

---

**ALAN BAXTER & ASSOCIATES**

CONSULTING ENGINEERS

---

**Ashford Town Centre Development  
Framework**

*Movement and Linkages Strategy*

April 2006

---

75 COWCROSS STREET  
LONDON EC1M 6EL

TEL 020 7250 1555  
FAX 020 7250 3022

---

## CONTENTS

1.0	Introduction	1
2.0	Traffic Movement	8
3.0	Pedestrian Movement	11
4.0	Cycle Movement	13
5.0	Bus Movement	14
6.0	Car Parking	17

Prepared by: Malcolm Turner, Sophie Noble and David Paddon  
Reviewed by: Robert Green  
Issued: April 2006

This report may not be issued to third parties without the prior  
permission of Alan Baxter and Associates.  
Copyright Alan Baxter & Associates 2006

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In June 2004 Urban Initiatives, Alan Baxter & Associates and DTZ were commissioned by English Partnerships on behalf of Ashford Borough Council, Ashford's Future and SEEDA to prepare an Action Plan focused on Ashford Town Centre

The Ashford Town Centre Action Plan sits within the Greater Ashford Development Framework. Considerable growth is projected for the region and it is the objective of GADF to plan for growth in an appropriate and sustainable way. The town centre sits at centre of the plan.

Alan Baxter and Associates have developed a movement strategy for the town centre that addresses the expected growth and redevelopment in the centre over the next fifteen years. This strategy has been developed as a fundamental part of the framework for development in the town centre. The work has been undertaken within the context of an understanding and appreciation of the historical development of the town centre, the position of the town centre in relation to GADF and the strategies and proposals developed by the previous consultants working on the town centre, BDP/MVA.

This report provides the detail of the movement strategy but should be read in conjunction with the development framework report. The development framework report contains summary information of the movement strategy and illustrates many aspects of the strategy in a diagrammatic form.

Details of the wider transport strategy associated with GADF are contained in a report produced by Kent County Council titled 'The Transport Strategy for Ashford'.

### *Historical Development*

There is evidence that Ashford dates from before the 10<sup>th</sup> Century although it seems that there was not a permanent Roman settlement. However, a Roman Road connecting Tenterden and Canterbury ran on the line of the current Beaver Road in south Ashford and continued up Station Road/Wellesley Road and northwards through Kennington.

It seems most likely that the first permanent settlement in Ashford was during the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Although there are some doubts as to the beginning of that permanent settlement it is known that Ashford was an established community by 1085. An entry in the Domesday Book indicates that the town itself had a church and two mills.

Strategically, Ashford is well placed, being south west of the only gap through the North Downs for a considerable distance either east or west and also within easy access both to the Sea and to the north west (e.g. London).

Ashford continued to grow and by the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, was established as the market centre of the area. During this period many improvements had been made, such as the paving of roads.

By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were four routes that were leading through the town centre. The most important connections at that time were to Maidstone (along the line of the current High Street and New Street), Canterbury and Faversham (along the line of the current North Street), Hythe (along the line of the current High Street and East Street) and Romney (along the line of the current Station Road and Beaver Road).

From the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the railway gained importance as a means of transport and this in many cases had an adverse effect on traffic on turnpike roads. Trains provided a more reliable and efficient mode of transport, in particular during the winter months when the condition of the roads was extremely bad. One of the first lines in Kent ran between Canterbury and Whitstable and was opened in 1830. From Ashford there were coaches operating that connected to the railway line and from Whitstable, London could be reached easily by steamer.

The South Eastern Railway from London reached Ashford in 1842 with other lines to Folkstone, Canterbury and Hastings soon following. The railway company's main works was opened in Ashford in 1847. They were the largest employers and as a consequence the town's working life changed significantly. This change was accompanied by a significant increase in population and by increasing prosperity of many of the town's inhabitants.

### ***Greater Ashford Development Framework***

The development of GADF has established key spatial structuring principles and a transport network as the foundation for the growth of Ashford. Those relevant to the town centre are outlined below.

