

Ashford Partnership

# **Ashford Borough Community Strategy**

2004 - 2014

The Local Government Act 2000 introduced a new power for local authorities to promote the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of their area and a duty to prepare community strategies. Many of the key issues affecting local communities cross organisational boundaries. Therefore, communities need to know that all the relevant organisations in their area (public, private and voluntary) are working together in a common and co-ordinated way to deliver the services they need.

This process is known as Community Planning and encourages organisations to look at how their services interact and could be more productive in the delivery of services to their area. Community planning is very much about sharing agendas, agreeing on issues, and working with local communities and partner organisations to achieve a bigger impact by combining resources and capitalising on the skills and experience that others can offer. Community planning is a complex process with huge potential benefits.

This is the first community strategy for Ashford borough that sets out some shared objectives to help us work together to achieve the best quality of life for all who live, work and visit the borough.

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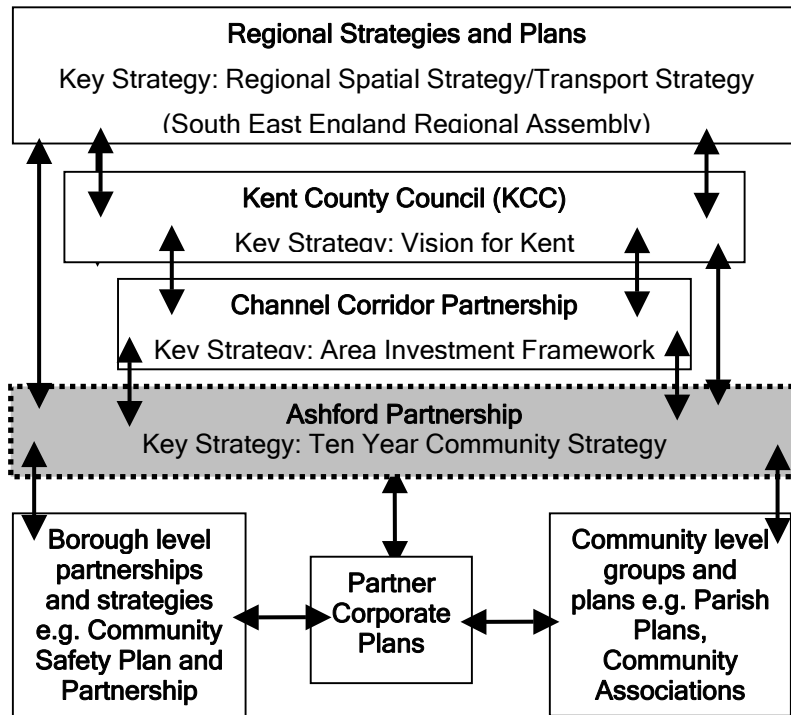
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## The Community Strategy

This strategy will act as an 'umbrella' document for the whole of Ashford borough. It does not and will not replace other specific plans and strategies. It begins to set out a shared long-term vision for the area that reflects local aspirations and provides a way of agreeing what the priorities should be. It therefore draws upon all regional, county, borough and neighbourhood strategies and plans. The following diagram illustrates how the community strategy fits into the wider picture:



Major agencies who can deliver on the priorities of the local community have been involved in drafting this strategy. With total public

expenditure in the borough of around £523 million, the community strategy is crucial in ensuring these priorities are reflected in resource allocation and in the delivery of mainstream services.

## The Local Strategic Partnership

Central Government wants to see community strategies being prepared by 'local strategic partnerships' (LSP's). The LSP for Ashford borough, the Ashford Partnership, was set up in August 2002 and includes the following key organisations from the public, community, voluntary and private sector:

- Ashford Borough Council
- Ashford (Kent) Chamber of Commerce
- Ashford Citizens Advice Bureau
- Ashford Committee of the Kent Association of Parish Councils
- Ashford Primary Care Trust
- Churches Together in Ashford
- Government Office for the South East
- Housing Corporation
- Kent County Council
- Kent Police
- Kent Rural Community Council
- Mid and South East Kent Council for Voluntary Service
- South East England Development Agency
- South Kent College

The role of the LSP is to work with communities and local partner organisations to identify local needs, highlight priorities for the short, medium and long term, analyse resources, initiate action and review progress.

