

Ashford Partnership

**Stakeholder Workshop
Discussion Paper**

Thursday 6 March 2008
9:30 to 2pm
Holiday Inn Central – Ashford

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Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to provide context and prompts for discussion both at the Ashford Partnership workshop to be held on 6 March 2008 and subsequently through further and wider stakeholder consultation.
- 1.2 This paper has been produced to provide an analysis and profile of the economic, social and environment dimensions of Ashford so to encourage discussion and the sharing of local knowledge that will add texture and a fine grain to the statistical data
- 1.3 The output from the workshop will be used to help shape a first draft of a refreshed Sustainable Community Strategy for the Borough which will be used to undertake further and wider stakeholder consultation. The feedback received from this consultation will inform a final draft for adoption and publication by Ashford Partnership and its partner organisations.

- 1.4 The following sections in this paper include:

Section 2 – State of Ashford Analysis – profiles the Borough against other local authorities

Section 3 – Resident Survey – summaries the main findings of the Ipsos MORI survey undertaken in July 2006

Section 4 - Headline messages – summaries the key messages emerging from analysis, resident surveys and stakeholder discussions

Section 5 – Vision and Priority Themes – introduces current policy emphasis and a more focused analysis along with relevant Key Agreement Indicators for each Theme

Section 6 – Governance and Joint Working – presents the current thinking around governance and joint working arrangements

Section 7 - Prompts for Discussion – draws from the analysis, headline messages and current vision, priority themes and joint working arrangements to help stakeholder engagement and input into the process of refreshing the strategy

Section 8 - Next steps – provides an approximate timeline with key milestone for producing ***Ashford Partnership's Sustainable Community Strategy***

Appendix 1 – Strategy Structure – proposes structure, content and direction of travel for the refreshed **Sustainable Community Strategy**

2.0 State of Ashford Analysis

2.1 The Local Futures Audit draws on quantitative data which helps to paint a picture of life across Ashford. The findings are summarised below. The scorecard uses an 'A' to 'E' scale to provide an overarching high level analysis of Ashford across a range of economic, social and environmental indicators, where 'A' places the Borough in the top 20 per cent of 408 Local Authorities, and 'E' places the Borough in the bottom 20 per cent

	Sub Region	Region	National
Economy			
Economic scale	C	D	C
Productivity	C	D	C
Economic change	A	A	A
Industrial structure	C	D	B
Business & enterprise	C	B	A
Skills & qualifications	C	D	C
Labour market	C	D	C
Society			
Knowledge workers	E	E	D
Prosperity	B	D	B
Deprivation	B	D	B
Inequality	C	D	C
Health	A	C	B
Crime	B	C	C
Environment			
Housing affordability	D	C	D
Floorspace change	D	D	D
Connectivity	D	D	C
Services	C	D	C
Amenities	D	D	C
Natural environment	B	B	B

Source: Local Futures Group

Note – Sub-region = Kent & Medway, Region = South East (as per current regional development agency boundary) and National = Great Britain and occasionally just England

2.2 Section 4, which considers each of the current priority themes, includes a more detailed analysis of several elements within this scorecard. Further analysis can be undertaken as required by the Ashford Partnership.

3.0 Resident Survey

3.1 In July and August 2006 Ipsos MORI undertook face-to-face surveys of 803 residents across the borough. In summary the following findings emerged:

- People in Ashford are currently positive about the quality of life in their own immediate neighbourhood and in the borough more generally; 85% rate their overall quality of life as either good or very good
- Residents identify health services, public safety/low crime levels and the area being free from vandalism/graffiti/damage to property as among the key contributors to a good quality of life. Along with facilities for teenagers these are considered to be important priorities for action by the Council.
- The control of development ranks highly when residents are asked to identify the most important services provided by the authority (35% pick this out from the list of services and only refuse collection comes higher).
- 45% of residents are critical of the success in delivering affordable housing
- There is high public appreciation of the quality of life in Kent and a concern that the considerable pace of change, and development, is happening too fast and without adequate control.
- Younger age groups are especially concerned about affordable housing, public safety/crime and, compared to other age groups, are less pessimistic about the future but less likely to feel they are kept well informed about what the Council and its partners are doing.
- Older age groups are concerned about safety/crime, roads/pavements, and the natural environment. They are more likely than other age groups to feel a sense of belonging.
- Those living in the town of Ashford are relatively less positive about their quality of life than those living elsewhere in the borough and are particularly concerned about public safety/low crime levels, facilities for teenagers and play areas, parks and open spaces.
- Residents living elsewhere in the borough are relatively more positive about their quality of life and their neighbourhoods as a place to live but are relatively less optimistic about what the future holds. Those in rural spots and in Tenterden are more likely than residents in the town of Ashford to focus on the protecting the natural environment, control of building development, traffic, roads and pavements.