#### **The Civic Cross**

The Civic Cross is a primary north-south and east-west link through Ashford. The north-south link ties Kennington in the north to Kingsnorth in the south. In the town centre the north-south link utilises Romney Marsh Road, Beaver Bridge, Station Road, Wellesley Road Mace Lane and North Street. The east-west link ties the A20 in the west to the William Harvey Hospital in the east. In the town centre the east-west link utilises New Street, Somerset Road, and Mace Lane. Although some parts of the Civic Cross comprise strategic routes, the primary purpose of this structuring element is to facilitate local movement within Greater Ashford itself.

#### ***SmartLink***

The SmartLink is the primary public transport provision linking the new growth areas to each other and the town centre. The SmartLink will be characterised by high quality buses, high service frequencies and bus priorities measures. SmartLink is a strategic provision within the overall GADF transport network and is seen as being fundamental in encouraging a shift from use of the private car to use of public transport. Within the town centre SmartLink will use Godinton Road, Elwick Road and Romney Marsh Way.

#### ***Victoria Way Corridor***

This is envisaged as an urban avenue linking Chilmington Green and Cheesmans Green urban villages via an expanded town centre/southern station zone. Victoria Way corridor comprises Victoria Way itself, Newtown Way, Orchard Way, Roman Way, and existing

streets in south west Ashford. Victoria Way provides additional highways and high quality public transport capacity to the identified growth areas south of the town centre. A number of strategic and district routes intersect with Victoria Way providing access to destinations both within Greater Ashford and those further afield. Victoria Way is a strategic route within the overall GADF transport network. The central section of Victoria Way within the town centre plays an important role taking much of the through traffic away from the ring road by providing a new route to the A28 to the west of the town centre.

During the development of GADF two options for the alignment of the central section of Victoria Way in the town centre were considered. The Northern alignment would utilise the existing Romney Marsh Road from the junction at the Designer Outlet Village and continue along the alignment of Victoria Road. The Southern alignment would take a westward route from the junction at the Designer Outlet Village passing south of the International Station multi-storey car park and north of the electricity sub-station site adjacent to Victoria Park. Both alignments have advantages and disadvantages in terms of transport and movement although it is considered that the northern alignment is the preferred option. However, in assessing the route, a range of other issues have been considered such as urban design, flooding, economics, environment, development potential, capital costs and deliverability. The Victoria Way Corridor Delivery Study, undertaken by Urban Initiatives, reconsidered various potential route alignments against these criteria.

#### *Elwick Road – The Civic Spine*

Elwick Road is part of the Civic Cross and envisaged as a tree lined urban street with wide pavements and strong pedestrian crossings. The street forms a strategic link from the station to new development at County Square. The street will operate as an important segment of the public transport network of the town centre. The street will provide local access to car parks, offices, shops and other facilities in the town centre.

#### *Station Road – ‘21<sup>st</sup> Century High Street’*

Station Road is envisaged as a tree lined street with wide pavements and forms the direct link with the station area and the retail core centered at the existing High Street. Station Road will have will have a public transport focus offering frequent bus stop facilities along its length. The street will provide local access to car parks, offices, shops and other facilities in the town centre.

#### *Learning Link*

The Learning Link connects educational facilities at the Discovery Centre and Victoria Park in the north with Discovery Park to the south. Within the town centre the link will provide an enhanced landscape corridor connecting Victoria Park over the rail lines to the town centre. The link would ease the vertical transition between the two areas through a series of ramps and terraced spaces. The Learning Link is of strategic importance in linking new development areas to the south with the town centre and re-integrating existing areas such as Stanhope into the town.

#### ***April 2004 Development Framework***

BDP and MVA were commissioned in August 2003 to prepare and deliver a mixed use development strategy for Ashford Town Centre in the form of a Development Framework.

This team progressed the project to the end of Stage 3 of the brief following which the current team of Urban Initiatives, Alan Baxter & Associates and DTZ took on the commission.

