

Conclusions

This handbook, the culmination of the Quality of Life Capital consultation and technical process, has demonstrated that there is a wide range of features that matter for Ashford's future and quality of life. It does not arrive at a definitive, single figure for how much housing and employment development the town can accommodate, but recognises the key benefits and services of these features for the local economy, environment and community. The capacity to manage change depends on the current status of these benefits/services, in terms of:

- Current surplus or deficit
- Trend
- Thresholds
- Alternatives to the benefit/service or alternative ways of achieving the benefit/service
- Policy, management and investment decisions.

The complex interaction of different features and their benefits and services, the economic uncertainties in the longer term, and the inherent political and value judgements that will need to be made about priorities means that setting out the "state of play" and implications of a range of future directions for Ashford is, in our view, a more appropriate and transparent way forward.

The main implications for capacity of each benefit/service have been categorised in terms of how they affect the scale, location, policy/legislation, investment, design and timing of development – as explained in the introductory notes. *Table 1* overleaf sets out a composite breakdown of how each feature and corresponding benefit/ service will impact on growth.

This section attempts to make sense of all the features which matter to Ashford's quality of life and to assess, in broad terms, their collective implications under different scales of urban change. This initial testing and analysis is set out in *Table 2* overleaf. The scales of

change are derived for the purposes of calibrating our capacity conclusions and do **not** constitute long term growth options. They will feed into decision-making as to sustainable growth options during the next phase.

More than a case of "growth" *per se*

Major residential or mixed use developments – particularly urban expansion on greenfield sites or large, relatively self-contained brownfield sites – have tended in the past to be capable of securing sufficient new or enhanced infrastructure and amenities to satisfy demand arising from new households and businesses. Development contributions (S106 agreements) for new schools, library facilities, community centres and highway improvements, for example, have traditionally been used in this respect.

Such an approach rightly puts obligations on developers and investors to acknowledge the impact of their development, and is generally successful with major residential schemes. However, this does not resolve under-investment in existing facilities and, in the case of employment related development, there is evidence from our consultations to suggest that some requests for funding toward new infrastructure are having a deterring effect on inward investment in the local economy. This is exacerbated by the extent of competing areas of investment elsewhere in Kent which, unlike Ashford, benefit from funding and land assembly incentives, e.g. Objective 2 areas.

To achieve higher levels of employment growth, therefore, a *re-assessment* of the balance between public and private sector investment in Ashford, and a *step change in policy intervention* will be required. Even if *additional* public investment, facilitation and policy support is forthcoming to create the necessary pre-conditions for growth, there is a risk that investment would be siphoned from other economic priority areas in the region. This would clearly necessitate a re-evaluation of planning and economic development strategy for Kent and the South East.

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Moreover, development contributions do not necessarily satisfy the need for the improved quality of life of existing residents and businesses, particularly where new developments *cumulatively* result in a key threshold/target being crossed/exceeded. For example, a new housing scheme may incorporate radical water saving devices to meet sustainable development targets, but does not *in itself* produce a net reduction in water consumption by Ashford's inhabitants overall.

There is a risk that an approach to future development that relies on private sector contributions, although legitimate, will create a focus on expansion, not strategic development. In our view, growth should be considered qualitatively as a complete “package” that is as much about consolidating and enhancing the “old” and as well as developing the “new”. For example, this could include an environmental framework which sets out proposals and actions for enhancing urban trees, managing the floodplain and strengthening the role of the river corridors as natural lungs for the town; or a network of multi-use community “hubs” combining a range of community services which are more flexible to changing modern needs and collectively have more favourable economies of scale. The urban renaissance and sustainable transport frameworks, to be developed as part of the next stage, will go some way to define such a package. This approach will be more environmentally and socially sustainable in the long term *and, in any case, be essential to improving Ashford's offer relative to competing investment centres* – increasing the probability of achieving desired (i.e. planned) employment-led growth in the town in the medium term.