## The Ashford Partnership

Our role is to make sure we work together wherever possible to deliver the services you need and deserve, particularly dealing with issues that cannot be dealt with by individual agencies acting alone. We will also provide strategic direction, ensure other organisations are involved that have a part to play in this process and oversee the delivery of this community strategy.

This strategy is only part of the community planning process. The success of this strategy will depend on the ability and commitment of local organisations to work together. Effective partnership working takes time and effort to develop and will not happen automatically.

It is true partnership working that will deliver for local people, not a document. We need to avoid the possibility that this strategy is seen as the only product of the process - it clearly is not. This is an ongoing process and we will work with local communities and local partner organisations to make sure we focus on local issues and priorities and deliver the services needed.

David Hill

**Chair of the Ashford Partnership**

## Where are we now?

A visitor to the borough couldn't fail to be struck by the beauty of our surroundings, especially our villages and countryside, but they would probably criticise the disjointed and road-dominated town centre of Ashford and wonder why the open spaces running into the town centre weren't better used. If the outsider stayed a little longer, they would soon also see evidence of the strength and spirit of communities throughout the borough and the scale of voluntary activity. But search a little deeper and the isolation of some people, typically the elderly and less well off, in both urban and rural areas, might also become apparent.

In outward signs the economy would look very prosperous, as indeed it is - but there are pockets of deprivation and education and skills levels remain low by the standards of the South East.

Ashford is therefore an essentially strong place with a lot of untapped potential and there is a huge opportunity to create a better borough for all.

### What are the key challenges and issues?

To realise our vision, the borough has to meet a number of key challenges over the next ten years. Ashford borough has the further challenge of accommodating the planned growth over the next thirty years of 31,000 new homes and 28,700 new jobs.

The key challenges and issues are to:

- Ensure effective public services, particularly health and education provision that meets the needs of residents in the borough
- Provide skills training, further and higher education opportunities to help strengthen the economy
- Encourage businesses to locate in Ashford borough in line with population growth to reduce the outflow of workers
- Provide adequate voluntary sector services to support future growth
- Achieve a realistic balance between new homes and new jobs
- Provide good social and community facilities for both existing communities and in line with future growth
- Make improvements to the transport network serving the borough
- Protect the villages and surrounding countryside from any adverse impact of growth
- Achieve a better range of facilities in Ashford town centre, including shopping, jobs and leisure activities and a greatly improved urban environment
- Increase the supply of water and reduce demand by better water efficiency

- Protect the flood plains and make sure future growth does not increase flood risks
- Make sure we strengthen the sense of identity and place in the borough as we grow

In order to meet these challenges we need to make use of the clear links that exist between other partnerships and groups working to deliver services within the borough.

### How was this strategy prepared?

This is the first community strategy for the borough of Ashford which draws on the following:

- regional, county, borough and neighbourhood plans and strategies;
- the ongoing work of Ashford's Future;
- consultation and engagement that has taken place to date with a wide range of groups, organisations and members of the public.

To start off this process, a community conference was held in September 2002, which gave local groups the opportunity to let us know their views. This information formed the basis of a one year framework (published June 2003). The purpose of the framework was to test we were heading in the right direction and based on the consultation results it was a promising start.

The Ashford Partnership built on this framework to create a draft ten year strategy, published for consultation in February 2004. Around 50

representative organisations took the opportunity to give their views, with virtually all supporting the key priorities and wanting to be involved in this process. These organisations included parish councils, local churches, clubs, forums, voluntary groups and service providers.