Based on previous studies, best practice guidance and a baseline analysis the development framework identified a number of priorities for change vital to the success of Ashford moving forward. In terms of transport and movement the following priorities were identified:

- **Break the Ring Road** – currently the barrier of the ring road makes arriving in Ashford both unpleasant and relatively unsafe for pedestrians and cyclists. Downgrading of the ring road will provide for improved pedestrian movement around the town and place more emphasis on the pedestrian and cyclist than the motorist.
- **Utilise Spare Capacity on the Road Network** – The road network was built to accommodate more traffic than currently uses it and the town centre does not experience congestion in the way that many other towns do. The redevelopment of the town centre offers the real opportunity to reallocate the road space away from the car traffic to pedestrians, cyclists and buses. The road network should be seen as an integral part of urban design
- **Deter Through Traffic** – Due to the lack of congestion, traffic without a destination will often use the ring road as a convenient route, rather than the strategic roads. This undermines the purpose of the town centre as a destination rather than a route.
- **Improve Access and Convenience** – Making the town centre more accessible, by all modes, underpins its regeneration and growth. This means creating legible, direct and convenient routes into and around the town centre.
- **Reduce Severance and Assist Pedestrian Movement** - The ring road is the main cause of severance, and is a significant hindrance in assisting freedom of pedestrian movement. Downgrading sections of the ring road and reducing traffic speeds will make a major contribution to reducing severance. Pedestrian movement will be further assisted by aligning crossing points with pedestrian desire lines and giving greater priority to pedestrians at busy junctions.
- **Shift Parking to Periphery of the Town Centre with Short – Stay Bias** – the availability of parking is a key determinant in the use of cars. Parking supply that is predominantly for short stay retail and leisure use will support the economic vitality of the town centre. Locating it on the periphery maximises the opportunity for redevelopment of town centre sites. Car parks should be linked to the retail core by direct and convenient routes.

Based on a review of the baseline conditions in the town, the current team fully endorse the transport and movement priorities identified.

The key strategies for the town centre have evolved out of the review of the previous work, the GADF structuring principles, historical development patterns and through consultations with the client group and stakeholders.

Details of the strategy are contained within this report and are also reproduced in the Development Framework Report.

The strategy has been developed in consultation with representatives from Ashford Borough Council, Ashford's Future, Kent County Council and other stakeholder organisations.

## 2. TRAFFIC MOVEMENT

The current one-way ring road system in Ashford was completed in the 1970s. This enabled Ashford town centre to develop without the traffic congestion associated with other major Kent towns. In addition, a successful pedestrianisation scheme has been implemented in the High Street and other streets in the town and is continuing to be developed in line with giving a high priority for pedestrians, cyclists, public transport and other essential access.

Construction of the ring road resulted in significant land take and demolition of property. This interrupted the urban grain and resulted in dominance of the ring road over the town centre. There are now many places on the ring road where the frontage comprises the backs or sides of buildings. There are also many areas that have open and redundant spaces and this affects the level of enclosure.

Currently the ring road is characterised by:

- High traffic speeds due to no ‘friction’ from opposing traffic lanes;
- Queue – sprint – queue pulsing;
- Alignment and layout encourages racing driver mentality;
- Increased travel distances;
- Barrier to pedestrians;
- Poor environment for cyclists;
- Split bus routes; and
- Poor legibility for the town centre.

The identified transport and movement priorities seek to address the effect of the ring road through the breaking of the barrier effect, utilising spare road capacity and through deterring through traffic. Changing the condition and character of the ring road is seen as a fundamental element of the framework for development in Ashford both in terms of accommodating physical growth across the ring road and in indicating to the development market that Ashford is changing and becoming a more attractive place to live and work.

The previous work by BDP/MVA examined the following options for the ring road:

- Option 1 - Downgrading of Station Road with two way operation around the remainder of the ring road (two lanes in each direction).
- Option 2 - Downgrading of Elwick Road with two way operation around the remainder of the ring road (two lanes in each direction).
- Option 3 - Downgrading of Station Road with two way operation around the remainder of the ring road with an extension of Victoria Road westwards towards the A28.
- Option 4 - Downgrading of Elwick Road with two way operation around the remainder of the ring road with an extension of Victoria Road westwards towards the A28.
- Option 5 - Downgrading of Station Road and Elwick Road with replacement low grade links east and south respectively.

- Option 6 - Downgrading of Station Road and Elwick Road with replacement low grade links east and south respectively and with an extension of Victoria Road westwards towards the A28.

BDP/MVA did not investigate two way working around the entire ring road as an option.

