relates to the transport system – roads and public transport - and the green space network and surrounding countryside, for example. As has been indicated above, a variety of approaches has been debated at workshops and other events and in the supporting work for the GADF Final Report.

Delivering infrastructure in a comprehensive way when it is needed is a hard nut to crack. The Ashford's Future Board and the Council support a new approach based on both a strategic tariff but also a form of contract between central Government and the local delivery partnership (i.e. the Board). Central Government and its agencies will undertake to commit to the agreed infrastructure package when needed, in return for the partnership working to ensure that the growth is delivered. The options are dealt with in more detail in the section on delivery below.

Various options exist to control quality when development takes place – conventional planning briefs have not always been adequate in our experience in Ashford as they leave too much scope for a developer who is seeking to cut costs or 'simplify' their scheme. The use of design codes is now becoming accepted nationally as a way of imposing a higher degree of certainty (without being too prescriptive). They are also beginning to find favour as a way of enabling speedier approval of detailed applications once a clear design framework has been set.

One additional issue has been how to deal with well advanced development projects which stem from allocations in the existing local plan where these are, in part, at odds with the emerging masterplan. A particular example is at Cheesemans Green, where the Council has already decided it is minded to give planning permission subject to a legal agreement but not all the area of this site is shown for development in the masterplan and the reasons for this are set out in the GADF document. The approach taken at this stage is to leave the masterplan as proposed but acknowledge the possible implications in future if the permission is implemented on land not in the final LDF proposals for the area. At this early stage of the LDF this seems a sensible approach – it accepts the possibility that development might go ahead on this land – in which case a reduction would be made in a masterplan development area elsewhere in the area south east of the town.

### **The Council's preferred option – 5 – The Growth areas around Ashford**

**In planning for the proposed peripheral growth areas the following issues should be considered in particular:**

- A) the scale and layout of the growth areas is planned in a way that maximises the opportunities to achieve a strong balance of mixed use places of real character, and the potential level of use of the bus system;**
- B) the growth area's setting is particularly carefully planned and adequate resources set aside (from development contributions and other sources) to enable the proper planting and provision of appropriate facilities in a transition zone of suitable scale between urban and rural areas, and for their long term maintenance;**
- C) the need to control the rate of release of development land to keep in step with infrastructure and the other elements of a balanced, mixed community (e.g. local job creation) – both in terms of the responsibilities of the landowners/ developers and the wider public sector responsibilities to deliver necessary infrastructure when it is needed;**
- D) establish the Council's commitment to the use of design codes to complement the Action Area Plans needed for each peripheral growth area.**
- E) as far as the Cheesemans Green Borough Local Plan site is concerned, indicate that should the part of the site outside the masterplan proposals be built then a reduction would be made in development elsewhere.**

## 2.5 Tenterden, the villages and rural areas

The remaining parts of the Borough outside the Ashford Growth Area are rich in environmental and landscape quality and in contrast to Ashford have traditionally been the subject of generally restrictive planning policies that seek to retain and enhance this rural character. However, it should be recognised that some limited housing development in these areas can help to maintain local jobs and services and reduce social exclusion that can be a feature of more remote communities. The Council's planning strategy for Tenterden, the villages and the rural areas must balance these competing principles by allowing for limited growth in appropriate locations and of suitable scales.

Many villages have lost local shops, services and jobs over a sustained period and the high value of housing land keeps up the pressure to 'turn over' other uses to residential. Investment in new jobs and workplaces tends to be relatively low in the rural settlements but a careful review is needed of the situation in Tenterden and the larger villages to see if more land should be identified for employment use to help provide local jobs. Policies to resist the loss of local shops and businesses are hard to operate in practice but are an important means of attempting to retain balanced village communities.

A particular current concern of more than local importance is the future of Wye College in the light of Imperial College reviewing its future presence there. The College is a major rural employer and is crucial to supporting the local shops and services in the village. It is also a very important part of the wider 'economic offer' of the Borough.

The Core Strategy will:

- Establish a broad rural settlement hierarchy that will form the basis for future site allocations in a more detailed DPD;
- Establish the target figure for new residential development outside the Ashford Growth Area up to 2021 and broadly how that should be phased within that period;
- Establish the most appropriate policy approach to affordable and local needs housing in Tenterden and the villages;
- Establish the policy approach to the continued protection and enhancement of local jobs and services in the rural areas; and,
- Confirm the continued policy approach to the long term protection and enhancement of the rural character of the Borough including the key issues of heritage, landscape and ecology.

### *Key Issues*

It is clear that the vast majority of new development in the Borough is to be located in and around the Ashford Growth Area but there will be significant demand (and need) for some new development in the rest of the Borough.

Providing opportunities to live and work in one's own village and the support of local services is a key recurring theme that comes through consultation with rural communities as is the strong desire to retain the qualities of an attractive environment that define the character of the rural settlements. How best to strike this balance is at the heart of a planning strategy for the rural areas.

### *Policy Background*

Ashford has had local plan coverage of its rural areas for around 20 years and has taken a consistent approach over that time which has:

- Concentrated most growth in Ashford town where most jobs, transport, shops and services are located;
- Allowed relatively small scale housing growth in specified rural settlements and sought to make that growth proportional to the size of the settlement;
- Sought to retain local shops and services in villages where possible;

- Strongly resisted new development outside the 'confines' of the villages; and
- Allowed, on an exception basis, housing for identified local needs outside these 'confines'.

The current Borough Local Plan follows these principles and also established a broad settlement hierarchy with Tenterden at the top and Charing, Hamstreet and Wye in the second tier – 4 settlements within which the largest residential allocations would be made. The other villages in the Borough are restricted to minor development and infilling opportunities only.

The draft Kent and Medway Structure Plan proposes an overall figure for new residential development within Ashford Borough from 2001-21 of 20,000 new dwellings, of 18,500 should be in the Ashford Growth area. These figures are consistent with the RPG9 targets for development for Ashford and hence provide a reasonable basis on which to plan for the rest of the Borough. Therefore, quantitatively, an assumed contribution of 1500 dwellings over this period is required from the rest of the Borough.

Based on this overall target to 2021, there needs to be a further reduction by making an assumption about the number of dwellings that will be created from windfall or other small sites in the rural area over this period. Previous trends indicate an average of 35 units per year arise from these sources which if continued would mean a total of 700 units over the 20 year period. This would leave 800 units left to come forward from allocated sites to 2021.

Government planning policy in PPS7 supports the broad principles mentioned above but also suggests that local authorities should consider allowing some limited development in or next to rural settlements that may not be service centres in their own right if it would help to meet local business or community needs that would help maintain the vitality of those communities. Other Government guidance in PPS6 refers to the need for a range of facilities at local service centres in the rural areas that are appropriate to the size of their catchment areas.

### **Options considered**

For the key elements of this rural strategy, there are some alternative approaches that have been considered.

#### *Phasing*

Assuming a target of 800 new dwellings from newly allocated sites up to 2021, these could either be provided by phasing the release of over two or more periods, or by allocating sufficient land in one go.

Government policy has clearly stated the need to properly manage the release of land for housing and closely monitor the progress of sites to ensure that adequate provision is made for new development but significant over supply situations are avoided. This implies that a phased approach to the release of land is the correct approach. In addition, it is highly likely that demand in the rural settlements is such that a single release of sites would result in pressures for additional land releases beyond the 800 units towards the end of the LDF period.

Therefore, the preferred approach would be phase the release of new sites in two phases – the first up to 2011 with the rest after then. This would enable a review of the amount of land required to meet rural housing requirements could take place at the end of phase 1. Such a phasing arrangement also echoes the proposals for phasing in the Ashford Growth Area. On a proportionate basis, sufficient land for 250 new dwellings would be allocated in the first phase.

#### *Distribution of development*

There are 3 main options for deciding the strategy where new allocations should be made. Firstly, they could be spread evenly around a large number of settlements, secondly, they could be restricted to Tenterden and the 3 key villages of Charing, Hamstreet and Wye in a continuation of existing policy, or thirdly, they could be restricted to a slightly wider list of key settlements than exists at present.

In considering this issue, several factors need to be weighed against each other:

- existing policy that directs new development towards the most sustainable locations (and hence the largest, most accessible villages),

- the availability of suitable development opportunities in individual settlements,
- the desire of the local population to see their settlement grow to a greater or lesser extent.

At the previous local plan inquiry, the Council's settlement hierarchy approach based on a series of 'sustainable indicators' was greatly supported by the Inspector and this should be the basis for any review of the Council's strategy. However, the current local plan only needed to find a relatively small amount of new land for development and a similarly restrictive approach may be harder to justify this time. In addition, Government guidance in PPS7 suggests there can be occasions when a strict hierarchical approach needs to be tempered.

An important factor should also be local wishes. The Council has carried out a parish 'wish list' exercise that helped to highlight the extent to which residents wanted to see new developments in their villages. In most parishes, this resulted in a desire to meet strictly local needs for housing, jobs and community facilities, i.e. little or no new significant development.

These factors mitigate strongly against an approach which seeks to equally share out an overall housing requirement across a large number of settlements – this would seem to have little local support and disregard the particular environmental and economic factors that prevail in different villages.

It is also felt that a revision of the existing rural settlement hierarchy as expressed in policy terms may be necessary. Tenterden's role as an important service centre in the south west of the Borough (and beyond) is well established and justifies the continuation of a policy that allows some carefully controlled expansion within the town over the LDF period. However, the scale of allocations necessary over this period means that restricting development to Charing, Hamstreet and Wye would result in a significant expansion of those villages that would be out of scale and potentially damaging to their character. Therefore, other settlements that currently enjoy a relatively good level of service provision, are relatively accessible and that can play a more localised service centre role in their part of the Borough should be considered for residential allocations.

In revising and updating a sustainability indicator approach, the highest scoring settlements were Wye, Charing, Kingsnorth, Great Chart, Hamstreet, Biddenden and Chilham. If Kingsnorth and Great Chart are considered as part of the Ashford Growth Area, the remaining 5 settlements should be the starting point for looking for appropriate sites for future allocations. In addition, Aldington emerged through the 'wish list' process as a village that would be happy to accommodate some further more significant development and although not scoring as highly in sustainability terms as the other villages, it could play an enhanced local service centre role in this south eastern part of the Borough in the future.

In conclusion, the Council's preferred approach to making specific allocations for new development in the LDF period will be to focus firstly on Tenterden and then to consider suitable opportunities within Charing, Wye, Hamstreet, Biddenden, Chilham and Aldington. Outside of these settlements, it is not proposed to make any residential allocations in the LDF and development should be limited to minor redevelopment and infilling through a revision to current policy HG6.

#### *Restricting development in the countryside*

The continuation of existing policy that prevents the development of new dwellings outside the confines of settlements or a more relaxed approach to development.

A key principle of Government planning policy in PPS7 is that new building in the open countryside should be strictly controlled and this has consistently been reflected in Local and Structure Plan policies over many years and the Council's preferred approach is to maintain this as part of its rural development strategy. The Council has chosen to define the confines of the settlement in textual terms instead of indicating a boundary on a plan base. There are pros and cons to each approach but the Council's traditional method of defining settlement boundaries has proved largely successful on appeal and thus its preferred approach is to retain this method in the LDF.

#### *Local needs / affordable housing*

Government guidance now provides the option to specifically allocate sites for affordable or local needs housing in LDFs as opposed to the policy of permitting 'exception sites' on land that would not otherwise be suitable for residential development.

Ashford Borough has been notably successful in pursuing a local needs housing sites policy in the villages over the last 10-15 years. This has resulted in many villages achieving small-scale developments on 'exception sites'. With house price inflation being so rapid in recent years, the need for a supply of local needs properties in villages across the Borough is bound to continue.

On larger sites in Tenterden and the main villages, affordable housing can be required as a proportion of the overall capacity of the site but in smaller villages, this situation would not arise and thus either the Council should seek to specifically allocate sites in the LDF for local needs only or allow suitable 'exception sites' to come forward in consultation with the local population when the need arises.

The Council's preferred option is to retain the current approach to providing local needs housing through an 'exception sites' policy.

