



Welcome – This is the second in a series of Shared learning briefing notes published by BBM Horizons that seeks to encourage the exchange of knowledge and experience across the economic development and regeneration fields

Issue 2 –

Ashford - Growing and Regenerating through a recession

Summary

Ashford Partnership, the local strategic partnership, (supported by Progress through Partnerships) and Ashford's Future (the local growth area delivery vehicle) co sponsored an event that brought together stakeholders from across the voluntary and community, private and public sectors to consider the implications of the current recession on the growth and regeneration plans for Ashford in Kent. The event (held on 31 March 2009) included a local and national perspective of the current issues faced followed by a workshop to consider several emerging themes.

Key Dimensions of Ashford

- Population – 112,500 (Mid Year 2007)
- Workforce – 46,000
- Employment Rate – 83%
- Unemployment Rate – 2.2% (Feb 09)
- Number of Businesses – 5000
- Main Companies – Brakes, Eurostar, Givaudan & Hitachi
- Main Sectors – Wholesale and retail, construction, transport and distribution & business services
- Train times – 57 minutes to Lille and 37 minutes to London (from May 2009)
- Housing Growth target 2001- 2031 – 31,000
- Employment Growth target 2001 – 2031 – 28,000

Headline Message

Investment in skills and training is critical for connecting local people to current and future opportunities. This requires the delivery of the Ashford Learning Campus and improved links between business and learning institutions.

In association with



local futures



Attendees:

Philip Last	Locate in Kent
Richard Alderton	Ashford Borough Council
David Hill	Ashford Borough Council
Tim Wilson	Ashford Churches Together
David Maddidson	McArthur Glen
Monica Box	South Kent College
Judith Armit	Ashford's Future
Andrew Osborne	Ashford Borough Council
Cllr Paul Clokie	Ashford Borough Council
Mark Carty	Ashford Borough Council
Sue Sawyer	Ashford Volunteer Centre
Ariba Karim	Highworth School
Jo James	Kent Invicta Chamber
Cllr Marion Martin	Ashford Borough Council
Hillary Moorby	Ashford Partnership
Paul Naylor	Ashford Borough Council
Colin Green	Ashford Borough Council
Simon Bannister	Ashford Community Network
David Geoghegan	Kent County Council
Richard Finlinson MBE	Ashford Community Network
Mick Fleming	Ashford Citizens Advice Bureau
Andrew Judd	Kent Police
Holly Williams	Highworth School
Simon Richardson	SEEDA
Cllr Jessamy Blandford	Ashford Borough Council
Linda Doran	Ashford's Future
Ian Bailey	Ashford Borough Council
Jayne Faulkner	Job Centre Plus
Ian Kirkland	Ashford Borough Council
Pete Keeling	Kent County Council
Sharon Williams	Ashford Borough Council
Andrea Benneyworth	Eastern & Coastal Kent NHS
Geoff Luker	Ashford Borough Council
Linda Alexander	Ashford Borough Council
John Fisher	Local Futures Group
Greg Macdonald	Local Futures Group

Overview of Presentations

The local perspective highlighted those sectors hardest hit (Financial Services, construction, retail) and the current problems facing business in terms of access to finance compounded by falling profit margins. The local perspective also highlighted positives including an increase in training, improved co-ordination of business support services and opportunities for property investment.