Following transport modelling and stakeholder workshops BDP/MVA identified the downgrading of Station Road as being the preferred option. Key aspects of the proposal included:

- Downgrading of the mid-section of Station Road (between Tannery Lane and Park Street). Access to the downgraded section would be for buses and service access only.
- A local access loop around Dover Place & Tannery Lane
- Bus interchange on the downgraded section of Station Road

The choice of the Station Road downgrading as an option was justified in the following terms:

- Downgrading of Station Road provides direct and uninterrupted pedestrian routes between the station and the town centre.
- Deliverability – Station Road has insufficient width to accommodate four traffic lanes prior to the completion of the Victoria Road extension.
- Financial – Station Road will be redeveloped in a more piecemeal way than Elwick Road. There are greater Section 106 opportunities from the redevelopment of Elwick Road than Station Road.

The proposal to downgrade Station Road has been reviewed in the context of the GADF structuring principles. It is considered that the vision for both Elwick Road (Civic Spine) and Station Road (21<sup>st</sup> Century High Street) in terms of character and land use would indicate that both routes should be trafficked streets. This approach would result in a more even distribution of traffic as opposed to one route being dominated by traffic and the other having very low vehicle flows. This would give a more even distribution of activity as well as restore Station Road to its historic roots as a north–south two way route. Other benefits of both routes being trafficked include activity and observation during the evening with benefits for personal security, better legibility and more direct vehicle routes.

The proposal for the entire ring road to be two way has benefits above those for BDP/MVA Option 1/3 both in traffic and urban design terms as described above. In addition, this proposal is entirely consistent with the priorities identified during the early stages of producing the development framework for the town centre, these being:

- Break the Ring Road
- Utilise Spare Capacity
- Deter through Traffic
- Improve Access and Convenience
- Reduce Severance and Assist Pedestrian Movement

It is important that the ring road and other streets within the town centre have sufficient capacity to accommodate the expected traffic demand in 2031. The capacity of the town centre streets have therefore been considered within the wider context of the full range of transport trips across Greater Ashford. Through a process of first modelling all modes of transport and making assumptions about public transport provision, parking charges and the scope for car journeys to shift to other modes, traffic flows on the town centre street network have been derived. In terms of the ring road these traffic flows are approximately 85% of current day flows and would allow the implementation of a two way ring road within a compact urban environment with high quality pedestrian crossings.

The GADF proposal for an extension of Victoria Road to the A28 will act as a relief to the town centre and remove some of the through traffic. This a vital and fundamental part of the proposals for the town centre as it will allow the aspiration for the ring road in terms of character and place making to be achieved.

In the context of the framework for development in the town centre the changes to the ring road are seen as a transformational project in terms of redefining the character and image of Ashford. It is therefore envisaged that the changes to the ring road will take place in Phase 1 of the town centre growth between 2006 and 2011.

In the near future there are a number of confirmed proposals for changes to the traffic circulation arrangements in Ashford town centre. These proposals are:

- Alterations to the Elwick Road/Bank Street junction in connection with the extension to County Square. Bank Street would become one-way northbound;
- Alterations to the junction of Elwick Road/Apsley Street junction in connection with the extension to County Square. The changes to the layout would provide access to the new car parking and servicing facilities;

These confirmed proposals are associated with existing developments and are not a direct outcome of the Town Centre Development Framework or GADF. Depending on the timing of the County Square extension the associated highway works may be undertaken as part of converting the ring road to two way working.

A further change within the medium term will be the removal of Edinburgh Road and the existing car parks at this location to allow redevelopment. Alternative arrangements will be provided to accommodate servicing of existing blocks.

The development framework for Greater Ashford includes a westward extension to the existing Victoria Road, south of the railway line. In the medium term it is expected that this will be extended to the A28 'Matalan' roundabout.

In the long-term the most significant changes to traffic arrangements in Ashford will be the creation of new street networks in the major development areas to the east of Station Road and south of the railway line. It is also expected that Victoria Way will be extended across the Ashford –Tonbridge railway line to join the A28 at 'Tank' roundabout.

### **3. PEDESTRIAN MOVEMENT**

The framework for development of the town centre is defined by structuring principles which set down at the highest level a hierarchy of routes and spaces. These are complimented by a number of urban quarters that determine themes, characters and responses for distinct areas. This framework is particularly important when developing a strategy for encouraging and improving pedestrian movement in the town centre.