There is therefore a need, to consider how to retro-fit and finance enhanced Quality of Life features *hand-in-hand* with incorporating them into new, major mixed use developments, which achieve radically higher standards of design quality and environmental management. Retro-fitting is especially important for those features and benefits of quality of life whose capacity is already at a deficit and which, if left unchecked, would create a significant “catch-up” situation for existing streets and neighbourhoods relative to new

ones. This calls for innovative means of procurement and, in many cases, changes in policy or legislation.

The impact of growth on existing built-up areas is more challenging given the policy trends focussing on checking urban sprawl and on the re-use of previously-developed land. *EU and national planning policy/guidance now presents a clear opportunity to ensure that investment in the revitalisation of Ashford's town centre and existing urban area is given priority in the short to medium term, so as to prevent its deterioration or unattractiveness relative to potential new residential and business neighbourhoods in the longer term.* The next stages of the study – informed by the urban capacity study – will help to shape such a sequential strategy and urban renaissance framework for Ashford's future. Nevertheless, it is imperative that a qualitative step change in the design of greenfield development is incorporated in longer term options.






Location of Future Growth

The composite plan of Environmental Benefits combines the analysis of areas of bio-diversity importance, with the designated landscape areas and other features of environmental importance. This gives a broad indication of the major areas of environment benefit. The analysis concentrates on the main planning designations and features; it does not imply that on the “white” land there are no features of environmental importance. Further assessment may reveal protected species in these areas, for example. However, the plan does provide a starting point for considering broad locations for future growth. The hierarchy of designations provides a spatial framework which indicates a suggested management approach towards peripheral urban expansion in each of the areas concerned. The scale and timing of any peripheral expansion will be dependent on the urban capacity study and future growth levels. In subsequent stages of the study this analysis will be integrated with the other study components.

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What matters and why

Table 1: Breakdown of Organising Principles for Growth

What matters	Key benefits/services (why)	Implications for growth (so what)					
					€		
Urban Housing Capacity	Re-use of previously developed land	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Regional Economic Balance	Economic growth of one area does not occur at the expense of another	✓			✓		
Employment Growth commensurate with Housing	Availability of local employment, reducing the need for commuting	✓		✓			
Growth Sectors	Employment generators				✓		
Ability to Attract Inward Investment	Economic driver				✓		
Speculative Office & Industrial Development	Economic growth in Ashford			✓	✓	✓	
Town Centre Retail Development	Ability to attract investment		✓	✓	✓		
Biodiversity	Diversity of habitats and species		✓	✓		✓	
Water Resources	Drinking water	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Water Quality	Clean water	✓			✓	✓	✓
Flood Plain	Flood protection of life and property		✓			✓	
Sustainable Waste Management	Environmental health and local amenity	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Agriculture	Food production and land management		✓	✓			
Landscape	Regional character/ local distinctiveness		✓	✓		✓	
Energy Efficiency	Energy Supply			✓		✓	
Air Quality	Clean air	✓	✓	✓			
Historic Environment	Chronological continuity	✓	✓			✓	
Town Centre	Heart of Ashford			✓	✓	✓	
Eurostar International Passenger Services	Access to European destinations and markets		✓				
CTRL Fast Domestic Services	Access to London	✓		✓			✓
Regional Rail Network	Access to/from Kent and the wider region		✓		✓		✓
Access to Europe & London	Potential for freight distribution		✓				
M20, Junction 10	European and regional motorway access	✓	✓		✓		✓
Radial Approaches to Ashford	Road access to Ashford	✓			✓		✓
Strategic Connections	Access and integration within Ashford	✓	✓		✓		✓
Town Centre Ring Road	Town centre accessibility	✓	✓		✓		✓
Local Public Transport Services	Reduced congestion	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Safe Attractive Walking & Cycling Environment	Human health/ air quality/ reduced congestion			✓		✓	
Affordable, decent housing	Shelter	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Local Health Services	Public health				✓	✓	✓
Social Services	Care of the community				✓	✓	
Schools	Education				✓	✓	✓
Libraries	Information and Knowledge	✓	✓	✓			✓
Arts and Culture	Creativity and Cultural Diversity	✓	✓	✓			✓
Community Spirit and Social inclusion	Equity Personal Safety and Sense of Belonging	✓	✓	✓			✓