### Ashford 2014 - The Vision

*“Set in the heart of the Garden of England, Ashford borough provides a safe, healthy and thriving environment that offers an excellent quality of life to all who live, work and visit the area.”*

To achieve this, over the next ten years, we aim to:

- Provide access to excellent health and social care facilities for all
- Revitalise and transform Ashford town centre with quality new development and public spaces
- Raise education, skills and training levels, especially basic skills and those needed for work
- Balance the built and natural environment to ensure its sustainability both for now and the future
- Provide good transport links to, from and within the borough that are sustainable, convenient, safe and affordable
- Encourage new jobs and businesses to flourish and market Ashford borough as the place to invest
- Improve the range of cultural and leisure activities throughout the borough
- Create strong, active and cohesive communities giving everyone access to services and opportunities

- Reduce crime and disorder within the borough and reinforce the right for all to live free from the fear of crime.

### Key Themes

Eight key themes have been identified that reflect the vision and aims. Although laid out in themes for this document, we recognise the strong links between them and they should not be seen in isolation.



## Health and Social Care

**Our aim:** To provide access to excellent health and social care facilities for all

Ashford will need to develop modern health and social care services to keep pace with its expansion and population increase. We want to ensure that Ashford hospitals provide excellent intensive specialised treatments and that professional health and social care staff provide high quality health and community care. There is a particular need to improve the health and well-being of children and strengthen services for older people.

### Our key priorities are to:

- Improve access to primary care services e.g. doctors, dentists, health visitors etc
  - Improve the health and wellbeing of children including nutrition, safety and mental health
  - Ensure increasingly dependent and disabled people can remain in their own home and be cared for in their local community
  - Make sure that health and social care services work together and keep pace with the population growth
  - Reduce health inequalities
  - Implement the Kent Health and Affordable Warmth Strategy to ensure affordable warmth for all homes
- Developing a joint Older People's Strategy for the borough
  - Developing a multi-agency recuperative care project for older people in sheltered housing
  - Developing community based initiatives through the Ray Allen Healthy Living Centre

### We are already:

- Developing a broad strategy between statutory agencies and the voluntary sector to define the pattern of health and social care services for the future of Ashford
- Working in partnership with the Sure Start programme to improve services for 0-4 year olds and their families
- Developing a preventative/early intervention strategy for children and families

### In the next 10 years we aim to:

- Achieve Public Service Agreement (PSA) and Local Delivery Plan targets associated with looked after children and teenage pregnancy
- Develop a joint strategy to ensure housing developments are informed by health and social care needs
- Develop an agreed approach on public access to health and social care services, including access by disadvantaged groups

### In the next 5 years we aim to:

- Form a Children's Consortia for the borough
- Open two Children's Centres in South Ashford

A three year action plan (with milestones)  
is included in the back of this document

# Lifelong Learning

**Our aim:** To raise education, skills and training levels, especially basic skills and those needed for work

The rapid growth of the town of Ashford will substantially impact on all areas of learning from nursery provision through to primary and secondary, further and higher education. Employment growth will also need to rise from around 350 new jobs required each year from 2001-2006 to 1,000 each year between 2011 to 2016. This will increase the demand on the local people to have the right skills and training that employers require.

The vision is to provide access to lifelong learning and education and skills training in order to enable everyone in the borough to achieve their potential.

## Our key priorities are to:

- Provide high quality educational provision for all primary, secondary and post 16 pupils
- Bring together all stakeholders in education and training to identify gaps in provision and respond to future training and skills development needs
- Make sure provision keeps pace with the population growth e.g. new schools
- Raise the skills levels to meet the needs of local employers
- Improve the educational achievements of all our children
- Develop schools as a genuine community asset used by everyone

## We are already:

- Setting up UK Online computer access centres in the borough
- Supporting the early years centre at the Ray Allen Centre
- Creating information technology (IT) facilities in libraries throughout the borough