Currently the major pedestrian routes into the town centre comprise North Street, East Street, Tannery Lane, Station Approach Road, Beaver Bridge, Bank Street-Victoria Park pedestrian link and New Street. All of these routes require pedestrians to cross the ring road using some form of signal controlled facilities. Given the speed of traffic and scale of the ring road, these crossings can be intimidating and unpleasant for pedestrians.

Within the town centre, the core retail areas of the High Street, Bank Street, County Square shopping centre and Park Mall shopping centre are pedestrianised and are the most heavily used routes. Some use is also made of the lanes around the church and the path through Memorial Gardens.

The priorities identified for the town centre during the early stages of the development framework relevant to pedestrian movement are:

- Improve Access and Convenience
- Reduce Severance and assist Pedestrian Movement

The proposals for converting the entire ring road to two way working will make a significant contribution to reducing severance and assisting pedestrian movement through the provision of direct high quality crossings with the reduced crossing distances. Within the hierarchy of routes and spaces there are particular streets that will become important in strengthening connections with the area outside the ring road or in providing major circulation routes within the town centre itself. These are outlined below.

The Learning Link is a pedestrian and cycle route running from Chilmington/Kingsnorth areas in the south through Stanhope and terminating at the Discovery Centre and associated public space to the south of Elwick Road. This is currently an important and well used pedestrian route and it is anticipated that the significance of this will increase as Ashford develops.

Bank Street is a northward extension to the Learning Link terminating at the High Street. This is a historic route within Ashford and it is envisaged that as the activity and retail offer in the town centre increases this street would become fully pedestrianised. The connection of Bank Street with the Leaning Link is particularly important and high quality pedestrian crossing facilities of Elwick Road are proposed as part of a wider public realm project for Bank Street, Elwick Road and Discovery Square. The public realm scheme will be exemplar in quality and is likely to include areas of shared surface to promote pedestrian priority.

The High Street forms the core of the pedestrianised shopping area in Ashford and is the termination point for many other streets. The High Street will remain as a very significant

pedestrian route and it is expected that improvements to the public realm will be undertaken in the medium term.

North Street is a historic route that connected Ashford with Canterbury. Immediately to the north of the High Street, this street is pedestrianised but there is a poor connection through to Park Street and across Somerset Road. As part of the changes to the ring road a new public space would be provided at this location with high quality pedestrian facilities strengthening this connection.

East Hill is again a historic street that connected Ashford with coastal destinations. There is no vehicular connection between East Hill and Wellesley Road and therefore traffic flows are relatively low. Other than the upward gradient towards the High Street it is a pleasant route into and out of the town centre. As part of the changes to the ring road high direct high quality crossings with the reduced crossing distances would be provided to strengthen this connection.

New Street is a historic street that connected Ashford with Maidstone. Immediately to the east of New Street there are two links through the New Rents area to the western end of the High Street. As part of the changes to the ring road a new public space would be provided at the New Street/Mace Lane junction with high quality pedestrian facilities strengthening this connection.

Memorial Way is an enhancement to the existing link connecting Memorial Gardens across Station Road to the Great Stour River and the Civic Centre. The route expands the visual connection from the town centre and Memorial Gardens to the river set along terraced spaces. As part of the changes to the ring road a direct high quality crossings with the reduced crossing distances would be provided across Station Road as an integral part of the link.

Station Road and Elwick Road are currently unpleasant routes for pedestrians due to the traffic conditions and nature of the fronting development. The conversion of the ring road to two way working together with the new development on both these streets will significantly increase the attractiveness and use of these streets by pedestrians.

The improvement to the pedestrian facilities in the town centre will very much follow on from infrastructure and development interventions in the town centre. However, in the short-term it is proposed to improve facilities at the domestic station forecourt and strengthen links to the town centre. In addition public realm improvements are also proposed on Bank Street south of Tufton Street with a new square being created adjacent to the Discovery Centre. It is expected that the extension to County Square and new uses at the Discovery Centre will increase pedestrian activity on the southern section of Bank Street and along Elwick Road to the rail station.

The conversion of the ring road from one-way to two-way working together with the humanising of this environment will provide a great opportunity to improve pedestrian facilities across and along this road. Significant public realm improvements are proposed at the gateway junctions around the ring road and particularly on Station Road and Elwick Road.