- Newer residents (those who have lived in the borough for less than three years) are more positive about the future of their neighbourhood and the borough as a whole, although they are less likely to feel a sense of belonging to either than other groups. They are particularly likely to see the countryside and the natural environment as important in making somewhere a good place to live as well as the area being free from vandalism and graffiti.
- Longer-term residents (who have lived in the borough for more than three years) tend to identify more things that they would like to see improved

3.2 This survey suggests there are some clear areas for improvement and focus in terms of moving ahead:

- **Recognising Resident's Priorities** - Working with partners to focus on optimising residents' priorities including community safety, facilities for teenagers, managing development in a way that is sensitive to the environment and does not outpace the local infrastructure or leave 'locals' behind.
- **Social Cohesion** - Building on past efforts and initiatives, and developing new ones, to foster residents' sense of belonging to the borough.
- **Communication** - Working hard to be seen to be listening and acting on residents' concerns including reminding residents of the many methods used by the Council to involve people in shaping the borough's future (this survey provides another opportunity to do this). In the years to come it will be important to harness a strong narrative about what is being done and how this is making life better locally. Also important will be providing reassurances that the Council and its partners are 'on top' of the pace of change.
- **Place Shaping** - Continuing to think through the impact of physical capital on public opinion. As we describe in our report Physical Capital: Liveability in 2005, while a lot of attention has been given by policy-makers to social capital, deprivation and social cohesion, the very structure and nature of the places being created, and their visual quality, has a strong association with overall public satisfaction with local quality of life.
- **Effective Strategic Thinking** - The need to reassure residents that the Council and its partners are looking beyond the 'here and now' and has well thought-through plans in place to manage future change and challenges
- **Environmental Protection** - It will be important to make it clear what is being done to protect the environment from 'over-development' and ensure that progress does not come at too heavy a price for local residents.

4.0 Headline Messages

4.1 The following headline messages have emerged from a combination of surveys , statistical analysis and partner discussions. This list is not all inclusive and it is envisaged that further messages will emerge over the coming months as part of the process of refreshing the Sustainable Community Strategy.

- 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 address skills poverty and therefore create greater prosperity for all through an ability to attract and develop those businesses that can develop and drive the knowledge economy
- Encourage businesses to locate in Ashford borough in line with population growth to manage 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 and new communities in line with future growth
- Make improvements to the transport network serving the borough
- Protect the villages and surrounding countryside from any adverse impacts 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

5.0 Vision and Priority Themes

Introduction

- 5.1 The current Sustainable Community Strategy has 8 priority themes that support the following overarching vision for the future of the Borough:

“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.”

- 5.2 This section will introduce each priority theme with regard to headline objectives supported by more in depth analysis relating to the scorecard introduced as part of the State of Ashford Analysis under section 2.

Note1 : The charts display the national ranking converted to a percentile score (i.e. the top ranking scores 100% and the bottom ranking 1%)

Note 2 – The presentation at the workshop will provide further in depth analysis

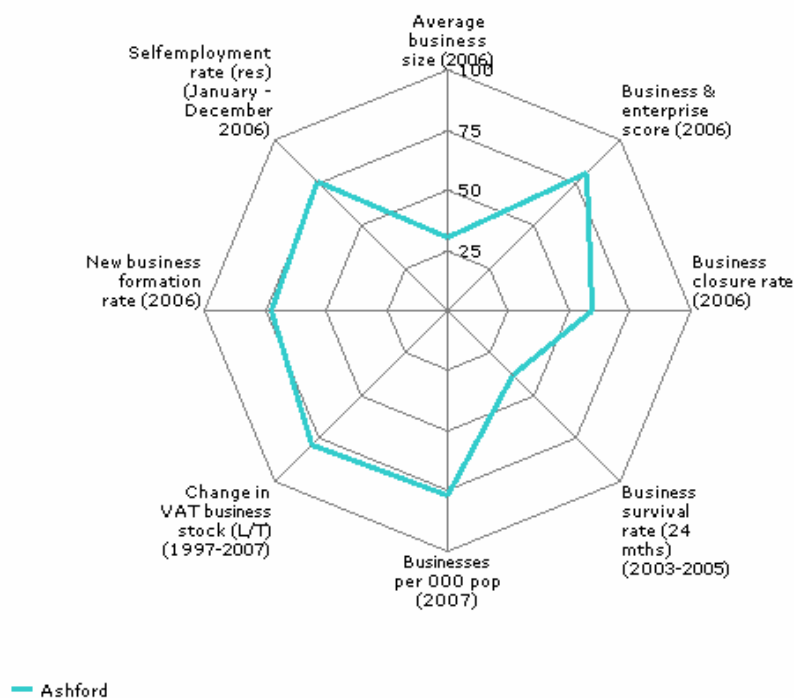
- 5.3 This section will also place the Kent Agreement Indicators against the most relevant priority Theme. These will be considered further against the State of Ashford analysis as part of the performance management process referred to in Appendix 1

Priority Theme 1 - Economic Success – Opportunities For All

Headline Objectives

- Improving enterprise, competitiveness and productivity
- Promoting pathways to economic independence
- Creating a low carbon and climate change resilient economy

State of Borough Analysis- Business and Enterprise



Source: Local Futures Group

In terms of Business and Enterprise Ashford performs well above the national average, just above the regional average and around the Kent and Medway average.