## In the next 10 years we aim to:

- Increase educational attainment of all school age children
- Increase the number of schools judged as being good or excellent to 75% for primary schools and 80% for secondary schools
- Reduce the number of failing schools to nil and reduce the number of schools judged to have serious weaknesses by three quarters
- To enhance further education provision and ensure local provision of higher education

## In the next 5 years we aim to:

- Open the new Ashford Discovery Centre in Ashford town housing a state of the art library, open learning zone, voluntary sector offices, café bar etc

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# Transport

**Our aim:** To provide good transport links to, from and within the borough that are sustainable, convenient, safe and affordable

Getting the right transport system is crucial for the everyday life of the communities within the borough. In the wider regional and national interest as well as meeting our local needs, there needs to be a better quality and faster rail service and improved access to the motorway - particularly the replacement of Junction 10. The transport system for Ashford town must quickly become better integrated and provide more alternatives to using the car. Slower speeds and safer, people-friendly streets make for better places and are a priority in towns and villages in the borough. In Ashford itself a successful future depends on this sort of change so that the growing town is a place that people want to visit, enjoy and invest in.

## Our key priorities are to:

- Have a fully integrated and sustainable transport strategy for the borough
- Have an improved, better integrated and affordable public transport system across the borough
- Make Ashford town centre more accessible
- Create safer roads, with slower traffic and put an end to anti-social driving
- Ensure fewer children are hurt in road accidents
- Secure a better rail service, providing fast and efficient links to the rest of the country and Europe
- Secure better access to the national motorway network, particularly Junction 10 of the M20

## We are already:

- Undertaking a joint Transport Study for South Ashford
- Producing a joint bus strategy for Ashford borough
- Piloting new schemes of rural transport

## In the next 10 years we aim to:

- Upgrade the Ashford to Hastings railway line
- Complete the new M20 Junction 10a scheme
- Start a new integrated public transport system

## In the next 5 years we aim to:

- Ensure new bus services are introduced to serve new developments
- Complete the cycleway network through Ashford urban area
- Implement a calmed ring road and extended pedestrian areas within the town centre
- Establish a clear town centre public transport hub
- Establish a new parking strategy for the borough including the provision of a first Park & Ride site
- Make sure all schools have adopted and implemented school transport plans and good practice for child safety
- Make sure all major employers (over 250 staff) have adopted and implemented Green Travel Plans

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## Housing and the Environment

**Our aim:** To balance the built and natural environment to ensure its sustainability both for now and the future

In many ways the environment is the key to the future of the borough. Both the natural and the built environment of the towns and villages combine to create its distinctive character. The key elements of the environment are the existing urban areas of Ashford and Tenterden, the attractive rural settlements and the surrounding rural landscape. The growth of Ashford must generate improvements to the quality of the urban environment - protect the quality of rural settlements and ensure protection of, and access to, the highest quality countryside. Housing in the borough is a critical factor to ensure an appropriate quality of life for all residents. It is important the existing stock of dwellings is protected, enhanced and improved. New dwellings in the borough should be built to the highest standards of design, sustainable construction and energy conservation. New housing development should also provide a proportion of dwellings at affordable levels and cater for the needs of key workers.

### Our key priorities are to:

- Work together to ensure all housing is of the highest quality contributing to the independence of individuals and families
- Give local people a strong influence on the growth of the borough
- Enhance the borough's natural and built environment, making sure new developments are sympathetic to existing landscapes, buildings and communities
- Protect the villages and surrounding countryside from any adverse impact of growth
- Provide a wide choice and mix of housing throughout the borough
- Increase the supply of water and reduce demand by better water efficiency
- Protect the flood plains and make sure future growth does not increase flood risks

- Adopt a strategic approach to energy efficiency and environmental protection
- See less waste, more recycling, fuel-efficient homes buildings and more use of renewable energy supplies
- Create more accessible green space, creating social and leisure space for local people

### We are already:

- Involving local people in the planning and design of their neighbourhood

### In the next 10 years we aim to:

- Provide an appropriate proportion of the 31,000 homes and the 28,700 jobs required in Regional Planning Guidance (RPG)