What it means in practice

Table 2: Draft summary and evaluation of implications of capacity conclusions

Alternative capacity tests ¹³⁶	Key implications for development		Key capacity “bottlenecks” ¹³⁷ likely to arise, significantly constraining growth or affecting quality of life	Implications for wider strategy and Steering Group partners
	Key determining issues	Forecast state of play/ issues arising		
Low growth Related to trends, equivalent to population increase of approximately 1,000 - 1,200 per annum	Urban capacity	Sufficient brownfield land to accommodate growth in the short to medium term. Review allocation of unimplemented employment sites, due to lower economic growth predictions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No <i>significant</i> bottlenecks • Improvements to M20 junction 10 capacity still likely to be necessary • Improvements to several junctions on the A2070, investment in an outer ring road required in order to alleviate pressure on the town centre ring road in the medium to long term, along with measures to promote modal shift • Potential longer term requirements for investment in water treatment infrastructure and cost implications of infrastructure crossings of the CTRL with a higher contribution per unit required than in medium/ high growth scales • Need for additional waste treatment facilities to accommodate development in medium to long term • Potential longer term capacity problems with respect to local 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Plan Review – review employment and greenfield housing allocations • Review of Structure Plan strategy with respect to housing and economic development • Similar knock-on effects for regional planning strategy, putting additional pressure on other parts of the region • Increased pressures on other “restraint” areas, e.g. Canterbury, Maidstone, rural settlements around Ashford
	Economy	Low levels of economic growth. Risk of greater levels of out-commuting in the medium to long term.		
	Environmental management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waste: extended kerbside collection of recyclables to achieve targets in short to medium term. Waste reduction measures for existing and proposed development. • Floodplain: development can potentially be contained outside of “undeveloped” high flood risk areas. • Water quality: measures to supplement water quality improvements upstream of Ashford; potential for upgrade of Bybrook. Limited potential for alternatives such as an attenuation pond system owing to scale and dispersed location of brownfield sites. 		

¹³⁶ These different levels of urban change are designed to demonstrate thresholds of implications, drawing on the Handbook for Change. They are distinct from the sustainable growth options which will be developed from the visioning stage. Where possible, the implications of these levels of change are assessed in the short (to 2005), medium (to 2016) and long term (beyond 2016).

¹³⁷ i.e. features likely to experience significant “catch up” problems or requiring major investment.

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<i>Alternative capacity tests</i> ¹³⁶	<i>Key implications for development</i>		<i>Key capacity “bottlenecks”¹³⁷ likely to arise, significantly constraining growth or affecting quality of life</i>	<i>Implications for wider strategy and Steering Group partners</i>
	<i>Key determining issues</i>	<i>Forecast state of play/ issues arising</i>		
	Town centre	Limited critical mass of population to support significant retail expansion	General Practice health services, assuming that demand is not “capped” through health prevention and innovations in service provision.	
	Transport infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traffic on the ring road anticipated to increase by 20% in medium term. See next column for M20 Junction 10. 		
Medium growth Related to planned growth, equivalent to population increase of approximately 1,200-1,850 per annum	Urban capacity	Preliminary indications are sufficient, at least in short term. Review unimplemented greenfield allocations and phasing policy for the medium to long term.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Solutions to M20 junction 10 are essential in the short term Modal shift, ring road enhancements and effective use of key town centre fringe development sites essential to growth of town centre Water supply a potentially significant bottleneck; unless per capita demand for water can be reduced in short to medium term, investment in alternatives such as Bewl Reservoir will be required post 2011, with potential environmental implications New waste water treatment plant likely to be required: costs in excess of £50 million, lead in time up to 10 years, supplemented by other measures Medium/long term capacity problems with respect to local 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes to the water regulation regime are necessary to facilitate demand management Support of regional agencies to facilitate policy change at the national level will be required Upping the rate of economic growth will require a range of initiatives including: public investment in essential infrastructure, stimulation of a more flexible land and property supply, improved contact between public agencies and employers, high-profile place marketing and promotion of Ashford as an employment location, increased resources in economic development, and review of planning policies Support (political and financial) for new
	Environmental management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Water quality: impacts of climate change and National Environment Programme (NEP), plus pressure from increased population, necessitate new infrastructure provision. Flood plain: where development of greenfield sites is required, the location of development will be determined by the extent of the flood plain. Water supply: supply can be met to 2025, but the impact of climate change and NEP requires demand management measures. Waste: additional waste treatment facilities in the short to medium term to support recycling, composting and recovery. 		