Although the Borough has a high business formation rate it has a relatively poor business survival rate after 24 months which is reinforced by a higher than average business closure rate. This high churn can often reflect a highly entrepreneurial population which if nurtured and developed could help to future proof local economic prosperity against globalisation.

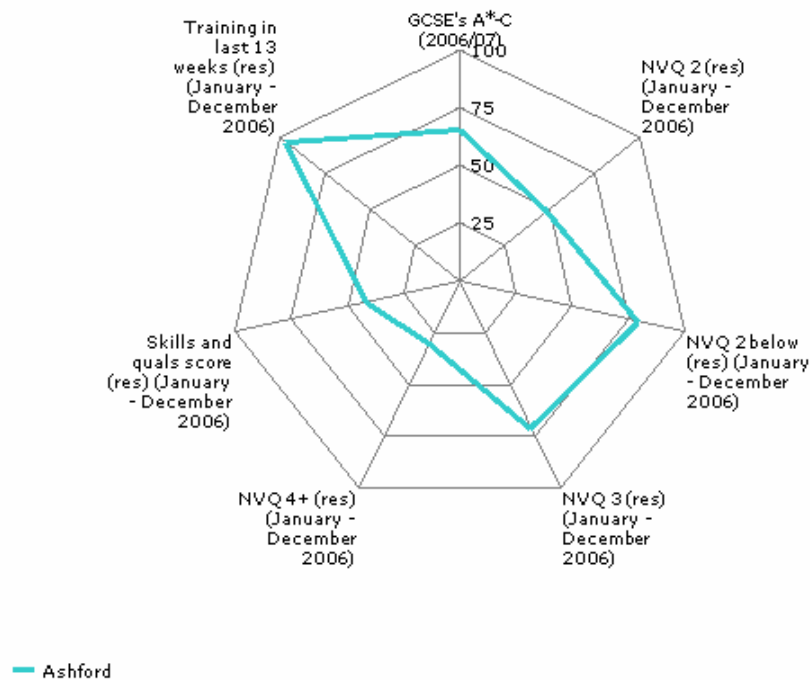
The economy has a high proportion of smaller businesses per head of population which again could play an important role in future proofing against globalisation as compared to those areas that are dependant on multi national business.

Priority Theme 2 - Learning For Everyone

Headline Objectives

- Raising aspirations and transforming skills for young people and adults
- Enhancing education, employment and training opportunities
- 16 Statutory DCSF Indicators

State of Borough Analysis – Skills and Qualifications



Source: Local Futures Group

Although the Borough enjoys a high level of recent training and GCSE results, it has a relatively low proportion of resident's with NVQ4 or equivalent. This can restrict the development of the knowledge economy and the ability to attract new businesses to the area.

Looking to the future Ashford does have a high proportion of residents with NVQ 2 & 3 which highlights significant potential in skills development and increase the proportion of those with NVQ 4 level. The position should play a pivotal role

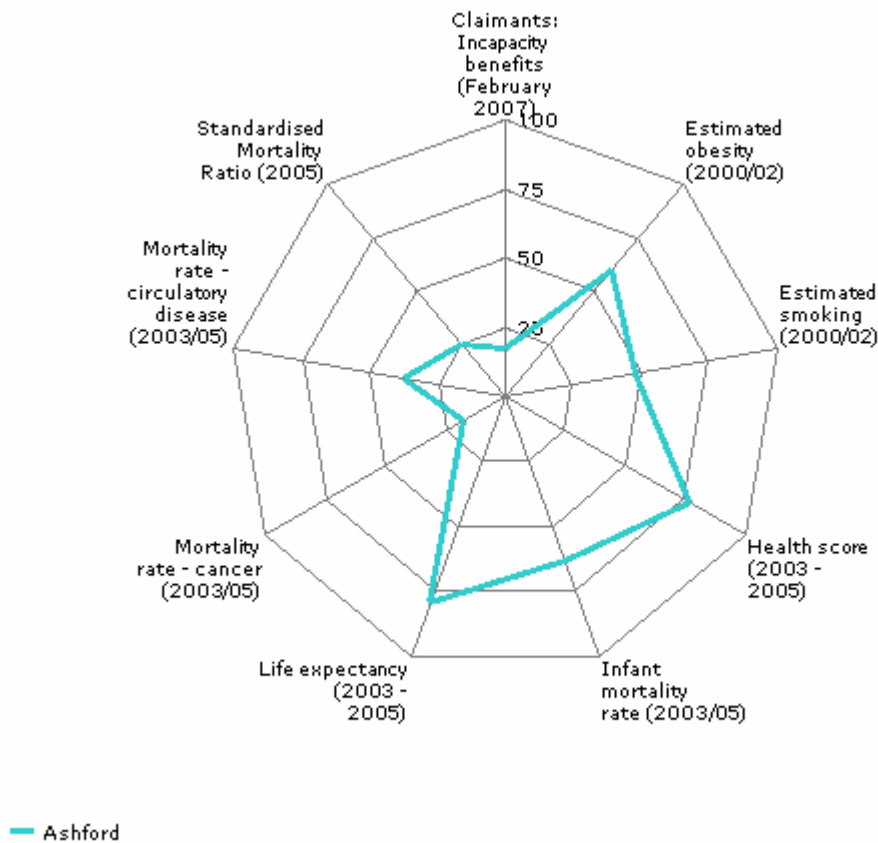
in helping to shape the approach to skills development across the area over the coming years.