#### *Wye College*

In Wye it is crucial that the higher education, related research and business presence remains – both to help support a thriving, mixed local community but also as an important part of Ashford's wider academic and business offer. Work on generating the jobs needed to support Ashford's Future has repeatedly highlighted the importance of improved further and high education. This can improve local skills, create a skilled workforce for incoming investors and generate spin-off businesses arising from local research and development. Although it is clear that funding the current agricultural science based facility at Wye is problematic, it is crucial that a strong link to this world-class academic institution remains in the Borough with a major Imperial College presence at Wye.

#### **The Council's Preferred Option – 6 – Tenterden, the villages and rural areas**

**Phase the release of new sites in two phases – the first up to 2011 with the rest after then. On a proportionate basis, sufficient land for 250 new dwellings would be allocated in the first phase and 550 in the second.**

**New residential development allocations in the LDF period will be to focused firstly on Tenterden and then subsequently on suitable opportunities within Charing, Wye, Hamstreet, Biddenden, Chilham and Aldington. Outside of these settlements, it is not proposed to make any residential allocations in the LDF and development should be limited to minor redevelopment and infilling through a revision to current policy HG6.**

**New building in the open countryside should be strictly controlled and no new residential development should be permitted beyond the built confines of existing settlements, which should continue to be defined as the 'limits of continuous development (inc. narrow gaps which may be suitable for 1 or 2 dwellings only) forming the existing built-up area of the settlement.'**

**Local needs housing shall continue to be provided through the implementation of an 'exception sites' policy.**

**Seeking to retain a major presence of Imperial College at Wye in the interests of both the local community and the Borough's economic future.**

### 3. Making Quality Places: Design and Sustainability

Delivering sustainable development is no longer an option: it is an imperative. The UK Government Sustainable Development Strategy "Securing the Future" states that;

'Make the wrong choices now and future generations will live with a changed climate, depleted resources and without the green space and biodiversity that contribute both to our standard of living and our quality of life. Each of us needs to make the right choices to secure a future that is fairer, where we can all live within our environmental limits. That means sustainable development'

The preferred options outlined in this document will help to set the way forward for Ashford to 2021 and beyond. It is crucial that we put in place as sustainable a framework as we can.

The Government's policies can be found in several publications including PPS1, the 'Sustainable Communities Plan' and the Energy White Paper of 2003. High quality design is a key element of making better places and is central to the national policy agenda:

'There should be no acceptance of ill-conceived designs which do not contribute positively to making places better for people'<sup>18</sup>

The Regional Planning Guidance (RPG9) also places high emphasis on achieving sustainable development and high quality design. It outlines the approach that should be taken towards delivering sustainable communities in Ashford. With the priority being to enhance quality of life, it sets out guiding principles for the 'phased and co-ordinated provision of quality community, economic, environmental and social infrastructure'. These principles reflect the national agenda for Sustainable Communities and recognised that a step change is needed in how we plan, design and deliver sustainable communities.

The Regional Development Agency, SEEDA, has also taken a leading role in gearing up to meet the sustainability agenda – studies have assessed the 'ecological footprint' of the South East and a 'Sustainability Checklist'<sup>19</sup> has been produced to help improve the standards of new development.

*Summary of key national<sup>20</sup>, regional,<sup>21</sup> and sub-regional carbon and energy reduction targets*

<b>National targets</b>	
2050	60% reduction in CO2
2010	10% of electricity generation from renewables
2020	to increase renewable generation to 20%
2010	Reduce domestic energy consumption by 30%
2010	Good quality Combined Heat and Power generation of 10K MW
2018	Eradicate fuel poverty in vulnerable households
<b>Regional Targets</b>	
2010	5.5% electricity generation capacity from renewables
2016	8% electricity generation capacity from renewables
2026	16% electricity generation capacity from renewables
<b>Sub-regional targets</b>	
2010	111MW renewable energy target (land based)
2016	154MW renewable energy target (land based)

At a local level the Council set key objectives for the Ashford's future work – two of these were:

- To ensure that growth takes place in a sustainable way;
- To develop an Urban renaissance at Ashford and ensure higher standards of urban design in new development

Both the initial 'Ashford's Future – Over-arching report' ('Halcrow report') and the Greater Ashford Development Framework took aboard these principles and worked with key stakeholders in the community to

<sup>18</sup> Planning Policy Statement 1 – Creating sustainable communities, ODPM 2004.

<sup>19</sup> Sustainability Checklist for Developments in the South – East, SEEDA. <http://www.sustainability-checklist.co.uk/>

<sup>20</sup> DTI, Energy White Paper, 2003, DEFRA, Governments Strategy for Combined Heat and Power to 2010, 2004, DTI, The UK Fuel Poverty Strategy, 2001.

<sup>21</sup> RPG9 South East, ODPM, 2004 (Amended Chapter 10 (Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy))

develop these ideas and set a clear way forward. The Halcrow report asked the key question “what matters and why” for Ashford’s quality of life, focusing on the benefits of social, economic and environmental capital (assets) and valuing the commonplace (as well as those assets that are formally protected). This capacity assessment set the scene for how growth should continue to improve the quality of life and how this can be met in Ashford. It identified the key constraints and threats as well as outlining the opportunities and aspirations for determining the scale and design of growth for Ashford. It illustrated that sustainable growth was desirable and possible but only if those threats and constraints were considered in how we designed communities in Ashford. It made it clear that growth should not compromise quality of life in Ashford and the key environmental, social and economic limits to growth. The study identified that there is not one single capacity issue for Ashford, but that its ability to absorb and flourish from growth is dependent on the management of its parts.

The report concluded that:

‘In many local people’s minds, “growth” equals the bland, monopolistic housing estates in Ashford. This must radically alter in the future if growth is to be “sustainable”. New development should be designed such that it reduces the need to travel, reduces energy and water consumption, contributes to the viability of services and infrastructure, respects biodiversity and enhances local landscape. Mixed use and design excellence should be a hallmark of urban growth in Ashford, demonstrating the best in modern, high density, European-style housing design’.

The GADF work has taken this assessment forward and sets out the key principles, issues, drivers and ‘non-negotiables’, and ideas and opportunities. The principles have been reflected in the emerging masterplanning ideas and the supporting Design Codes that are being developed. Accompanying the GADF work is a Strategic Environmental Assessment which has established targets or performance criteria for the Development Framework, and evaluates the Options and Working Plan as they have evolved. The SEA was not limited to environmental concerns only, but addressed the broad range of social, economic and transport considerations.

The greatest opportunities to deliver Sustainable Development occur in the way the new urban villages are designed, built and managed because it is in these areas that the whole approach to resource management can be considered afresh from the choice and design of physical and social infrastructure, to the layout of villages and the design of individual homes.

However, there is opportunities to incorporate new sustainable technologies and thinking into the regeneration of the town centre, for example by installing flexible infrastructure into the design of new road developments that support energy efficient community heating schemes, sustainable urban drainage and water management and by creating cycle and pedestrian friendly streets.

Delivering sustainability should be a core objective of the Local Development Framework and the studies and workshops of the GADF process have informed the options considered the preferred approach taken. Stakeholders have supported an ambitious approach to sustainability and quality design in Ashford to show how the national policy agenda can be delivered on the ground.

The GADF process has generated a series of ‘Core Principles’

#### **Creating compact urbanism**

Compact urbanism is the most effective way to deliver the sustainable growth of Ashford. This approach has been endorsed by key stakeholders through community consultation because it delivers efficient land use, and a density of use/population enough to support public transport and commercial/ community services.

#### **Accessibility and Ease of Movement**

Development layouts should, as far as possible, be accessible to all modes of transport and where appropriate, limit vehicular access to some areas. All routes are linked into surrounding areas; they create new links where necessary, particularly around the town and ensure ease of movement within developments.

#### **Enhance social and economic conditions**

A guiding principle of this framework is to ensure all growth delivers the maximum benefit possible to

everyone and particularly the existing population of Ashford and to the poorest and most disadvantaged communities.

One core way in which this is to be achieved is to ensure growth contributes to the development and regeneration of existing communities, the 'mend it before we extend it' principle highlighted in other parts of the framework. These proposals aim to improve the quality of life for residents and visitors to Ashford.

### **Environmental Capital**

Wherever possible new developments have been located to avoid land with high environmental importance, and are designed to preserve and actively enhance biodiversity and nature conservation. In addition, it is important particularly in a rural location like Ashford that all development meets the 'Dark Skies' standards (see box below) for development and minimise their impact on surrounding areas.

### **Site context, character and sense of place**

Modern development too often lacks identity and a sense of place. As Ashford grows it is essential that it retains and enhances its sense of 'Ashfordness', both in order to attract business and people to use the town centre and to help build attachment and sense of belonging in the new urban villages. Development proposals are based on a robust appraisal of the site's context, character and local distinctiveness, whilst avoiding the temptation to simply mimic what is nearby. This approach is similarly promoted through the design code work, which accompanies this document.

### **Continuity and enclosure, security and a safe environment**

Streets and spaces are designed to be overlooked with continuous street frontage and a consistent design approach between the roadway and building line. This theme is developed further in the design codes.

### **Legibility**

Ashford has been hidden to visitors who often know it only by its international station or the out of town developments, such as the Designer Outlet. As Ashford has grown it has become disjointed, in part because of the nature of the natural environment and particularly the flood plain and in part because of the impact of new infrastructure, especially road and rail that have cut swathes across the town. This plan works to stitch the town back together, physically and socially and thereby transform the image of the growth area and enhance the sense of place and identity.

### **Variety and diversity**

Wherever possible a mix of uses, variety and choice of property types and places has been proposed. In practice, the ability to deliver these aspirations will be partially dependant on market demand, location and other factors, but the development framework makes a major contribution in setting out the key principles.

### **Adaptable neighbourhoods and buildings**

Society is changing fast: the nature of work, climate change and environmental awareness, communications, leisure and retail, demographics, the way social and health services are delivered and almost every other aspect of life is under-going radical change and no one can predict what society will look like or what its requirements will be in 30 years time.

A core principle therefore is to ensure that all new development no matter how big or small is designed to be flexible so that new standards and technologies can be readily adopted over time with the minimum of disruption and with the objective of minimising whole life costs and use of resources. Successful neighbourhoods, places and buildings change their use several times during their lifetime and such flexibility is vital to long-term sustainability.

### **Resource use and energy efficiency**

Buildings and landscapes should be designed to minimise resource use during construction, operation and maintenance and further to use renewable and sustainably managed resources efficiently. This principle is further developed in the next section on standards where specific targets are identified for different essential resources.

As a result of the work that has been done on understanding the current and future relationship between global consumption patterns and the planet's sustainable carrying capacity, the concept of 'One Planet Living' has been coined by BioRegional and WWF. This tackles new approaches to the design and management of settlements that aim to reduce demand for resources to a sustainable (one planet living) level. This is perhaps the ultimate ambition for a sustainable community and worth striving for, whilst recognising that it will take time and radical changes; in the capacity of the development industry; consumer demand; economic and fiscal circumstances; and technology to achieve this ambition.

## Options considered

### *A 'step-change' in designing sustainable communities*

National and regional policy requires a step change in how we design and deliver sustainable communities in Ashford. The Halcrow report set out some of the challenging standards that will have to be met if growth is to stay within Ashford's 'capacity' to carry it. The Halcrow study highlighted that taking account of local circumstances, the national sustainable development agenda as well as the impacts of climate change on Ashford, the ideal type of development should be carbon, water and waste neutral. This is taken further in the SEA with a number of targets which will contribute to this ideal and in the GADF with its recommendation to move towards One Planet Living communities.

Alternative options that detract from this more balanced and efficient use of resources are likely to mean that the capacity limits set on Ashford's growth will be hit quicker and the scale of growth that is possible will be reduced. A good example is water consumption where, without significant reductions in water consumption per household, major environmental thresholds (e.g. a new/ enhanced supply) will be reached sooner and growth will be held back.

Whilst there is sure to be debate about the ways in which the 'core principles' above are applied their general relevance is clear. It will be for more detailed parts of the LDF to consider and debate these ideas and the practical issues that arise.

### *Phasing in sustainable standards*

Whilst government and regional policy promotes the adoption of sustainable development standards across all communities, it is far easier and less expensive to design sustainability into new build than to apply sustainable standards to existing neighbourhoods.

There is great potential to establish flexible and sustainable infrastructure in new development, for example district and community heat and power systems, sustainable urban drainage, improved cycle and pedestrian routes, home zones and bus stops, extensive biodiversity measures and waste management and recycling systems. The intention therefore is to focus on these areas initially and introduce sustainability measures to existing communities more gradually.