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What it means in practice

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	Key determining issues	Forecast state of play/ issues arising		
	Transport infrastructure	Traffic on the ring road anticipated to increase by 35% in the medium term. Increased congestion and delays on road network in the medium to long term, unless measures are introduced to promote modal shift.	General Practice health services	infrastructure provision at the regional and national level, e.g. implications for funding priorities for SEEDA, Housing Corporation.
	Community facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools: sufficient, subject to provision of planned primary school expansion and new build; likely requirement for new secondary school. • Contributions towards library, adult education, youth, sport and/or arts and cultural facilities will be necessary. • See next column for health services. 		
High (maximum) growth Equivalent to population increase of more than 1,850 per annum (in excess of planned growth to 2011).	Economy	High levels of economic growth will require high levels of population growth (over currently planned levels of growth). Net commuting assumed to be close to zero. Employment offers and opportunities in Ashford will need to be more attractive relative to alternative locations with some 50% of growth occurring at the expense of other labour markets in Kent.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant administrative bottlenecks with respect to management of such change • Alternative water supply sources (e.g. raising of Bewl Reservoir) will be required in the medium term (see above) • Bybrook waste water treatment plant not identified for improvement during the current investment period (to 2005). Urgent investment will be necessary during AMP4 (2005-2010), potentially in a new treatment facility. Cost and lead in time for the completion of a 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economically, will require “intensive care” measures by public agencies, including SEEDA and the Learning & Skills Council, to stimulate substantial growth higher than that currently planned • Review of county and sub-regional strategy • Early investment in key physical and social infrastructure required, with fundamental changes to planning and funding regimes. • Management of impacts
	Urban capacity	Existing urban capacity would not sustain such growth in housing over the longer term; greenfield sites for expansion would be expected under this scenario, in the context of a sequential approach (see town centre, below)		

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Alternative capacity tests ¹³⁶	Key implications for development		Key capacity “bottlenecks” ¹³⁷ likely to arise, significantly constraining growth or affecting quality of life	Implications for wider strategy and Steering Group partners
	Key determining issues	Forecast state of play/ issues arising		
	Transport infrastructure	Investment necessary in the short term to enhance Ashford’s regional role, reducing congestion, stimulating investment and maintaining the attractiveness of Ashford. Significant enhanced public transport potential. Improvements to gyratory movements likely to be required, particularly in the western arc.	<p>new facility place limitations on the scale of growth in the medium term. Risks include deterioration in the biological quality of the Stour and discharges in excess of consented flow.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Waste targets will need to be met within existing development and as part of new development. Potential increased pressure for an energy from waste facility in Kent Regional commuter services require significant upgrade Short/medium term capacity problems with respect to local health services and schools 	required on other priority areas of investment, e.g. East Kent.
	Community facilities	Substantial investment in community – schools and adult education, library, arts and culture, sport and leisure, and youth – facilities will be essential to maintain and enhance Ashford’s quality of life.		
	Town centre	Additional growth in demand for consumer and other services has positive implications for the town centre. Significant expansion of retail and office function. Need to reserve town centre brownfield sites for employment/ commercial/ leisure uses with potential knock on effects for urban housing capacity. Promote “Halo” multi-use library & learning centre.		
	Environmental management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Water supply: impact of demand reduction likely to be less given rapid rate of development. Urgent 		

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	<i>Key determining issues</i>	<i>Forecast state of play/ issues arising</i>		
		<p>need for new supply sources likely to be required in the medium term. Potential implications for supply across the broader region.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water quality: new water treatment facility to accommodate development in the short to medium term. Additional measures include the provision of an integrated attenuation pond system as part of new development. • Flood plain: the development of greenfield sites will be determined by the extent of the flood plain. • Waste: urgent need for additional waste treatment facility. 		