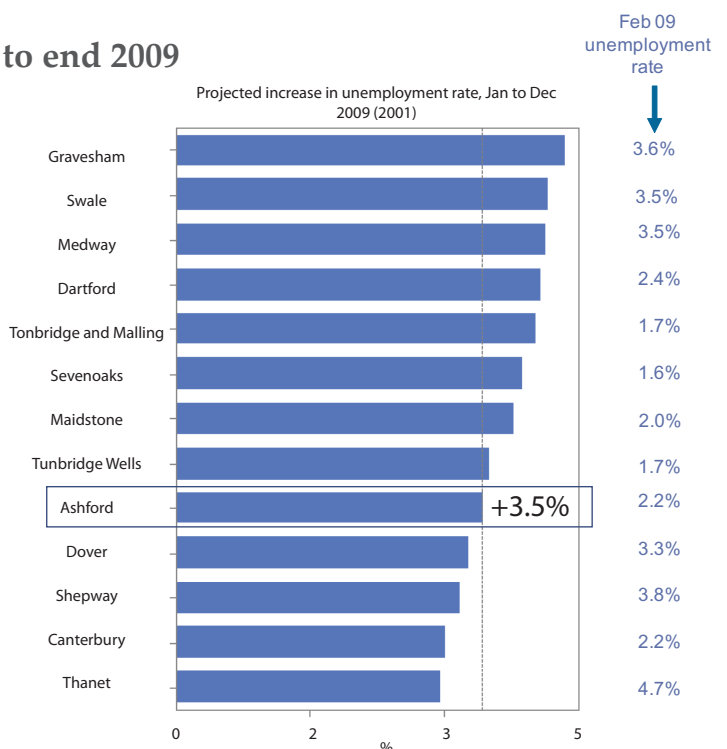
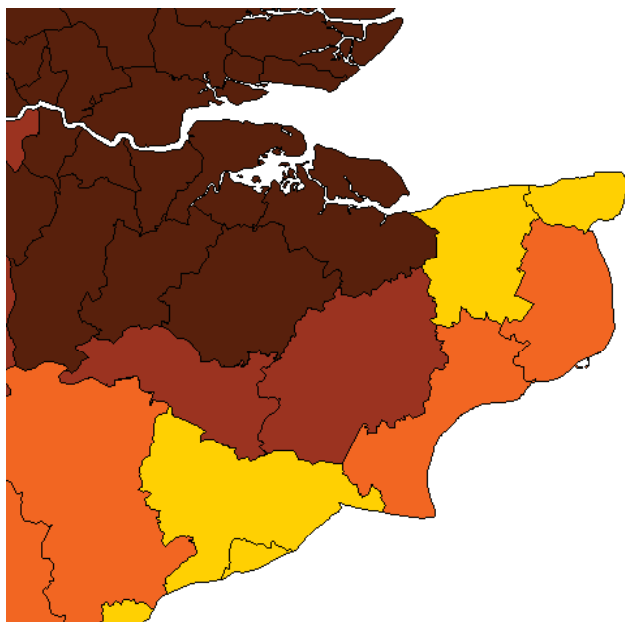
The national analysis confirmed the vulnerable sectors presented by the local perspective and modeled a predicted increase of unemployment over the next year from 2.2% to 5.7% which means that Ashford will perform relatively well compared to other parts of the Kent and the rest of the country. This being said the analysis highlighted areas of opportunities including agriculture, pharmaceuticals, utilities, environmental technology (including renewable energy) and public services with a particular emphasis on education and health. A key message emerging from this analysis is that local economic geographies do not correspond with local authority boundaries meaning that the loss of jobs in Ashford businesses will also impact on other areas and likewise the loss of jobs in other areas will impact on those living in Ashford.

Quote - "A really interesting and useful overview of the current local and national perspectives – this will be critical for helping us to decide what we do next"

Richard Finlinson MBE – Chair – Ashford Community Network and Vice Chair Ashford Partnership



Impact on local unemployment rates Projected increase in unemployment rates to end 2009

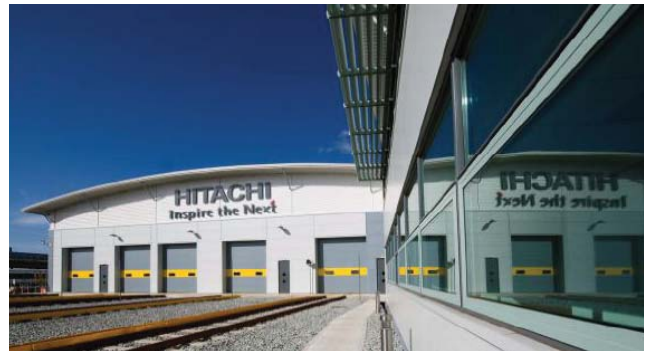


Source: Local Futures Group

Summary of potential impact on Ashford

Jobs in vulnerable sectors	17,046
Jobs in vulnerable sectors as % of employment base	36%
Potential job losses Jan-Dec 2009 (workplace)	1,500
Workforce employed in vulnerable sectors	20,180
Workers employed in vulnerable sectors as % of total workforce	40%
Potential increase in unemployment Jan-Dec 2009 (resident)	1,865
Percentage point increase in unemployment rate Jan-Dec 2009	+3.5%

Source: Local Futures Group



Framework for discussion

The local and national perspective and analysis helped to shape a framework for stakeholders to consider a response to the issues faced. This framework was based on the following 6 themes:

Theme 1 – Driving Ashford's growth and regeneration agenda through optimising the use of public sector assets, the continued provision of enabling infrastructure and maximising the benefits of the new high speed train service

Theme 2 – Supporting those businesses suffering the greatest as a result of the economic downturn (sectors to be confirmed as part of analysis provided on the day)

Theme 3 – Nurturing those businesses suffering the least as a result of the economic downturn (sectors to be confirmed as part of analysis provided on the day)

Theme 4 – Supporting those residents suffering the greatest as a result of the economic downturn

Theme 5 – Connecting unemployed to current and future opportunities

Theme 6 – Securing good intelligence about the economy to enable early intervention (particularly role of economic assessments as part of Sub National Review)

Workshop Methodology

The workshop session of the event included 5 elements:

Straw Poll – Attendees were asked to grade current interventions aimed at reducing the impact of the recession with regard to their importance and performance. This enabled a quick and dirty analysis as well as providing a warm up for the main workshop session

Solution Shaping – Attendees were split into 6 groups and asked to consider one theme in terms of:

- "what" needs to be done
- "how" each "what" could be achieved
- "who" should lead on each "What"
- "when" each "what" should happen

Peer Reviewing – Each group left one member behind to present to others whilst they rotated around all the other groups. Each group member was given a set of sticking dots to mark the actions suggested by the other groups:

- Gold – Top Priority for action
- Silver – Would be nice to do but not priority
- Red – Stop – Do not do this
- Green – Easy win – just get on with it

Feedback – Each group presented their one headline message

Talking Wall – This enabled attendees to raise other issues not covered in the workshop so as allowing those present to express all their thoughts and views whilst enabling the workshop to remain focused.

Quote – *"I think it is good that everyone had a limited number of stars as it reinforced the need for prioritisation – you can't give everything a gold star"*

Judith Armitt – Managing Director Ashford's Future



Summary – Suggested workshop actions and prioritisation

Action	Gold	Silver	Green	Red
1. Increasing skills of resident workforce	■	■	■	■
2. Securing quality of place	■	■	■	■
3. Deferring s106 payments	■	■	■	■
4. Training Schemes via growth projects	■	■	■	■
5. Innovation and Research	■	■	■	■
6. Developing the learning campus	■	■	■	■
7. Start Project Quickly	■	■	■	■
8. Redundancy Support	■	■	■	■
9. Business rates support	■	■	■	■
10. Trade/buy local	■	■	■	■
11. Business Support	■	■	■	■
12. Education/ Training	■	■	■	■
13. Champion Local Business	■	■	■	■
14. Environmental Technologies	■	■	■	■
15. Community Advice and Support	■	■	■	■
16. Establish Culture of shared working	■	■	■	■
17. Investigate credit unions	■	■	■	■
18. Training and education	■	■	■	■
19. Information Sharing	■	■	■	■
20. Co-ordination of agencies and approach	■	■	■	■
21. Working towards agreed priorities	■	■	■	■
22. Pre employment training	■	■	■	■
23. Apprenticeship schemes	■	■	■	■
24. Transferring skills/ retraining	■	■	■	■
25. Greater role for voluntary sector	■	■	■	■
26. Making most of culture/ leisure offer	■	■	■	■
27. Sub National Review – assessment	■	■	■	■
28. Understand local conditions	■	■	■	■
29. Create effective communications cycle	■	■	■	■

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A copy of the event document can be obtained from Ian Bailey

Messages from Workshop

- Urgent action is required to improve debt advice for residents
- Investment in skills and training is critical for connecting local people to current and future employment opportunities. This requires the development of the Ashford Learning Campus and improved links between business and learning institutions.
- Investment in key infrastructure underway and supported by extra government investment via the Community Infrastructure Fund
- There is a need to improve co-ordination and collaboration between public and voluntary and community sectors to deliver an effective support system for the local community
- Consideration must be given to the impact of developers contributions on financial viability within a declining market – need for further debate / discussion
- Must focus on collecting and analysing local data so as to understanding local conditions within national context

Conclusion

The workshop has highlighted that recession brings both challenges and opportunities and that it is critical for local authorities and their partners to understand the dynamics within and between their economy and communities so they are well placed to consider the form and degree of intervention required. Equally, the workshop has highlighted that it is critical for local authorities and their partners to consider their own business models and how these can be utilised to secure a speedy and robust route out of recession.

Implications for long-term vision

It is important to consider the dynamic between prosperity, place and people when developing a long term vision.