For all types of development, standards should be designed to become more demanding over time because it is recognised that developers and the public sector will need time to gear up to meet these objectives. It is anticipated that over the period of this plan European, National and Regional policy will change and standards will become increasingly onerous. This is reflected in the standards set out in the preferred option below.

### *Design quality*

Design quality has many facets including the Core Principles of sustainable design set out above, but also including good urban design of the relationships between buildings and the spaces they inhabit and the places they together make up. A considerable amount of work has gone into helping set the principles of design and tools to help in their application – design codes for new residential areas and for town centre sites are being prepared. These will assist designers and decision makers in arriving at better schemes.

Some of the more intangible and qualitative aspects of design are to do with the essential imagination and innovation needed and the ability of the good designer to create a sense of enjoyment, comfort, stimulation or relaxation in different places at different times. In these areas the use of independent design expertise and 'critical friends' is a really useful way of refining and improving projects as they develop. The

Commission for Architecture in the Built Environment and the regional network of independent Design Panels are two good sources.

At the end of the day subjective design judgements will always be needed by local decision makers and on key sites and in important locations. The value of independent advice is, firstly, that the sensitive designer should respond positively to it and, secondly, if all else fails local decision makers can use the support of such advice to back decisions and hopefully secure the support of planning appeal inspectors.

The shared agenda of the Ashford's Future Board partners is to deliver design quality – it is central to the Council's agenda. Many steps have already been taken locally – design training for officers and members; best practice visits; workshops; Enquiry by Design piloted here with the Prince's Foundation; and most recently the national design coding demonstration scheme.

### The Council's preferred option – 7 – Making Quality Places: Design and Sustainability

Taking account of the aspirations of Government and local stakeholders and recognising the local environmental capacity constraints, the Council's preferred approach is to work to achieve the core principles identified above and to develop a set of standards which can be applied to all new developments in Ashford.

This approach also reflects the recommendation in RPG9 for the use of the SEEDA Sustainability Checklist.

Dealing firstly with design quality, the Council's emphasis on achieving constantly improving design standards will continue. In practical terms this will be supported by the use of the 'design code' approach to new development areas; design briefs and guidance on key and prominent sites (especially in the town centre); and community participation in design workshops and other processes. The role of independent design advice during the design process and before projects are formally considered – possibly a Design Panel - will be explored with partners. This will help to re-enforce the design agenda and add value to the local process of decision-making, responsibility for which rests firmly with local politicians.

The second main approach is to set standards that (together with the Strategic Environmental Assessment) set a series of benchmarks that all development will be expected to achieve as a minimum.

The environmental standards include:

- the adoption of the Building Research Establishment's EcoHomes and BREEAM standards. The EcoHomes standard is designed to cover residential development, whilst the BREEAM standards cover other types of buildings including public buildings and infrastructure as well as office and industrial development; and
- a set of standards for 6 key areas of resource use identified in the Ashford Capacity Study and echoed in the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and in SEEDA's Taking Stock report.

Both sets of standards are proposed because; whilst the BRE assessment methods are very useful they are an aggregate assessment of many areas so that relatively poor performance in one aspect can be hidden by meeting other standards in an overall assessment.

The standards have been sub-divided into 3 categories to cover the 3 types of development; the new urban villages, town centre development and regeneration. The reason for this is that it is easier to achieve these standards in green-field developments where unit construction costs are relatively low, and returns on investment relatively high. Town centre development will typically take place on brown-field sites, where building costs tend to be more expensive but values can be relatively strong, whilst regeneration sites are both difficult and expensive to develop and tend to achieve fairly poor returns.

The 6 key areas are:

Energy  
Materials

Water  
Biodiversity

Waste  
Transport

(These key areas are further developed with examples in the GADF Report)

The standards that the council wishes to adopt are as follows:-

Standards		Adopted dates for standards by development type			
		Growth Areas	Town Centre	Urban Area	
Current Base Standards	<b>Building Regulations (2006)</b>				
	Currently building regulations will be improving gradually to address the impact of buildings on the environment, however this is not sufficient to meet the resource savings outlined in the capacity study, and is therefore considered not to be an acceptable option for new development in Ashford.				
	<b>Energy/C02</b>	50kg.m <sup>2</sup> .pa CO <sub>2</sub> emissions 125 kWh/m <sup>2</sup> .pa Energy Demand			
	<b>Water</b>	100 dwelling litres/person/day	2005	2005	2005
	<b>Waste</b>	470 kg/person/pa Domestic Waste 20m <sup>3</sup> per 100m <sup>2</sup>			
	<b>Materials</b>	10% recycled / 30% FSC Timber			
Standard 1	<b>Eco-Homes 'Very Good'</b>				
	This standard has been adopted by our partners the Housing Corporation, English Partnerships and SEEDA for all new developments. It is also a recommended standard to be achieved in the SEA. Setting this standard increases the sustainability credentials of developments beyond Building Regulations (2006).				
	<b>Energy/C02</b>	35kg.m <sup>2</sup> .pa CO <sub>2</sub> emissions 95 kWh/m <sup>2</sup> .pa Energy Demand			
	<b>Water</b>	89 dwelling litres/person/day	2005	2005	2005
	<b>Waste</b>	400 kg/person/pa Domestic Waste 15m <sup>3</sup> per 100m <sup>2</sup>			
	<b>Materials</b>	15% recycled/60% FSC timber/30% 'A' Rated			

Standards		Adopted dates for standards by development type			
		Growth Areas	Town Centre	Urban Area	
Standard 2	<b>Eco-Homes Excellent plus improved core resource utilisation</b>				
	This standard moves beyond best practice being set by our partners and begins to move towards the overall carbon, waste and water neutral target as set out in the accompanying text. It adopts many of the higher SEA targets within developments in addition to the higher Eco-Homes target of 'excellent'.				
	Energy/CO2	25kg.m <sup>2</sup> .pa CO <sub>2</sub> emissions 72 kWh/m <sup>2</sup> .pa Energy Demand	2008	2010	2015
	Water	67 dwelling litres/person/day			
Waste	340 kg/person/pa Domestic Waste 10m <sup>3</sup> per 100m <sup>2</sup>				
Materials	20% recycled/75% FSC timber/50% 'A' Rated				
Standard 3	<b>60% Carbon Dioxide Emissions reduction</b>				
	This standard follows the UK wide aspiration for 60% CO <sub>2</sub> emissions reduction across the UK by 2050. But in order to meet this target for Ashford as a whole higher standards are set for new developments in order to compensate for the more gradual adoption of higher standards in existing development.				
	Energy/CO2	10kg.m <sup>2</sup> .pa CO <sub>2</sub> emissions 30 kWh/m <sup>2</sup> .pa Energy Demand	2011	2018	2020
	Water	47 dwelling litres/person/day			
Waste	260 kg/person/pa Domestic Waste 5m <sup>3</sup> per 100m <sup>2</sup>				
Materials	35% recycled/100% FSC timber/75% 'A' Rated				
Standard 4	<b>Energy, Water and Waste Neutral - CARBON NEUTRAL</b>				
	This standard sets out the targets and implications of carbon neutral developments, whereby development follows one planet living objectives set out in the text. This level of consumption represents a fair share of the earth's resources. Ashford aspires to delivering a pilot carbon neutral development in partnership with the private sector as soon as is feasibly possible.				
	Energy/CO2	Carbon Neutral	2015	2020	2030
	Water	Water Neutral			
Waste	Waste Neutral				
Materials					

## 4. Making quality places – how can we make sure that the delivery of the LDF meets expectations?

### *Formal reviews of progress towards balanced, sustainable growth*

A key pre-condition set by the Council in accepting the scale of development identified for the Ashford growth area in the Halcrow Report <sup>22</sup> was the need formally to review progress at key stages, to ensure that the Council's and the Ashford's Future Board's objectives for sustainable growth (listed above) were being achieved. For example, the Council wished to see a sustainable balance of development of homes and jobs over time, without an over-dependence on commuting from the town. It was also determined that key infrastructure needed to serve the needs of a growing population was provided in step with that need and not lagging behind it. In terms of the actual product, the new places created in the name of Ashford's Future must be of genuinely high quality and be meeting ambitious sustainability targets. All these features and others together make the sustainable community envisaged in the Government's proposals and the Council is determined that nothing less is achieved.

To achieve this balanced sustainable growth the public and private sectors will need to work closely in tandem. The numerous agencies of the public sector will need to be co-ordinated – close working in local and regional partnerships (such as the Ashford's Future Board and the Ashford Borough Local Strategic Partnership) can achieve much but the role of central Government in forcing change is crucial. Without this key role the public sector input will always move at a speed governed by the pace of the slowest and least committed partners. Much has been achieved but much remains to be done.

### **Options considered:**

There are various elements that a formal review of progress in the Ashford growth area could include:

- the extent to which the economic vision and action plan <sup>23</sup> is being achieved and new skills, jobs and investment being created;
- the way in which Ashford's growth measures up against the clear and measurable targets set in the Strategic Environmental Assessment <sup>24</sup> which partners the GADF;
- the degree to which the actions identified in the Delivery Plan <sup>25</sup> set by the Ashford's Future Board has been met in the priority order set, in terms of key infrastructure provided, spending decisions and other actions from the public sector

This formal review needs to be conducted after sufficient time has elapsed to test outcomes fairly, but soon enough that corrective action can be taken to tackle any problems or areas where performance has not met the objectives set by the Council and the Ashford's Future Board.

Just how the review is conducted will need more detailed work nearer the time but much of the framework for evaluation already exists. The review could be conducted by a sub group of the Board or by a lead partner. It may be that an independent person or body could play a useful role in pulling together this assessment on behalf of the Borough Council but also for the Ashford's Future Board as a whole.

<sup>22</sup> Halcrow Report, 'Ashford's Future – the over-arching report' December 2002

<sup>23</sup> Economic Action Plan, SEEDA, 2005

<sup>24</sup> Strategic Environmental Assessment, Halcrow, 2005

<sup>25</sup> Interim Delivery Plan, 2003-5, Long Term Delivery Plan due to be agreed Autumn 2005

### The Council's Preferred Option – 8 – Formal reviews of progress towards balanced, sustainable growth

For the Ashford growth area all three elements identified above – progress against the Economic Vision and Action Plan, the SEA and the Delivery Plan – should form a key part of the formal review framework. In terms of timing, a sensible date for the first review would be the end of the 2006-2008 public sector spending round – target date being a Council Executive and an Ashford's Future Board in mid 2008. The next logical review would be at the end of the proposed first phase of growth in 2011. A possible role for an independent person or body to lead these reviews should be explored.

This formal process would be additional to, but would complement, the Council's Borough-wide monitoring of its Local Development Framework, its Corporate Plan<sup>26</sup> and the Ashford Borough Community Strategy Action Plan<sup>27</sup>.

#### *Phasing of Development and Land Supply*

Phasing is an important issue – especially in the Ashford growth area, but also for the much smaller scale of development in Tenterden and the Borough's villages.

In the Ashford growth area phased release of development is needed to help achieve co-ordinated implementation of the plan. Various factors will govern the phasing including, the need to 'mend before extend' and make best use of urban sites; the need to relate development to key social and physical infrastructure being provided to service it, especially the public transport system; the need to 'husband' the release of land in the countryside to minimise unnecessary impact; and the need to begin to create the key 'building blocks' of the masterplan for the town which will form the focus for future growth. Equally, sufficient land needs to be made available to meet the land supply needed for jobs, homes and infrastructure and a variety of types and locations of site are needed to enable the private market to respond to a mix of opportunities for new homes and workplaces.

The approach to phasing needs to be clear and robust – if it is not then the objectives above will be threatened and uncertainty will prevail in the market and for local people. Local communities understandably seek a degree of certainty over future plans and the phasing of development. All parties will wish to avoid a sporadic or random pattern of development as this will do nothing to help create strong new communities needed and will be likely to represent a very inefficient use of investment in infrastructure.

The GADF includes phasing tables and diagrams showing the scale and broad location of the land to be released during two periods – to 2011 and 2011 to 2021. The areas indicated for development in any one phase are not definitive at this stage – more detailed work on the relevant Local Development Document for that area will be needed to determine final site allocations and detailed phasing.