## 4. CYCLE MOVEMENT

Ashford is relatively flat and compact, making it convenient to cycle around. There are cycle routes around Ashford in the vicinity of the town centre although they are few in number and disjointed. There is no complete cycle route through the town centre other than the Sustrans national route which skirts the edge of the retail/commercial area. There are some existing cycle parking facilities in the town centre.

The key priorities identified for cycling in Ashford are for routes to be:

- Coherent
- Direct
- Attractive
- Safe
- Comfortable

The strategy for achieving these priorities is to provide a mix of on and off carriageway facilities supported by high quality crossings of strategic traffic routes and cycle parking at key locations. Due to the nature and character of development proposed for the town centre it is anticipated that cyclists will be able mix with general traffic in relative safety across much of the street network. On carriageway facilities such as advisory cycle lanes and advanced stop lines will be the normal level of provision. It is likely that off carriageway facilities will only be provided in conjunction with pedestrian linkages along for example the Learning Link and the Green Necklace as it passes through the town centre.

The current one way ring road presents an unpleasant environment for cyclists mainly due to the speed of traffic as well as the layout and scale of junctions. In the short-term, off-carriageway facilities are proposed for Elwick Road and Station Road. These are important routes as they will complete missing links and start to form the basis for a coherent cycle network within the town centre. The approach of locating cycle lanes on what is currently footway is currently practical as pedestrian flows on these roads are relatively low and there are no significant safety issues with cyclists and pedestrians sharing the same space.

The conversion of the ring road from one-way working to two-way working together with the mixed-use development proposed for this road will have a significant impact on the environment for cyclists. Although traffic volumes will be largely unchanged traffic speeds will be lower and the junctions of a layout and scale that will be easier for cyclists to negotiate. These factors will result in cyclists being able to use the ring road and mix with general traffic in relative safety. In addition, due to the type and mix of development proposed for the frontage to the ring road these streets will have much more of a high street character with an associated increase in pedestrian flows. The mixing of cyclists and pedestrians in the same space will therefore be much less compatible compared to the existing situation.

In the long-term a new street network will be established in the areas to the east of Station Road and south of the railway line. Cycle facilities will be integrated with the layout of these new streets.

## 5. BUS MOVEMENT

A key priority for growth in Ashford over the next thirty years is that sustainability is an integral part of new development. Transport has a key role to play in achieving sustainable growth and it is particularly important to both reduce the need to travel and reduce reliance on use of the private car. An objective for Ashford as a whole therefore is to significantly increase the relative proportion of bus journeys into and out of the town centre. SmartLink, a high quality bus service linking Cheesman's Green and Chilmington via the town centre, will have an important role to play in achieving this aim. Park and Ride facilities comprising 3000 car parking spaces in total at the Warren, Waterbrook and Chilmington linked to the town centre using SmartLink and other high frequency services will also be a key component. Improvements to standard bus routes serving the existing urban fabric will also be vital in encouraging the existing population to alter their travel patterns. The town centre will be at the heart of the future bus network in Ashford and it is important to provide the appropriate range of facilities for buses.

Currently, bus routes servicing Ashford town centre comprise town and rural/inter-urban services. Bus services enter the ring road from the radial approach roads and terminate either at Park Street (rural/inter-urban services) or at Bank Street (town services). Many of the bus routes loop into and out of the domestic railway station forecourt.

Due to the one-way nature of the ring road many services experience long diversions on either entering or leaving the town centre. The two different termination points are less than ideal in terms of interchange between town and rural/inter-urban services.

In the short-term, a confirmed proposal for bus facilities within the town centre is the removal of the loop around Middle Street. This is being removed in connection with the County Square extension with two new stops being located on Bank Street, south of Queen Street.

In the medium-term the ring road will be converted to two way working and this will allow bus routes to take the most direct route into town centre core, avoiding the need for lengthy diversions. The change to the traffic arrangements will also allow in-bound and out-bound bus stops to be paired on most sections of the ring road. Station Road and Elwick Road will become a focus for many bus routes, providing direct access to the new mixed-use developments on these streets.