### In the next 5 years we aim to:

- Ensure an affordable housing policy is implemented to provide an adequate proportion of affordable homes and accommodation for key workers
- Ensure sustainable construction methods are used in new buildings

- Maintain and improve existing public sector housing stock

- Open an Environmental Education Centre in Singleton

## Social Inclusion

**Our aim:** To create strong, active and cohesive communities giving everyone access to services and opportunities

Our aim is not simply to tackle areas of deprivation; we want to see strong, active and cohesive communities everywhere that will benefit from future growth and development. Improvement in access to services and opportunities is a priority so that no one within the borough is profoundly disadvantaged or excluded. This will only be achieved by optimising additional national and regional funding schemes and ultimately by pooled partnership budgets that shape service delivery within the borough.

### Our key priorities are to:

- Work with local communities to tackle wards and pockets of deprivation throughout the borough
- Improve access to services in identified rural areas
- Improve education opportunities and attainment
- Improve earning potential and employment opportunities for residents of the borough
- Support the role of the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) in delivering services within the borough
- Encourage the development of active and sustainable local communities

### We are already:

- Working in partnership to deliver programmes and schemes such as Single Regeneration Budget, Children's Fund, Sure Start, Community Action for South Kent (CASK), New Opportunities Fund, Leader Plus and Private Finance Initiative in Stanhope
- Developing community forums in urban Ashford

- Supporting the Voluntary Sector Compact to ensure effective partnership working in the delivery of local services

### In the next 10 years we aim to:

- Raise levels of income and employment to ensure that no areas within the borough rank within the bottom 20% nationally
- Raise the standard of education in urban areas so that they no longer rank within the bottom 20% nationally

### In the next 5 years we aim to:

- Raise levels of income and employment in Stanhope to ensure it no longer ranks within the bottom 10% nationally
- Raise the standard of education in urban areas so that they no longer rank within the bottom 10% nationally
- Improve the provision of services for targeted rural communities

A three year action plan (with milestones)  
is included in the back of this document

## Prosperity

**Our aim:** To encourage new jobs and businesses to flourish and market Ashford borough as the place to invest

If Ashford's future is to be truly sustainable, it is fundamental that we create an environment that encourages business growth and enterprise and maximise employment opportunities for existing and new residents of the borough. To do this, we will need to attract and develop employers offering a wider range of jobs at all skill levels in both existing and emerging growth sectors. We will also need to attract new residents with the skills and provide existing residents with the opportunities to achieve the skills necessary to support a growing economy. Housing developments must meet the needs of all residents whether they be key workers or managing directors, young professionals or growing families. The town centre must provide a vibrant and attractive heart, offering a range of quality retail, leisure and business facilities within a welcoming and safe environment.

### Our key priorities are to:

- Ensure Ashford borough enjoys a balance between homes, jobs and leisure
- Maximise employment opportunities for the residents of the borough and create economic wealth for all
- Provide an environment that is conducive to business growth and enterprise
- Encourage new businesses and support existing businesses (particularly SME's) throughout the borough
- Encourage and engage businesses in partnership activity throughout the borough
- Hosting a jobs fair with local businesses to raise awareness of job opportunities

### In the next 10 years we aim to:

- Ensure major employment growth particularly in the town centre
- Complete the second major retail development within the town centre, adjacent to Park Mall

### In the next 5 years we aim to:

- Complete a major retail development within the town centre, adjacent to County Square
- Provide an appropriate balance between new homes and jobs

### We are already:

- Providing business support services through Ashford Business Point
- Hosting a Careers Convention for 13 year olds in conjunction with local schools

A three year action plan (with milestones)  
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- Develop further Centres of Vocational Excellence (COVE's) in the borough

## Community Safety

**Our aim:** To reduce crime and disorder within the borough and reinforce the right for all to live free from the fear of crime

Permanently reducing crime requires a total partnership commitment. A sense of public safety can be achieved by actively bringing to justice those individuals who choose criminality as a way of life, whilst discouraging others from pursuing such a lifestyle by instilling citizenship and values through education. Other factors such as drug and alcohol dependency, truancy, breakdown in relationships and a lack of understanding and tolerance of a diverse community also need addressing. The Ashford Borough Community Safety Partnership will lead this theme in terms of community consultation, audit, target setting and accountability and this will be supported by the Ashford Partnership.