The scale of development relates to the requirement set in RPG 9, the draft Kent Structure Plan and that likely to be reflected in the draft Regional Spatial Strategy. In addition to this requirement an additional level of supply has been shown in each of the two phases – this level of over-supply, in the order of 15% - has been added to provide flexibility. It is common practice, especially in areas contributing significantly to wider growth demands, for an over-supply to be planned for. This reflects the inevitable uncertainty surrounding all the planned developments coming forward as planned and on the timescales envisaged. Problems with infrastructure, land ownership, legal agreements and other approvals can all affect timescales. Relying on one site involves some degree of risk but this is magnified many times if a whole series of sites are assumed to deliver to expectations. The over-supply figure is therefore an estimate of the level of planned supply needed to actually result in the delivery of the actual supply requirements set out in regional policy.

<sup>26</sup> Ashford Borough Council Corporate Plan, 'Ashford – simply better' 2003 - 2007

<sup>27</sup> Three year Action Plan for the Ashford Borough Community Strategy, 2004 - 2014

In Tenterden and the rural areas the case for phasing is rather different. Where a significant scale of development is proposed in relation to the size of the existing community phasing can help to ensure that growth is absorbed more easily and that social and other infrastructure is more able to keep in pace with demands. It is also the case that the economics of development in rural areas, where demand and sales values are high, would be likely to lead to the vast majority of the supply of land in the villages being used up early in the plan period. Broad phasing over two periods in the LDFs lifespan will help to counter these problems. Local needs housing comes forward in response to identified needs as they arise and it would not be sensible to apply phasing to these schemes.

#### **Options considered:**

The Local Development Framework has a proposed end date of 2021 – this is a little longer than Government guidance that suggests a life of 10 years after adoption. The intention is to provide a sufficiently long time horizon to help enable the major infrastructure investment decisions needed in and around Ashford to cater for such sustained and long term growth of the town (e.g. major investment in water supply, waste water treatment and public transport). With GADF suggesting a masterplan to 2031 this provides an even longer context for the broad planning of the town although there will clearly be several reviews of the LDF before formal commitments for the post 2021 period are entered into.

One option is not to phase the release of land. Given that infrastructure will, however, need to be phased to make best use of public and private investment; some phasing strategy of development land seems inevitable. Assuming this to be the case the issue becomes just how prescriptive this phasing is. Given the inevitable time it will take to roll out the LDF and subsequent reviews, the phasing periods need to be long enough to sit alongside that timetable but not so long that development would become unco-ordinated, sporadic and poorly related to infrastructure investment.

In the rural areas similar issues arise in relation to the LDF process – broad phasing is needed to avoid the problems explained above but there seems little case for an over-sophisticated approach.

#### **The Council's Preferred Option – 9 – *Phasing of Development and Land Supply***

**That the LDF runs to 2021 and that this is broken into two broad phases – up to 2011 and from 2011 to 2021. This approach has the merit of being the simplest phasing strategy and a clear one – balancing the need for flexibility against the minimum level of control needed to enable efficient planning.**

**The phasing proposals in GADF provide the basis for the LDF Core Strategy approach but a more detailed interpretation will be included in the relevant Local Development Document for each area.**

**A level of planned over-supply of approximately 15% is proposed in the two phasing periods for the Greater Ashford area – this provides the flexibility over whole of the Borough to cope with any unforeseen problems in sites coming forward and enables the Council to show that adequate land supply exists.**

**In the rural areas those settlements taking most development over the Plan period will be most likely to have development phased over the two periods – elsewhere the sites identified will be broadly divided between those coming on stream before 2011 and those in the period 2011-21 in order to preserve a supply over the LDF's lifespan.**

#### *Delivering the range of physical and community infrastructure needed*

It is a widely held view locally that Ashford's growth to date has not been well planned in the sense that the range of infrastructure needed has often lagged behind the development taking place <sup>28</sup>. This view is mirrored in the other growth areas and the Local Government Association has been looking at alternative ways to deal with this problem <sup>29</sup>. The Ashford's Future Board has commissioned work to look specifically at

<sup>28</sup> See the results of opinion survey work carried out during the Ashford growth study reported to the Borough Council in October 2002

<sup>29</sup> See for example the Local Government Association publication 'New development and new opportunities'.

the issue as it faces the Ashford growth area. This work has explored the options open and the ability to fund infrastructure through the uplift in values enjoyed by land allocated for development.

This problem is particularly acute in areas of most rapid growth – chiefly in and around Ashford. To some degree, however, similar issues arise with smaller scale village development. Many of these are covered by standard charges or a clear contributions framework – e.g. for education, open and play spaces, affordable housing, etc. Off- site needs, for example, for improved community facilities to serve the village, may also arise and an approach that reflects this is needed for housing developments in Tenterden and the villages. Many villages have produced ‘wish lists’, some have Parish Plans or other appraisals that identify needs. These provide a good source to draw on to identify potential off-site needs in villages.

At the scale of the Ashford growth area this issue has several aspects:

- The scale of the infrastructure needed to enable sustainable growth in Ashford is very significant and the costs will be incurred over a long period;
- Incremental pressures from growth in past years has created an ‘infrastructure deficit’ that further development will exacerbate unless it is tackled;
- The costs – whilst not untypical for growth areas – will need to be met from a variety of sources – landowner contributions, Government funding from various sources, and from service providers of many kinds who will recoup some or all of these costs over time from consumers;
- Landowner contributions are most difficult to secure in the early stages of developments when costs are high in relation to returns and finished values not established – cashflow to fund early infrastructure is a major issue;
- The timing of investment needed in infrastructure is governed by capacity issues as the town grows and, in particular, certain critical ‘thresholds’ that need to be crossed – e.g. the need for additional water supplies. It is not a ‘straight line’ pattern of investment and considerable sums will need to be invested at relatively early stages of the overall development programme and before values are fully established;
- Whilst a range of infrastructure will be needed to cater for the specific needs arising on each site, much of the most costly infrastructure is needed to cater for the wider needs of the area as a whole (e.g. investment in waste water treatments works or the new M20 J10a);
- It follows that much of this ‘strategic infrastructure’ will be needed off-site;
- The creation of high quality, sustainable growth of the sort envisaged in the Sustainable Communities Plan requires a wide range of investment, not just in conventional ‘hard’ infrastructure. The Ashford’s Future Study and the more detailed masterplanning analysis since has identified many areas of investment needed (for example, in town centre renewal to provide a stronger basis for economic growth). As the growth programme unfolds and precise needs become clearer, more specific projects will emerge. These will cover both built infrastructure and facilities but also the revenue costs of helping to shape and consolidate a rapidly growing community;

The conventional approach to these sorts of issues has been to try to use planning obligations to secure funding – normally for on-site facilities. In recent years increasing attempts have been made to assemble contributions to fund major off-site investments without which development would be frustrated. An example of this approach in Ashford is the way the Council and its partners (including strategic landowners) have attempted to fund the improvements to M20 junction 10 and a replacement junction<sup>30</sup>. Without these works there is insufficient capacity to accommodate the traffic arising from proposed developments.

Despite a huge investment of time and effort from all parties an agreement to fund the necessary works to the existing junction is only now being concluded 6 years after the junction capacity problem was first identified by the County Council. To satisfy all parties this sort of process is extremely complex in terms of the legal agreements needed, it is also formulaic and cumbersome. It requires major risk taking by the private sector partners before development is commenced; and can be thrown off course by individual landowners seeking to gain tactical advantage at different stages in the negotiation process.

<sup>30</sup> See Ashford Borough Council Supplementary Planning Guidance 6, Providing for Transport Needs arising from the South of Ashford Study July 2004

It is inconceivable that this sort of approach could be used on a site by site and an issue by issue basis as a way of delivering the investment needed in all sorts of social and physical infrastructure for Ashford's growth over a sustained 30 year period. Not only would there be major delays delivering growth, but the resources and complexity of the process would create the need for a vast bureaucracy just to administer it. Neither would this approach deliver the early investment when it is needed.

In terms of Government guidance <sup>31</sup> there are several tests of appropriateness for the sorts of planning obligations local authorities seek. These have restricted the scope of planning policy and practice. A draft revision to this guidance <sup>32</sup> now acknowledges many of the issues outlined above and the potential role of pooled contributions to off-site infrastructure, notably in growth areas. This indicates a useful emerging policy basis for some sort of 'strategic tariff' approach.

In addition to the tariff the development industry needs the certainty that other major infrastructure investment, beyond the scope of developer contributions, will occur when it is needed. The current system gives little or no reassurance when problems will be tackled and development able to come forward (e.g. the long period of uncertainty surrounding commitment to a new junction 10a on the M20).

### Options considered

In the Ashford growth area:

- Relying on public sector funding and service providers to put all the infrastructure in place when needed is not a realistic option – it flies in the face of the trend over the last 30 years towards increasing reliance on developer contributions (effectively as a share in the uplift in land value caused by the allocation of land for development);
- The status quo approach would be to seek to negotiate on and off-site infrastructure needs on a site by site basis – the sort of approach taken by SATS to transport infrastructure applied to other strategic infrastructure. The difference compared to the current approach would be the number of issues needing to be covered and the increasing quantity of development coming forward;
- Apply a strategic infrastructure tariff approach – pooling off-site infrastructure costs and applying a clear and fair rate of tariff by unit of development at a level that it can be demonstrated can be sustained without removing the financial incentive to bring forward and develop land.

In Tenterden and the villages:

- Maintain current approach of a specified range of on site requirements and off-site education contributions;
- Broaden the approach to cover possible contributions to wider community needs which the development causes in part and can realistically contribute towards tackling.

### **The Council's Preferred Option – 10 – Delivering *the range of physical and community infrastructure***

#### **A) In the Ashford growth area:**

**Based on our experience to date, and the shared views of other growth areas, the Council's clear preference is to set up a strategic tariff to tackle off site infrastructure costs. This broad model has been canvassed at two sets of workshops held with landowners and development interests from around the town and has been widely supported in principle. All parties desperately want a manageable and clear system that removes the delays and uncertainties that are inherent in the way current arrangements work. The Government's proposed revisions to the circular guidance on this issue seem to accept a change in the system needs to be pioneered, not just in Ashford but in rapidly growing towns around the country.**

**The tariff is not without its own complexity and will need to be capable of being updated regularly. It will need to distinguish between town centre/ brownfield and greenfield developments to reflect the different cost profiles of each – town centre landowners stressed this point in discussions. Reasonable judgements will have to be made and efforts made to avoid a spiral into an ever more complex system and calculation**

<sup>31</sup> Circular 1/97

method – too much complexity and debate over the detail could undermine the overall approach.

The tariff must be as fair as practically possible and its spending be clearly linked to the wider infrastructure needs over the area. It cannot be set at an arbitrary level or simply be scaled to be big enough to fill the overall funding gap for infrastructure. The tariff will need to be realistic and shown not to impact on typical scheme viability so that it can be applied generally without creating the need for detailed negotiation on a site by site basis where different abnormal costs might apply.

In short, this is not a simple way forward but it represents a vast improvement on the current approach and holds the prospect of providing a sound basis for generating clarity and confidence in the market. It can only be applied successfully if there is equal clarity about the public sector contributions to the overall infrastructure bill – both the scale and the timing over the short, medium and long term.

Supporting this tariff there is a need for a form of local area agreement between the Government and the local delivery partnership (the Ashford's Future Board) that will ensure that infrastructure investment decisions are made on a planned basis to enable the controlled release of development land.

**B) Tenterden and the villages:**

Refine the current local plan approach to increase the range of possible off site contributions to help meet the local community's needs. Such an approach needs clarity in the site specific proposals to quantify the scale of any contributions – work conducted locally on 'wish lists', Parish Plans and other local appraisals provides a useful basis for this. Contributions will need to be proportionate and within the spirit of Government guidance.

*The organisational framework for delivering Ashford's Future*

The Ashford's Future Board is now well established with strong representation of leading public and private sector players in the region. It has the role as the Government's agreed form of local delivery vehicle for the Ashford context of bringing together key agencies and co-ordinating the delivery of the range of infrastructure and intervention needed to deliver growth in the high quality and sustainable form envisaged.

A key role for the Board is producing a Delivery Plan which identifies all the important steps needed to secure this growth – in terms of specification, timing and the costs associated with all the investments needed in the community, environmental and economic fabric of the area.