A number of options have been considered regarding the location of the town centre bus hub, this being the location where routes start and terminate. The current use of Bank Street for town services is not ideal due to the constraints imposed by the street dimensions and it can also become congested from parked servicing vans/lorries and vehicles accessing car parks. However, Bank Street is relatively close to the High Street and County Square and with the re-opening of Church Road and the closure of Godinton Road (as part of the County square extension), the number of vehicles using this street will reduce significantly. Therefore, in the short to medium term, Bank Street and the western end of Tufton Street will remain as the focus for town services with rural/inter-urban bus services also moving from Park Street to this location. This will greatly improve the interchange between the different types of service.

In the medium to long term it is likely that development on Elwick Road and south of the railway line will steadily increase the number of pedestrians using Bank Street, this being a natural extension of the Learning Link into the historic part of the town centre. There will therefore be increasing justification for the pedestrianisation of Bank Street southwards to Elwick Road. This would require the bus hub to be relocated elsewhere in the town centre. Two possible locations for the bus hub have been identified and considered; Elwick Road and Vicarage Lane.

Elwick Road will be downgraded as part of the ring road proposals but will still need to provide a medium level of capacity for general traffic. In order for a bus hub to work efficiently and for buses to not obstruct general traffic this would increase the street width needed, eroding the compact urban quality that is sought for Elwick Road. Although the town centre will expand both southwards and eastwards Elwick Road is approximately 400m from the current attractors of the High Street and County Square. In addition, there is a level difference between Elwick Road and Tufton Street/Vicarage Lane area and this is an issue for the elderly who make up a significant proportion of bus users in Ashford.

There are currently bus stops on Vicarage Lane towards Station Road and with the redevelopment of the car park this will release a length of approximately 150m for use as a bus hub. Up to eight bus stops could be provided at this location with access provided via Elwick Road and Church Road. The current attractors of the High Street and County Square are a maximum walking distance of 330m (3-4 minute walk) and there is not an issue with the change in levels. The primary pedestrian linkages to the High Street would be either through the small lanes surrounding St Mary's Church or via new routes created as part of redevelopment of Vicarage Lane car park. The route to County Square would be along Vicarage Lane or via Church Street and Queen Street.

Of the two options for the bus hub, Vicarage Lane is currently preferred as it maintains the termination point in the core of the town centre and provides a location relatively near to both the existing retail offer and new development on Station Road. However, the position of the bus hub will need to be reviewed at regular intervals in order to ensure that the town is best served by bus services.

As part of the ring road project bus lanes will be introduced. The location and extent of bus lanes will be subject to future traffic modeling but it is likely that the following provision would be introduced:

- In-bound and out-bound bus lanes on Romney Marsh Road, Beaver Bridge, Mace Lane and New Street.
- Southbound bus lane on Station Road, south of Tannery Lane
- Eastbound and westbound bus lanes on Elwick Road

SmartLink services will become operational during the medium term and will be routed into and out of the town centre as follows:

- To and From Cheesman's Green – via Newtown Way, Romney Marsh Way, Beaver Bridge and Elwick Road.

- To and From Chilmington – via Chart Road, Cobbs Wood Industrial Estate and Godinton Road.

This approach would route SmartLink away from what will be the more heavily trafficked Victoria Way. The main stop for SmartLink will be on Elwick Road near to the southern end of Bank Street and the Discovery Centre. It is not proposed to route SmartLink via Church Road and Vicarage Lane to reduce journey times and to avoid possible conflicts with standard bus services that may affect journey time reliability.

The location and extent of guided bus facilities for use by SmartLink and will be determined at a future design stage. However, within the town centre it is possible that guided facilities will be incorporated into the bus lanes as previously described.

In the long term the domestic rail station entrance will be relocated to Beaver Bridge. A square will be created at this location and this area will become a significant public space with bus stops to give a high standard of interchange bus/rail interchange.

Overall it is considered that the proposals for bus routing and facilities in combination with the ring road becoming two way will achieve the priority for the town centre of improving access and convenience.

## 6. CAR PARKING

The level of public and private car parking provided in the town centre will have an influence on how successful the town is in delivering sustainable transport objectives and in achieving the aspiration for streets in terms of character and place. At the same time it is also important ensure that as the town develops an appropriate level of car parking is provided to maintain the vitality of the centre and increase the commercial attractiveness of Ashford as a place for business. In the short term a detailed car parking strategy will need to be developed and as the town centre expands there will be a need to regularly review this strategy to ensure that a balance between what are often competing objectives is being achieved.