### Our key priorities are to:

- Ensure effective multi-agency working through continual development of the Community Safety Partnership (Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership - CDRP)
- Develop a rolling three year plan targeting relevant local and national issues
- Tackle anti-social behaviour and the impact it has upon local communities
- Improve the reality and perception of safer communities
- Raise the public profile of the Community Safety Partnership

### We are already:

- Providing a 24 hour East Kent Racial Incident Line
- Increasing our mobile CCTV capability around the borough
- Providing a 24 hour East Kent Homophobic Incident Reporting Line
- Supporting a Family Focus Group to tackle and reduce criminal behaviour
- Introducing Automated Number Plate Recognition systems in the area
- Developing a multi-agency approach to reducing domestic violence

### In the next 10 years we aim to:

- Have Neighbourhood Wardens/Community Support Officers in all targeted communities
- Ensure all targeted parishes have access to a rural community warden
- Develop and implement a rolling three year Crime & Disorder Reduction Plan

### In the next 5 years we aim to:

- Ensure access to mobile CCTV capability in all targeted areas
- Remove the problem of ring road racers
- Have a fully resourced community safety unit, expanding in line with the growth of the borough

A three year action plan (with milestones)  
is included in the back of this document

## Leisure and Culture

**Our aim:** To improve the range of cultural and leisure activities throughout the borough

Improving the borough's leisure and cultural services is critical if the large scale growth planned for Ashford is to meet the communities aspirations. A thriving cultural environment promotes social and economic wellbeing and will contribute to a successful, healthy and vibrant community.

Our aim is to take a leading role in promoting creative partnerships, encouraging and enabling the public, private, voluntary and community sectors to work together to create new and improved leisure and cultural services and opportunities. This leisure and cultural agenda aims to help bring together these local and regional partners. It is only in this way that we can positively exploit everyone's energy and resources to provide leisure and cultural services to meet local needs.

### Our key priorities are to:

- Promote creative partnerships, encouraging and enabling the public, private, voluntary and community sectors to work together to improve cultural and leisure activity in the borough
- Have high quality leisure and cultural facilities and opportunities to meet current needs, which can grow with the borough
- Utilise and invest in existing buildings and resources to provide high quality leisure and cultural facilities
- Ensure provision of affordable sports facilities throughout the borough

### We are already:

- Supporting and enabling social enterprise through local trusts and partnerships as a best value means of providing services
- Working with schools to encourage the wider community to make better use of school facilities
- Providing services through the Sk8side Youth One Stop Shop
- Working with young people particularly through the Youth Forum

### In the next 10 years we aim to:

- Open an Exhibition and Conference Centre close to the International train station

### In the next 5 years we aim to:

- Promote a month long summer Arts Festival
- Open a new Ashford Arts Centre

A three year action plan (with milestones)  
is included in the back of this document

## What happens next?

This community strategy is not set in stone and is designed to develop and evolve to reflect the needs and aspirations of the borough. To do this, we need to continually engage with residents, businesses and other stakeholders. It is essential that we monitor the three year actions (included in the back of this document) and inform you of their progress.

It is important that we now turn these words into actions. To do this, each theme is led by a member of the Ashford Partnership, supported by a lead officer.

It is their responsibility to make sure we achieve the aims and priorities set out in this strategy. Where possible, the lead partner for each theme will work with existing partnerships, such as the Ashford Borough Community Safety Partnership. Where partnerships do not currently exist, it may be necessary to create new partnerships to support this work.

If you have any views or would like any further information, please contact:

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