The Local Strategic Partnership also plays a key role – both in the masterplanning work to date and increasingly in planning service and facility provision to cater for a growing population over the next 20 plus years. Where additional specific infrastructure or intervention is needed to plan properly these needs should also form a key part of the overall Delivery Plan. The Board and the LSP therefore both play vital and inter-related roles.

From the point of view of the Council the Local Development Framework cannot be an isolated land use planning document. It must deal with the means of delivering high quality sustainable growth and creating places and communities that people are proud to be part of. The Delivery Plan is therefore an integral part of the LDF. The GADF provides a table of key actions needed to accompany each phase of development. To this must be added the requirements of the LSP and the Community Strategy and Action Plan. Partner agencies from across the spectrum of community, cultural, economic, health, transport and other sectors need to review the Delivery Plan and identify gaps that need to be plugged.

<sup>32</sup> Draft revision to circular 1/97

In this way a wide ranging and comprehensive Delivery Plan can be created – it will spell out the means by which the aspirations of the Council, the Ashford Future Board, the Local Strategic Partnership and the Government’s own Sustainable Communities Plan can be met.

### Options considered

There are various ways this link between plan making and delivery are tackled in the LDF. For example, producing a conventional local plan type document with little reference to how it will be implemented. Weighed against this is the strength of the argument that plan making and delivery must be seen as two sides of the same coin and this must be reflected in the LDF. There are a variety of ways of doing this – the key issue is probably to find a way of emphasising those key links without producing an unmanageable document that seeks to be both a detailed land use plan and a detailed delivery plan. A key issue to emphasise here is the ‘conditionality’ of planned growth – the high quality, sustainable place making that the Council aspires to can only be delivered with continuing and high levels of investment in infrastructure of all sorts, and that investment is needed at the right time. All parties need to ‘contract’ to delivery as all parties have responsibilities that will need to be met if truly sustainable growth is to be delivered.

#### **The Council’s preferred option – 11 – The organisational framework for delivering Ashford’s Future**

**The LDF should deal explicitly with the delivery processes that are being put in place and will be needed to deliver the full, rounded, growth package. The impact of infrastructure investment on phasing timetables and the planned rate of growth needs to be set out. This clear and transparent approach and commitment is needed to help provide the confidence that local people and potential investors need in Ashford’s Future. The work of the Ashford’s Future Board has a key role to play in providing this clarity – the first key step being the completion of the Delivery Plan.**

## 5. Core Strategy Policy Issues

The purpose of the Core Strategy is to set the strategic policy context. It does not deal with detailed policy matters – those will follow in the Area based DPDs, the Development Control policy DPD and appropriate Supplementary Planning Documents.

This Core Strategy Preferred Options paper highlights some new policy areas but the Core Strategy DPD, when formally submitted to government, will roll forward much of the key “strategic” policy content of the existing Borough Local Plan. The Council’s view is that the spirit of much of that policy will remain, although there may be amendments made to the detailed wording. Detailed policy wording for these areas is not included in this document but will be included in the submission document.

This section of the options report takes each major topic area in turn and for each tackles:

- The overall objectives of the Council (normally these are largely unchanged from the existing local plan)
- A table listing existing Borough Local Plan policies which are considered to be sufficiently strategic to be included in the Core Strategy. In some cases it is likely that policies will be merged.
- Where major review is needed an explanation of the options considered and the identification of the Council’s ‘preferred option’.

## HOUSING

### Overall objectives:

- To identify enough housing land to meet the requirements for the Borough specified in the RPG9, the Kent and Medway Structure Plan and the emerging South East Plan;
- The identify new sites in line with the spatial development strategy for the Borough outlined above;

- Make the best use of urban land and previously developed land;
- Place emphasis on design and sustainability issues and overall increases in density, whilst providing a range of housing;
- Help meet housing need through affordable housing and a variety of house types and sizes

<b>Housing – Borough Local Plan - Core Policies</b>		
HG1:	Housing density	The overall issue of housing density is dealt with in PPS. Specific area requirements can be included in area based DPDs. Density issue included within the design/sustainability section.
HG2:	Design of new development	Policy retained and linked to the design and sustainability section.
HG5:	Sites not on the proposals map	Policy retained. This policy deals with the possible development of the sites within the confines of the urban areas that are not “identified” sites on the proposals map.
HG11:	Housing variety in large developments	Review this section in light of the housing needs assessment - see main text.
HG13:	Gypsy sites	Review this section in light of Government gypsy advice – refer to the main text
HG14:	Affordable housing	This is a key objective for Ashford and should be in the Core Strategy – policy needs to be reviewed in response to the revised national guidance, regional guidance and the local housing needs assessment – see section in the main text.
HG15:	Local needs housing	Policy retained.

### **Affordable Housing**

A community's need for a mix of housing types, including affordable housing, is an established planning policy issue. Government guidance makes it clear that where there is a demonstrable lack of affordable housing to meet local needs - as assessed by up-to-date surveys and other information - local plans should include a policy for seeking affordable housing in suitable housing developments.

The policy approach in the Core Strategy will need to:

- define what the Borough Council considers to be affordable in the local plan area in terms of the relationship between local income levels and house prices or rents for different types of households;
- indicate how many affordable homes need to be provided throughout the plan area, including the different types of affordable housing needed by households of different characteristics, taking account of rural as well as urban needs; and
- identify suitable areas and sites on which affordable housing is to be provided and the amount of provision which will be sought.

### **Key Issues**

Currently house prices are still lower than West Kent and other parts of the South East region, however, it is anticipated that the arrival of the CTRL providing fast domestic rail services to London will have an uplift effect on land values and house prices. This may increase levels of housing need and it is therefore imperative that growth is planned with a range of housing types, tenures and levels of affordability.

The current Borough Local Plan sets a 20% affordable housing target (on sites over 25 dwellings or 1 hectare in size) and this has delivered nearly 300 affordable homes in the period 2002 to 2004. At the time the Plan was prepared the Housing Needs Survey indicated that achieving this 20% target would be likely to meet local needs.

Since then the affordability gap has widened and further work, including an update of the borough Housing Needs assessment is underway to estimate the current level of need for affordable housing arising from the Ashford area. Regional Planning Guidance (RPG 9) sets a target of 'up to 30%' affordable housing, although the definition of affordable is wider than the current local plan which limits the definition of affordable to stock at 70% of market value (rent or purchase) and made available in perpetuity.

The difference between the 20% and 30% levels, and what is the right target for Ashford Borough, therefore needs evaluating on various fronts:

- It should reflect an up to date assessment of affordable needs in the Ashford area
- It should reflect the extra needs created by Ashford's designation as a growth area in the region (e.g. to what extent should or can the town tackle the key worker needs in the region?)
- It should reflect different definitions of what is affordable (i.e. compare like with like)

Subsequent to the adoption of the BLP there has been much additional policy guidance on the provision of affordable housing. The figure of 20% set out in the BLP may not provide the level of provision necessary to meet local needs. The local housing needs survey which is currently being finalised will inform this debate.

The report of the Panel examining the RPG states that:

*"We consider that the right place for any further guidance on affordable housing eg the mix of dwelling sizes and tenures, affordable housing requirements in villages surrounding Ashford and a more detailed definition of affordability, will be in the local housing strategy and the LDF".*

The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) is currently in draft. Policy H4 states:

"Local Development Documents will set targets for the provision of affordable housing , taking account of the results of local housing needs assessment and having regard to the overall regional target that 25% of all new housing should be social rented accommodation and 10-15% other forms of affordable housing. Where justified by needs assessments Local Development Documents should specify the tenure of housing being sought."

It is difficult for District Councils to give firm views on affordable housing numbers and types in advance of work on local needs assessments.

It is clear that whilst the existing policy approach has secured the provision of affordable housing on larger sites, the targets set in regional policy will demand that smaller sites are also targeted. The Council is currently completing its housing needs assessment. This will obviously help to inform the preferred approach but it seems clear that there will be a requirement for greater provision of affordable housing.

## Options considered

There are various possible approaches to increasing the supply of affordable housing, which could include:

- Retain the existing approach of seeking a % contribution from a range of housing sites but seek to increase the % and reduce the site size threshold to which the policy will apply
- Set an overall quantitative target for the Borough as a whole, based on the outcomes of the housing needs assessment, and use that as the basis for a site-by-site negotiation.

### The Council's Preferred Option – 12 – Affordable Housing

*The existing policy approach in the BLP has successfully secured the provision of affordable housing. There is a high level of awareness amongst developers and landowners and the benefit of a fixed requirement if the certainty it provides for the development industry in assessing its costs. There is a likely need to increase that supply to meet the identified needs of the Borough.*

*The Council's preferred approach, which will need to be tested against the outcomes of the Council's Housing Needs Assessment, is to increase the % of affordable housing on sites to 35%. The site size threshold to which the policy applies will be 10 units.*

## The Type of Affordable Provision

Affordable housing varies from housing for rent to shared equity homes and low cost market housing. Housing for rent tends to provide for those in most need whilst low cost market housing gives people the chance to get a foothold on the housing ladder. For housing to remain affordable it must be controlled in ways that will make it affordable in perpetuity. The results of the Council's housing needs survey will recommend an appropriate proportion of broad types of affordable provision and this could be reflected in the LDF. There is some confusion in regional policy over low cost market housing – the general understanding of the term is that this covers the outright sale of property – hence this is not available in perpetuity.

### The Council's Preferred Option – 13 – The Type of Affordable Provision

*The affordable housing policy should specify the required proportion of different types of affordable housing. Subject to the detailed findings of the Housing Needs Assessment, the proposed split of the overall provision of 35% is that 20% be affordable housing for rent and 15% other forms of affordable housing.*

## Housing Mix

Increasing densities required to meet Government policy has tended to result in an increased proportion of smaller dwellings. At the same time average household size has continued to fall and projections have it falling still further in coming years. Small units also tend to be more affordable for small households in housing need.

Maintaining a good proportion of new housing as small units will also help to provide for the needs of a mixed community. Where major new growth areas are planned it is important that this mix is planned for in the type of housing provided – including housing suitable for single people and childless couples, families, elderly people and people with disabilities. At the top end of the market there is a need for larger dwellings to cater for more affluent purchasers – so called 'executive housing'.

## Options considered

The current policy approach is to require a range of house sizes and types on larger sites and PPG policy has helped to enforce this. In future it might be better to distinguish in the different LDDs between, for example, the mix likely to be appropriate in the town centre, the urban area generally and within new growth areas. The different approaches would be based on evidence from the Housing Needs Assessment and from the social and economic 'drivers' – such as the need to cater for the % of people in society to have disabilities and special needs, and the importance of providing good housing choices for high earning managers and professionals who need to be attracted to live in the area to help stimulate economic growth.

Left to its own devices there is a strong argument that the market will respond and provide the mix needed by potential occupiers. However, there is a danger of the market simply catering for the responding strongest demand at any one time, rather than a more balanced approach which will provide a mix of housing able to suit varying needs over the long term. A mix policy is justified but it should avoid being too detailed or prescriptive.

### The Council's Preferred Option – 14 – Housing Mix

*Establish the importance of housing mix within the Core Strategy but consider the suitability of more detailed mix policies within each of the area based LDDs, taking account of the social and economic factors involved and specifically the Council's Housing Needs Assessment. Such an approach should recognise the importance of the breadth of provision needed from one bedroom homes to specific locations where larger "executive" style dwellings are more appropriate.*

## Provision for Gypsies and Travellers

The issue of providing sites for gypsies and travellers has become a prominent issue nationally and locally. The current approach is to assess applications for gypsy sites against a set of criteria set out in the Borough Local Plan. Recent government guidance has strengthened the case that Council's should identify actual sites based on an assessment of the level of need. Whilst that guidance is still in draft it has been assumed that the site identification requirement will remain. As an extension to the Council's housing needs assessment, work is also being commissioned to assess the needs of gypsies and travellers.

### The Council's Preferred Option – 15 – Provision for Gypsies and Travellers

*The Core Strategy should set out how the Council will respond to the needs of gypsies and travellers based on the outcome of the survey currently being commissioned. If the case for additional permanent provision is established, suitable provision by identifying a site or sites will be needed in a subsequent LDD.*

## ENVIRONMENT

### Overall objectives:

- Protection and enhancement of the countryside, important landscapes, scarce habitats and nature conservation sites
- Safeguard and improve the character of Ashford, Tenterden and the villages.
- Protection and enhancement of the setting of towns and villages in their surrounding countryside, the river corridors, the quality of the entrances to settlements and important areas within them
- Preservation and enhancement of Conservation Areas, Listed buildings, ancient monuments and archaeological sites in the Borough.