In the previous work by BDP and MVA the following principles for the car parking strategy were identified:

- Town centre parking is located on the periphery with direct walking access into the town centre.
- Parking is provided on the south side of the railway to reduce traffic on Beaver Road Bridge.
- Greater priority is given to short stay parking for shopping and leisure use.
- Limited commuter and long stay car parking is provided within the town centre.
- Most long stay parking is provided through Park and Ride sites
- Parking provision is phased in line with growth of the town centre

These principles have been endorsed as the proposals have been developed further with the addition of parking being located on the periphery to reduce traffic on the ring road generally in order to facilitate more compact junctions with high quality pedestrian facilities.

The existing public car parking within the town centre comprises a mixture of short and long stay in surface and multi-storey facilities. Excluding the parking for the international station and the designer outlet, there is a total of 2434 public spaces in the town centre. There are also a significant number of private non-residential spaces (1263). The average occupancy for the public car parking midweek is approximately 82% with a slightly lower figure at the weekends. Many of the existing town centre car parks offer the potential for redevelopment as other uses and this has been identified as part of the development framework for the town centre.

Based on a review of the framework for development in the town centre approximately 3800 public spaces are proposed with around 2400 private non residential spaces. The public spaces will be prioritised for short stay shopper and leisure parking with charging structured to support this approach and encourage use of public transport. Park and ride sites with a total of 3000 spaces will be provide at the Warren, Waterbrook and Chilmington, primarily for the use of long stay commuters. The introduction of park and ride services will be in line with the rate of development within the town centre and the level of traffic congestion. However, it is anticipated that 1000 and 600 spaces will be provided in the short term at the Warren and Waterbrook sites respectively.

The number of spaces is directly related to the mix and density of land use, particularly retail and commercial space. The approach to the provision of parking within the town centre will

be to meet the demand in the medium term. Once a critical level of activity in the town is established the level of parking will be used as a constraint to encourage a modal shift towards sustainable transport. This approach will have implications for the number of public spaces provided, the pricing structure and the level of parking permitted with new developments.

In relation to private non residential parking, during the initial years of the town's development, half of PPG 13 maximum standards will apply in order to meet restraint targets to reduce traffic and encourage use of sustainable modes. In the medium to long term even higher levels of restraint are proposed to further encourage use of sustainable modes.

A number of sites on the periphery of the town centre were identified as having potential for accommodating new multi-storey car parks. These were reviewed in terms of plot areas, potential building heights, potential number of spaces, compatibility with land use strategy, vehicular access arrangements and pedestrian linkages. Based on this review and considering confirmed proposals, the following principal car parks have been identified for the town centre:

Godinton Road County Square	622 spaces
Stour Centre/Civic Centre	400 spaces
Victoria Road	800 spaces
New Street	500 spaces
Mace Lane	500 spaces
Station Road	300 spaces
Park Mall	300 spaces

These are all multi-storey car parks with the exception of the Stour Centre/Civic Centre.

An important consideration for the construction of new multi-storey car parks will be the quality of the design. Where possible the intention will be to have buildings with retail or residential units fronting the street with multi-storey car parking behind. This approach will create much more attractive and active frontages onto major streets.

In the short term, confirmed proposals comprise an increase in parking at Apsley Street from 400 spaces to 622 spaces (multi-storey) and a new car park of 510 spaces on Victoria Road. These changes are associated with the extension to County Square. The car park on Victoria Road is a temporary facility only and will be removed once permanent car parks are completed.

In the medium-term it is expected that existing car parks at Vicarage Lane and Edinburgh Road will be removed and the sites redeveloped. New car parking will be provided outside of the ring road at New Street (multi-storey) and at a new site on Victoria Road (multi-storey) near to the existing pedestrian bridge across the railway lines. A further car park will be provided on Station Road north of Tannery Lane. During the medium term it is possible that the area covered by controlled parking zones may need to be extended.

The longer term will see completion of the car parking strategy with the provision of a further principal car park on Mace Lane (multi-storey).

Further details on the parking strategy are contained in a separate report produced by Ashford's Future.

**DISCLAIMER:-**

Some of the projects referred to in this document have since progressed to a more detailed design stage and therefore some of the details and figures have been superseded.