Since the Local Plan was adopted, the Government has begun to review national guidance on the natural environment and issued a consultation draft of PPS9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation in 2004 (this will replace PPG9). The revised guidance sets out a number of key principles for how the natural environment should be considered through the planning process. These need to be reflected in the Core Strategy and worked up in more detail in supporting LDDs.

- Ensuring that biodiversity is considered as an integral part of strategies which consider the economic, social and environmental development of an area.
- The overall objective should be to protect, enhance and restore biodiversity and geology. Where development would have adverse impacts on these elements of the natural environment it should be demonstrated that no suitable alternative sites are available.
- Plan policies should focus on maintaining and enhancing both designated sites and other locally valuable sites - the hierarchy of designations should be clearly explained.
- Developments should positively incorporate opportunities for biodiversity and geological enhancement
- There is a need to recognise that the different components of the natural environment form a network and linkages between the different parts of the natural environment should be preserved and enhanced

### Environment – Borough Local Plan - Core Policies

EN1:	Protecting and improving the environment	In its present form this is more a statement of intent than a policy. However, the principles underpinning this policy are important and should be reflected in the Core Strategy.
------	--	--

EN13:	Green corridors	The Green Corridor policies have worked successfully and should be retained in the Core Strategy – the principle may need expanding to cover wider areas of strategic open space around growth areas.
EN14	Land adjoining the green corridors	Probably combined with EN13.
EN15 – EN32:	Conservation Areas, listed buildings, archaeology, ancient monuments, nature conservation, historic landscapes	Policies EN15 to EN32 below cover key strategic principles (the Historic Environment, the Natural Environment and Archaeology) which will be fundamental to the overall strategic approach that the Core Strategy will set out. However, the level of detail in these policies should not be included in the Core Strategy and can be covered in the Generic DC DPD. The CS should set out the principle of protecting and enhancing these aspects of the environment.

### Key principles for the natural environment

The increasing emphasis biodiversity and geological conservation requires a shift in the emphasis of the way planning policy for the environment needs to be couched. The positive protection, enhancement and restoration of the natural environment should form part of an integrated approach to development which gives equal weight to economic, social and environmental concerns.

### Options considered

This new policy emphasis is important – especially in an area where such large scale development is occurring. Many aspects of the new guidance are covered in existing policy, although those may need reassessing and refining. Two of the key aspects of the new approach that probably need stronger policy support in the LDF are:

- Specific targets for habitat protection, restoration and creation should be set out which differentiate between different habitat types.
- The need to sustainably manage the natural environment should be considered, where appropriate as part of development proposals

### The Council's preferred option – **16** – Key principles for the natural environment

Expand the current policy basis so that the LDF Core Strategy and other LDDs take account to take account of the emerging Government Guidance on Biodiversity and Geological Conservation that need a local policy interpretation.

## EMPLOYMENT

### Overall objectives:

- Promote continued economic growth with new jobs created and existing ones safeguarded
- Provide a range of employment sites which meet the needs of investors and occupiers and help maintain a broad economic base
- Ensure that a relatively sustainable pattern of industrial and commercial development is achieved
- Seek a reasonable balance between jobs and housing growth and to protect local jobs and workplaces in the rural areas

Employment – Borough Local Plan - Core Policies		
ET1	New employment developments	Policy retained. Strategic policy to support employment developments. Potential to combine into a single policy that

		incorporates the rural employment policies.
ET2	Design of new employment areas	Design issues for all developments are a key element of the core strategy and will be dealt with through the new policy approach discussed elsewhere in this options report

## RURAL ECONOMY

### Overall objectives:

- Stimulate the rural economy but protect the landscape, the character of rural settlements, the best agricultural land and the nature conservation value of the countryside.

Rural Economy – Borough Local Plan - Core Policies		
RE1	Expansion of premises	Part of core strategy approach to rural settlements and health of the rural economy. More detailed approach can be taken in future Rural Areas DPD.
RE2	Retention of premises	Same strategic issues as for RE1 and similar approach advocated.
RE3	New employment buildings	Same strategic issues as for RE1 and similar approach advocated

In the spirit of the Core Strategy being a more strategic document addressing the whole Borough with broad policies grouped together, the rural issues above might best be tackled with at least as great a prominence in the Economy and Environment themes above.

## SHOPPING

### Overall objectives:

- Reinforce the town centres as the most efficient location for major shopping activity by strengthening the role of Ashford town centre as the main location for shopping in the Borough, and promoting a scale of shopping provision in Tenterden reflecting its functions and environmental constraints.
- Encourage a range of shopping facilities catering for people's everyday shopping needs as close to their homes as possible
- Secure provision of a safe, accessible and pleasant environment within which all members of the community can shop
- Allow for choice and variety in shopping provision whilst achieving sustainable forms of development

Shopping – Borough Local Plan – Core Policies		
SH1, 2, 10:	Proposals in Ashford and Tenterden TC; retail schemes in out of centre locations	Policy retained. SH1, SH 2 and SH10 relate to provision of new development and apply on a Borough wide basis – they could be merged into a criteria-based policy for new retail development setting out general criteria and criteria for specific circumstances e.g. new retail developments over x sq. m, edge of centre locations
SH6:	Local & village centres and individual shops	Policy retained. This policy applies to the whole borough and is intended to guard against the loss of local retail facilities. It could be covered in CS by general policy on importance of community facilities to sustainability. May need a different approach in rural areas and if so this could be covered in more detail by retention of community facilities policy in rural DPD.

## TRANSPORT

### Overall objectives:

- To reduce the overall need for people to travel and encourage non-car based movement, especially cycling, walking and public transport
- Link decisions about the location, scale and mix of land uses with their implications for the patterns and total amount of movement generated
- Improve the integration and interchange facilities of different modes of public transport and provide appropriate levels of car and secure cycle parking taking account of the wider transport strategy
- Provide for the safe movement of all people travelling in the Borough
- Manage traffic effectively to help improve the environment, reduce crashes, decrease congestion and limit pollution

Transport – Borough Local Plan – Core Policies		
TP1, 3, 4, 7:	Integrated land-use and transport planning – pedestrians, cycle routes, buses and taxis	Policy retained. This is a key strategic transport policy in the Local Plan. The policy wording could be amended to incorporate policies TP3, TP4 and TP7 below.
TP16	The road network and development	Policy retained. Generic policy relating to suitability of road network to serve new developments.
TP17	Rural roads	Policy could be given more teeth. More detail could be provided in the Rural Areas DPD
TP18	Road accesses	Policy retained. Generic policy relating to suitability of road network to serve new developments.
TP19:	Assessing the transport needs of development proposals	The assessment element of the policy remains valid. Financing element of policy superseded by strategic tariff option.

## LEISURE

### Overall objectives:

- Provide policy guidance and identify specific sites to help secure a wide range of leisure facilities, respecting the need for sustainable development
- Ensure that new housing developments include facilities to provide the needs they generate
- Prevent the loss of important leisure facilities including open spaces
- Ensure that any new facilities are well related to public transport routes and designed to allow easy access for buses, cyclists and pedestrians.

Leisure – Borough Local Plan – Core Policies		
LE5, 6 - 13 and 16:	Equipped public open space/ off site POS/ play facilities/ leisure facilities/ maintenance of open space/ loss of leisure facilities, POS and playing fields/ allotments	Review overall policy structure and approach along with LE6 to LE13 and LE16. Core policies/overall approach in CS DPD will be backed by more detailed policies in SPD, to be based on open space strategy which is currently reviewing approach to open space provision
LE17:	Public Rights of Way	

Open spaces play a vital role in ensuring a high quality of life for communities. The Local Plan has provided a good basis for protecting existing open spaces and ensuring that an adequate quantity of open space is provided as part of new development. Revisions to PPG17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation, issued in 2002 provide a key basis for considering if any changes are needed to the existing Local Plan policies. Key issues are:

- Firstly, standards for open space provision should be based on a local assessment of need and demand for open space.
- Secondly open space provision should focus equally on quantity, quality and access to open spaces.
- Thirdly the open space network is made up of a range of types of open space. The strategy for open space should ensure that the overall open space network as a whole fulfils its key roles but also that there is appropriate provision of each typology of open space.

**The Council's preferred option – 17 – Leisure**

**Expand the current policy basis so that the LDF Core Strategy, in general, and other LDDs, in more detail, take account of the need to locally assess the need for and access to the range of types of open space.**

## TOURISM

### Overall objectives:

- Promote the Borough as a centre for tourism and to encourage private sector tourism investment
- Encourage a variety of new tourist facilities and accommodation whilst supporting the retention of existing local accommodation in areas where there is an identified need
- Make sure that new tourism development is situated wherever possible in locations that can be served by public and private transport
- Limit the impact of new tourism development on the environment within acceptable levels

### Tourism – Borough Local Plan – Core Policies

TM1	Hotel development (in Ashford)	Policy retained but merged with different policy approach in Tenterden and rest of the Borough
TM7	Conference and exhibition facilities	Policy retained and considered in relation to emerging masterplanning work on the town centre

## COMMUNITY FACILITIES

### Overall objectives:

- Seek to provide a wide range of services to new and existing developments where it is technically and financially realistic
- A co-ordinated and efficient pattern of provision which reflects the ability of service providers to meet needs now and as future needs arise
- Protect the quality of the environment, particularly in the most visually sensitive areas when planning and providing services, by giving clear policy guidance on the location and scale of new facilities

### Community Facilities – Borough Local Plan – Core Policies

CF2:	Water supply and quality	Needs to be related to Integrated Water Management Study and the infrastructure identified to meet Ashford's needs. Detailed
------	--------------------------	--

		provision of that infrastructure tackled in later LDD.
CF3:	Development and flooding	See CF2 comments and additional comments in the text below.
CF4:	Sewerage	See CF2 comments.
CF8:	Renewable energy	Part of sustainability section in CS – needs to be expanded to respond to Government guidance
CF15, 19, 21:	Additional community facilities/ health care/ schools	Part of CS approach to providing infrastructure to support new development – policy can probably be merged – specific requirements dealt with in detail in later area based LDDs and in strategic tariff approach (probable SPD).

## Water issues – supply, waste water and flooding

Public concern about water issues remains high. The Integrated Water Management Study (IWMS) has addressed all these closely related issues and will produce more detailed outputs in the coming months.

The constraints imposed on Ashford's growth by water supply shortages and by the capacity to treat wastewater were rehearsed in the Halcrow report into Ashford's capacity to grow. This has fed through to the assumed growth rates in the RPG and also proposed policy measures in this document – for example, the water use reduction measures outlined in section 4. Other LDDs will need to include further policy responses.

The IWMS is currently addressing various options:

### **Water Supply**

Water efficiency and demand management is essential for the growth of Ashford to be sustainable and so will be a central part of any integrated water management strategy.

#### *Indirect Effluent Re-use*

Indirect effluent re-use by taking water from the Stour near Wye. This will allow reduced Chalk abstraction and thus upper catchment water is swapped for Chalk outflow. As well as using water more efficiently, it would help protect the Chalk river characteristics of the Great Stour downstream of Wye.

#### *Follow the regional strategy but reduce groundwater abstraction, with compensation coming from elsewhere in the region*

Reduce groundwater abstraction by providing alternative supply from another source in the Kent Area. Likely candidate sources include desalination of brackish groundwater near the coast. The specifics would be addressed through the Regional Water Resources plan put together by the water companies, the Environment Agency and Ofwat.

### **Wastewater Treatment**

#### *All sewage to an expanded works at the current Bybrook site*

All sewage to Bybrook works. In combination with other measures, this still may be the best solution.

#### *2-3 Innovative biological treatment works*

Innovative biological works, similar to that used at BedZed, to serve the new southern urban villages. Needs land but it is attractive and perhaps less energy intensive.

#### *A conventional works to serve south Ashford*

A second works in south Ashford sited near the Discovery Park, there would be no CTRL crossings to worry about and there is flexibility in where the effluent can be discharged. The safest option is to discharge into the Upper Great Stour, near Singleton Lake, but in the longer term, it may be found to better to discharge to River Beult or use the water for other uses, such as irrigation of woodland coppice.

## ***Flood Risk Management***

### *Sustainable Drainage Systems*

Controlling runoff from the new and existing development will be one of the biggest challenges facing Ashford to keep flood risk down to existing levels. North of the M20, infiltration systems can be used to encourage groundwater recharge. To south, which is on clay, detention systems will be needed, but these can also have benefits in terms of reducing diffuse pollution and increasing habitat and landscape value.

### *Upstream flood storage*

Ashford is currently protected by two flood storage reservoirs. Black & Veatch are of the opinion that they are at their optimal location and size. Although it is possible to raise the dams, would be such that a careful cost-benefit analysis would be necessary.

### *Raised Flood Defences*

It may be necessary to erect bunds or other raised defences through the town to protect properties currently at risk, or likely to be at risk in the future.

### *River Channel Improvements*

Improving flood flows through Ashford is an effective way at reducing risk in the town.

### *Flood Plain Modification*

Increasing the storage volume in the floodplain is likely to be essential to mitigate against some of the proposed developments around the international station and any form of Canal District.

## ***Ecological Water Management***

### *Treated effluent as non-mains water source*

Wastewater is a resource to be used, though with care. A favoured idea is to use it seasonally to irrigate coppice woodland that in turn can be used as a renewable energy source for Ashford.

### *Cool WWTW effluent by ground injection (subject to process feasibility)*

Chalk rivers are distinctive for their steady water temperature and this is important for many important species, including trout.

### *Wetland creation*

Wetlands in the UK have declined drastically over the last hundred years, however it is now recognised that they can provide multiple benefits in terms of wildlife habitat, flood risk reduction and water quality improvements. Wetlands can be built to further improve the quality of treated wastewater effluent and so can play an important role in protecting the Stour.

### *Agricultural land management*

Diffuse agricultural pollution, from agricultural chemicals and soil erosion, is as important at impacting water quality in the Stour as treated sewage effluent. Therefore, a twin-track approach is needed to reduce both impacts. Land management may also offer flood risk management benefits and through storing winter water, farms can reduce the impact of summer irrigation.

### *Green Roofs*

Green Roofs are strongly favoured for reducing runoff in densely built areas and also have multiple benefits in modulating climate, improving air quality, building energy efficiency and providing some habitat value and visual appeal. However, it has been recognised that its applicability is likely to be limited to large buildings, such as offices and public buildings.

### *Combined grey water/storm water disposal in SUDS*

Combining greywater and stormwater systems may provide benefits for runoff reduction and water efficiency.

### The Preferred Option Water issues – 18 – supply, waste water and flooding

*The basic policy approach is to maintain an approach based on the adopted local plan's key principles – including at least maintaining current levels of flood protection and improving them where possible.*

*The GADF has, however, explored the possibility of developing a canal district. This would require extra capacity in the floodplain elsewhere and a solution that works to achieve at least current levels of protection. The Council and the Environment Agency will need to work closely to establish that any proposals here meet this objective.*

*Equally, the Council considers that there is the potential around the town centre to enable key development areas to be brought forward. The Council will work with the EA to explore ways in which this approach can be developed.*

*A variety of other options are being explored to tackle waste water and supply issues – the output of the IWMS work will help to inform the LDF.*

## APPENDIX A

### The Council's approach to the Government's growth agenda

Guiding Principles set out in autumn 2002:

- To ensure that growth 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 and 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
- 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 that growth at Ashford does not undermine other regional and sub-regional economic regeneration policies (including Thames Gateway and East Kent Priority areas)
- To protect village communities from the potential negative effects of development
- To ensure the protection of designated areas of countryside of national, countywide and strategic importance and be sensitive to the importance of 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 make optimum use of any greenfield land that needs to be developed

## APPENDIX B

### Regional Planning Guidance for the South East (RPG9), Chapter 12 – Ashford Growth Area

#### Policy 1: Scale of Growth

The Ashford Growth Area should seek to deliver the following levels of housing provision and jobs over the period 2001-2006:

	2001-2011	2011-2016
Housing – of which up to 30% should be affordable	7,900	5,200
Jobs	5,900	4,400

To achieve the longer-term growth envisaged in the Communities plan, active pre-planning is necessary to achieve capacity increases in strategic infrastructure, particularly in respect of water supply, waste water treatment, health and education facilities, and sustainable transport.

#### Policy 2: Spatial Framework

New development in the growth area will be delivered through urban intensification and the development of new sustainable urban extensions integrated with the provision of new and enhanced bus-based public transport and interchanges. Broad areas of search for new development are identified in Map 2.1.

At present there is sufficient planned employment land supply to meet forecast demand to 2016. Both quantitative and qualitative aspects of supply and demand for employment land should be kept under review in the LDF process, in order to encourage job growth to move forward in tandem with housing development.

To support sustainable growth, the provision of infrastructure should take place in parallel with development. Key transport improvements that are likely to be required by 2016 (subject to further detailed appraisal and statutory procedures) are:

- Improvements of Junction 10 of M20 and an additional Junction 10a.
- Frequent domestic services on the new CTRL, with links to East Kent.
- Improvement to the Ashford-Hastings railway line
- A south Ashford rail station.
- Co-ordinated bus route planning with new and existing development.
- A new central bus interchange.
- Park and ride facilities.
- Facilities and measures to support cycling and walking.

And after 2016:

- A south Ashford orbital road linking the A28 to the A2070.

#### Policy 3: Sustainable Communities

The growth envisaged at Ashford should deliver an enhanced quality of life following the principles of sustainable development. This will necessitate the phased and co-ordinated provision of quality community, economic, environmental and social infrastructure. This shall include the following:

- Affordable housing – significant increase in provision, mix and choice.
- Urban renaissance – major improvements to the town centre and the public realm, linked to substantial additional provision of well-managed public open spaces.
- Employment – creation of a range of suitable business space to help promote economic growth.

- Water-related – the provision of reinforcements to water supply in parallel with demand management measures, and water treatment capacity.
- Drainage – the strategic planning of surface water drainage management to minimise flood risk.
- Social – the timely provision of additional local educational, health and community facilities.
- Resource efficiency – more efficient use of resources, particularly energy, waste and water.
- Design quality – a step change in sustainable design, construction and innovation, including the use of the SEEDA Sustainability Checklist.
- Urban fringe – positive management of the area around Ashford for recreation and biodiversity.

#### **Policy 4: Effective Delivery**

Delivery partners should provide a firm commitment to the Delivery Board, the local delivery vehicle, which should be kept under review as growth progresses. The dedicated Delivery Team should be maintained, reporting to the Board.

Delivery partners should investigate private and public sources of funding and work together to find a mechanism to forward fund strategic infrastructure.

## APPENDIX C

### Borough Local Plan: Guiding Principles

**GP1** To meet the needs of local people and to fulfil the borough's wider role in the Euro-region by channelling and controlling the development needed in ways which make best use of resources – including land, infrastructure and energy.

**GP2** To protect and improve the quality of the borough's urban, village and rural environments by safeguarding the setting and character of settlements and buildings, and protecting the countryside for its landscape, heritage, nature conservation and recreational value.

**GP3** To be sufficiently flexible in the location of new development to reduce the need to travel, to take best advantage of existing public transport and other infrastructure and to encourage alternative types of transport, reducing the level of dependence on the car.

**GP4** To propose development on specific sites in a way which minimises damage to the environment by respecting the character of surrounding areas, protecting important features in the landscape, heritage features and wildlife habitats and providing compensating environmental benefits where damage by development cannot be avoided.

**GP5** To ensure that the community facilities and infrastructure needed to cater for a growing population are provided when required.

**GP6** To encourage high design quality and an appropriate "sense of place" in new development in the design of buildings, their relationship with each other, and the spaces and landscape around them

#### Guiding Policies for Ashford Town

**GP7** To reinforce the attractions of the town centre by encouraging a wide range of uses, including shopping, employment, housing, entertainment, tourism and community services, coupled with a balanced approach to transport that reduces unnecessary car use, congestion and pollution.

**GP8** To plan within a long term vision and coherent structure for the future planning of the town and its surroundings based on a framework of rivers and attractive open spaces, improved wildlife habitats and pedestrian and cycle routes.

**GP9** To make the best use of land within the urban area (whilst protecting important open areas) in a way which adds to the town's character and is well related to the public transport network. Where "Greenfield" sites are needed, to propose development on the least environmentally constrained sites and promote a variety of transport modes to reduce dependence on car travel.

#### Guiding Policies for Tenterden

**GP10** To conserve and enhance Tenterden's special character by restricting development to sites identified in the plan, redevelopment or minor development such as infilling and assessing all proposals in terms of the impact that the development would have on the town's special character and its setting.

**GP11** To help the town continue to perform its important role as a shopping and service centre serving a wide area and as an employment and tourist centre, whilst recognising the primary objective of conserving the character of the town and its surroundings and its historic fabric.

#### Guiding Policies for the Villages and the Rural Areas of the Borough

**GP12** To protect the countryside for its own sake, for its landscape and scenic value and for the important wildlife habitats it contains, and to respond to the need for carefully managed change to accommodate demands for agricultural diversification, tourism and public access to the countryside.

**GP13** To target a limited quantity of small scale housing development on identified sites in those villages best

served by shops, community services and public transport services and to cater only for infilling and minor development in appropriate villages within their confines where environmentally acceptable. Elsewhere to restrict housing development unless it is in response to "local needs".

## APPENDIX D

### Index of preferred options

Page No:

#### Overall Vision for the Borough

1	Overall Vision for the Borough	12
---	--------------------------------	----

#### The Spatial Strategy for the Borough

2	The broad distribution of development	14
3	Ashford Town Centre	21
4	Ashford Urban area	23
5	The Growth areas around Ashford	25
6	Tenterden, the villages and rural areas	29

#### Making Quality Places : Design and Sustainability

7	Design and Sustainability	34
---	---------------------------	----

#### Making quality places – how can we make sure that the delivery of the LDF meets expectations?

8	Formal reviews of progress towards balanced, sustainable growth	38
9	Phasing of Development and Land Supply	39
10	Delivering the range of physical and community infrastructure needed	41
11	The organisational framework for delivering Ashford's Future	43

#### Core Strategy Policy Issues

##### HOUSING

12	Affordable Housing	44
13	The Type of Affordable Provision	45
14	Housing Mix	46
15	Provision for Gypsies and Travellers	47

##### ENVIRONMENT

16	Key principles for the natural environment	48
----	--	----

##### LEISURE

17	Leisure	51
----	---------	----

##### COMMUNITY FACILITIES

18	supply, waste water and flooding	54
----	----------------------------------	----

(Complete preferred options text overleaf)

## Local Development Framework: Core Strategy Preferred Options

### 1 - Overall Vision for the Borough

The preferred option is to retain the general approach set by the existing Plan's Guiding Principles and Design Principles but to update and amend these as necessary and, in particular, to reflect:

- A) The objectives the Council has set for the Ashford's Future capacity study (the 'Halcrow' report) and masterplanning (the Greater Ashford Development Framework);
- B) The main issues emerging from community involvement in planning in the urban and rural areas of the Borough;
- C) The need to reflect national policy guidance and trends;
- D) The need to relate the Local Development Framework very closely to the Borough's Community Strategy

### 2 – The broad distribution of development

The consultants' work has spanned many months and included a vast amount of source material – listed in the appendix to the GADF Final Report. A large number of stakeholder groups and local representatives have been involved in challenging and helping to shape the masterplan as it has emerged. Given the scale of development proposed and the inevitable concerns people will have it will always be difficult to endorse every aspect of the 'preferred option' the consultants' have arrived at.

It is important to remember that the purpose of agreeing an options report is to start a wider debate on the Council's approach to its LDF – not to reach a fixed set of ideas or conclusion. On the basis that the preferred masterplan represents the conclusion of a long, thorough and independent process it seems reasonable to conclude that this should be broadly endorsed as the Council's 'preferred option' for the spatial strategy for the Ashford growth area. This will now be open to comment and representations from all sides and the Council will formally consider all of these and amend its preferred approach where necessary. Only then will the Council move to a submitted version of its Core Strategy for the Local Development Framework.

### 3 - Ashford Town Centre

Priority will be given to bringing forward redevelopment opportunities in the town centre in advance of major releases of greenfield land on the periphery of Ashford.

The town centre should be expanded to accommodate up to 2,500 new dwellings, 94,000 sq.m., of new retail / leisure floorspace, 85,000 sq.m. of new office floorspace by 2021. Priority needs include a new FE/HE campus, the Discovery Centre and a mix of leisure, retail and other active uses at ground floor levels to help bring activity and add real character to well designed urban streets.

The transport and movement strategy for the town centre shall include the provision of a new strategic east/west link through the Victoria Road area and the phased implementation of two-way traffic flow on the Ring Road. Car parking provision should be made in a way that best complements the new movement patterns whilst providing easy access on foot to the town centre.

### 4 - Ashford Urban area

On phasing and delivery - to adopt the broad phasing approach suggested in the GADF report but to seek to bring forward brownfield development at the earliest opportunity. Where development proposals come forward that will provide key infrastructure early this is an important issue that the Council will need to consider as part of the overall merits of the scheme and could justify support for a 'departure' application in advance of the completion of the LDF process.

Broadly endorse the GADF masterplan and work up the proposals it includes in more detail so that they can be examined properly and tested fully in the subsequent stages of the LDF process. The general approach should be based on using a mixed use approach where needed, creating better linkages between areas and targeting attention to tackle the particular needs of areas currently performing less well.

## 5 - The Growth areas around Ashford

In planning for the proposed peripheral growth areas the following issues should be considered in particular:

- A) the scale and layout of the growth areas is planned in a way that maximises the opportunities to achieve a strong balance of mixed use places of real character, and the potential level of use of the bus system;
- B) the growth area's setting is particularly carefully planned and adequate resources set aside (from development contributions and other sources) to enable the proper planting and provision of appropriate facilities in a transition zone of suitable scale between urban and rural areas, and for their long term maintenance;
- C) the need to control the rate of release of development land to keep in step with infrastructure and the other elements of a balanced, mixed community (e.g. local job creation) – both in terms of the responsibilities of the landowners/ developers and the wider public sector responsibilities to deliver necessary infrastructure when it is needed;
- D) establish the Council's commitment to the use of design codes to complement the Action Area Plans needed for each peripheral growth area.
- E) as far as the Cheesemans Green Borough Local Plan site is concerned, indicate that should the part of the site outside the masterplan proposals be built then a reduction would be made in development elsewhere.

## 6 - Tenterden, the villages and rural areas

Phase the release of new sites in two phases – the first up to 2011 with the rest after then. On a proportionate basis, sufficient land for 250 new dwellings would be allocated in the first phase and 550 in the second.

New residential development allocations in the LDF period will be to focused firstly on Tenterden and then subsequently on suitable opportunities within Charing, Wye, Hamstreet, Biddenden, Chilham and Aldington. Outside of these settlements, it is not proposed to make any residential allocations in the LDF and development should be limited to minor redevelopment and infilling through a revision to current policy HG6.

New building in the open countryside should be strictly controlled and no new residential development should be permitted beyond the built confines of existing settlements, which should continue to be defined as the 'limits of continuous development (inc. narrow gaps which may be suitable for 1 or 2 dwellings only) forming the existing built-up area of the settlement.'

Local needs housing shall continue to be provided through the implementation of an 'exception sites' policy.

Seeking to retain a major presence of Imperial College at Wye in the interests of both the local community and the Borough's economic future.

## 7 - Making Quality Places : Design and Sustainability

Taking account of the aspirations of Government and local stakeholders and recognising the local environmental capacity constraints, the Council's preferred approach is to work to achieve the core principles identified above and to develop a set of standards which can be applied to all new developments in Ashford.

This approach also reflects the recommendation in RPG9 for the use of the SEEDA Sustainability Checklist.

Dealing firstly with design quality, the Council's emphasis on achieving constantly improving design standards will continue. In practical terms this will be supported by the use of the 'design code' approach to new development areas; design briefs and guidance on key and prominent sites (especially in the town centre); and community participation in design workshops and other processes. The role of independent design advice during the design process and before projects are formally considered – possibly a Design Panel - will be explored with partners. This will help to re-enforce the design agenda and add value to the local process of decision-making, responsibility for which rests firmly with local politicians.

The second main approach is to set standards that (together with the Strategic Environmental Assessment) set a series of benchmarks that all development will be expected to achieve as a minimum.

The environmental standards include:

- the adoption of the Building Research Establishment's EcoHomes and BREAM standards. The EcoHomes standard is designed to cover residential development, whilst the BREAM standards cover other types of buildings including public buildings and infrastructure as well as office and industrial development; and
- a set of standards for 6 key areas of resource use identified in the Ashford Capacity Study and echoed in the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and in SEEDA's Taking Stock report.

Both sets of standards are proposed because; whilst the BRE assessment methods are very useful they are an aggregate assessment of many areas so that relatively poor performance in one aspect can be hidden by meeting other standards in an overall assessment.

The standards have been sub-divided into 3 categories to cover the 3 types of development; the new urban villages, town centre development and regeneration. The reason for this is that it is easier to achieve these standards in green-field developments where unit construction costs are relatively low, and returns on investment relatively high. Town centre development will typically take place on brown-field sites, where building costs tend to be more expensive but values can be relatively strong, whilst regeneration sites are both difficult and expensive to develop and tend to achieve fairly poor returns.

The 6 key areas are:

Energy	Water	Waste
Materials	Biodiversity	Transport

(These key areas are further developed with examples in the GADF Report)

The standards that the council wishes to adopt are as follows:-

*(table not included – see preferred options report page 34)*

## 8 - Formal reviews of progress towards balanced, sustainable growth

For the Ashford growth area all three elements identified above – progress against the Economic Vision and Action Plan, the SEA and the Delivery Plan – should form a key part of the formal review framework. In terms of timing, a sensible date for the first review would be the end of the 2006-2008 public sector spending round – target date being a Council Executive and an Ashford's Future Board in mid 2008. The next logical review would be at the end of the proposed first phase of growth in 2011. A possible role for an independent person or body to lead these reviews should be explored.

This formal process would be additional to, but would complement, the Council's Borough-wide monitoring of its Local Development Framework, its Corporate Plan<sup>33</sup> and the Ashford Borough Community Strategy Action Plan<sup>34</sup>.

## 9 - Phasing of Development and Land Supply

<sup>33</sup> Ashford Borough Council Corporate Plan, 'Ashford – simply better' 2003 - 2007

<sup>34</sup> Three year Action Plan for the Ashford Borough Community Strategy, 2004 - 2014

That the LDF runs to 2021 and that this is broken into two broad phases – up to 2011 and from 2011 to 2021. This approach has the merit of being the simplest phasing strategy and a clear one – balancing the need for flexibility against the minimum level of control needed to enable efficient planning.

The phasing proposals in GADF provide the basis for the LDF Core Strategy approach but a more detailed interpretation will be included in the relevant Local Development Document for each area.

A level of planned over-supply of approximately 15% is proposed in the two phasing periods for the Greater Ashford area – this provides the flexibility over whole of the Borough to cope with any unforeseen problems in sites coming forward and enables the Council to show that adequate land supply exists.

In the rural areas those settlements taking most development over the Plan period will be most likely to have development phased over the two periods – elsewhere the sites identified will be broadly divided between those coming on stream before 2011 and those in the period 2011-21 in order to preserve a supply over the LDF's lifespan.

## **10 - Delivering the range of physical and community infrastructure needed In the Ashford growth area:**

### A) In the Ashford growth area:

Based on our experience to date, and the shared views of other growth areas, the Council's clear preference is to set up a strategic tariff to tackle off site infrastructure costs. This broad model has been canvassed at two sets of workshops held with landowners and development interests from around the town and has been widely supported in principle. All parties desperately want a manageable and clear system that removes the delays and uncertainties that are inherent in the way current arrangements work. The Government's proposed revisions to the circular guidance on this issue seem to accept a change in the system needs to be pioneered, not just in Ashford but in rapidly growing towns around the country.

The tariff is not without its own complexity and will need to be capable of being updated regularly. It will need to distinguish between town centre/ brownfield and greenfield developments to reflect the different cost profiles of each – town centre landowners stressed this point in discussions. Reasonable judgements will have to be made and efforts made to avoid a spiral into an ever more complex system and calculation method – too much complexity and debate over the detail could undermine the overall approach.

The tariff must be as fair as practically possible and its spending be clearly linked to the wider infrastructure needs over the area. It cannot be set at an arbitrary level or simply be scaled to be big enough to fill the overall funding gap for infrastructure. The tariff will need to be realistic and shown not to impact on typical scheme viability so that it can be applied generally without creating the need for detailed negotiation on a site by site basis where different abnormal costs might apply.

In short, this is not a simple way forward but it represents a vast improvement on the current approach and holds the prospect of providing a sound basis for generating clarity and confidence in the market. It can only be applied successfully if there is equal clarity about the public sector contributions to the overall infrastructure bill – both the scale and the timing over the short, medium and long term.

Supporting this tariff there is a need for a form of local area agreement between the Government and the local delivery partnership (the Ashford's Future Board) that will ensure that infrastructure investment decisions are made on a planned basis to enable the controlled release of development land.

### B) In Tenterden and the villages:

Refine the current local plan approach to increase the range of possible off site contributions to help meet the local community's needs. Such an approach needs clarity in the site specific proposals to quantify the scale of any contributions – work conducted locally on 'wish lists', Parish Plans and other local appraisals provides a useful basis for this. Contributions will need to be proportionate and within the spirit of Government guidance.

## **11 - The organisational framework for delivering Ashford's Future**

The LDF should deal explicitly with the delivery processes that are being put in place and will be needed to deliver the full, rounded, growth package. The impact of infrastructure investment on phasing timetables and the planned rate of growth needs to be set out. This clear and transparent approach and commitment is needed to help provide the confidence that local people and potential investors need in Ashford's Future. The work of the Ashford's Future Board has a key role to play in providing this clarity – the first key step being the completion of the Delivery Plan.

## **12 – Affordable Housing**

The existing policy approach in the BLP has successfully secured the provision of affordable housing. There is a high level of awareness amongst developers and landowners and the benefit of a fixed requirement if the certainty it provides for the development industry in assessing its costs. There is a likely need to increase that supply to meet the identified needs of the Borough.

The Council's preferred approach, which will need to be tested against the outcomes of the Council's Housing Needs Assessment, is to increase the % of affordable housing on sites to 35%. The site size threshold to which the policy applies will be 10 units.

## **13 – The Type of Affordable Provision**

The affordable housing policy should specify the required proportion of different types of affordable housing. Subject to the detailed findings of the Housing Needs Assessment, the proposed split of the overall provision of 35% is that 20% be affordable housing for rent and 15% other forms of affordable housing.

## **14– Housing Mix**

Establish the importance of housing mix within the Core Strategy but consider the suitability of more detailed mix policies within each of the area based LDDs, taking account of the social and economic factors involved and specifically the Council's Housing Needs Assessment. Such an approach should recognise the importance of the breadth of provision needed from one bedroom homes to specific locations where larger "executive" style dwellings are more appropriate.

## **15 – Provision for Gypsies and Travellers**

The Core Strategy should set out how the Council will respond to the needs of gypsies and travellers based on the outcome of the survey currently being commissioned. If the case for additional permanent provision is established, suitable provision by identifying a site or sites will be needed in a subsequent LDD.

## **16 – Key principles for the natural environment**

Expand the current policy basis so that the LDF Core Strategy and other LDDs take account to take account of the emerging Government Guidance on Biodiversity and Geological Conservation that need a local policy interpretation.

## **17 – Leisure**

Expand the current policy basis so that the LDF Core Strategy, in general, and other LDDs, in more detail, take account of the need to locally assess the need for and access to the range of types of open space.

## **18 – supply, waste water and flooding**

The basic policy approach is to maintain an approach based on the adopted local plan's key principles – including at least maintaining current levels of flood protection and improving them where possible.

The GADF has, however, explored the possibility of developing a canal district. This would require extra capacity in the floodplain elsewhere and a solution that works to achieve at least current levels of protection. The Council and the Environment Agency will need to work closely to establish that any proposals here meet this objective.

Equally, the Council considers that there is the potential around the town centre to enable key development areas to be brought forward. The Council will work with the EA to explore ways in which this approach can be developed.

A variety of other options are being explored to tackle waste water and supply issues – the output of the IWMS work will help to inform the LDF.