Priority Theme 3 - Improved Health, Care & Wellbeing

Headline Objectives

- Reduce inequalities in health and wellbeing
- Reducing drug and alcohol misuse and the harm it causes
- Helping people live life independently
- Improve mental health, care and wellbeing

State of Borough Analysis - Health



Source: Local Futures Group

Overall Ashford performs relatively well with regard to health and well being as compared to the rest of Kent and Medway and nationally, however, it is around the average for the region.

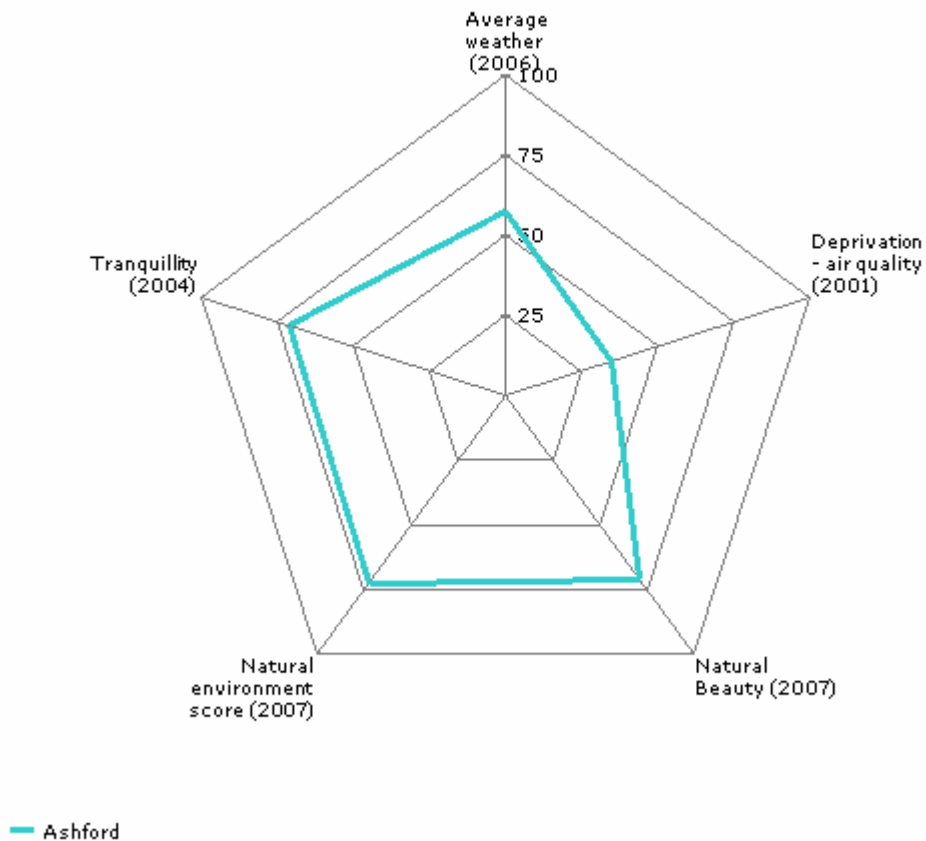
Life expectancy is relatively high with obesity and the infant mortality rate being the only causes for concern against the national average.

Priority Theme 4 - Environmental Excellence

Headline Objectives

- Sustainable water and flood risk management
- Reducing Kent's carbon footprint
- Sustainable management of waste
- Protecting and enhancing biodiversity and landscape in Kent

State of Borough Analysis – Natural Environment



Source: Local Futures Group

Ashford scores relatively well against all comparators with the only area for concern being around air quality. Sustaining this position as part of Ashford's

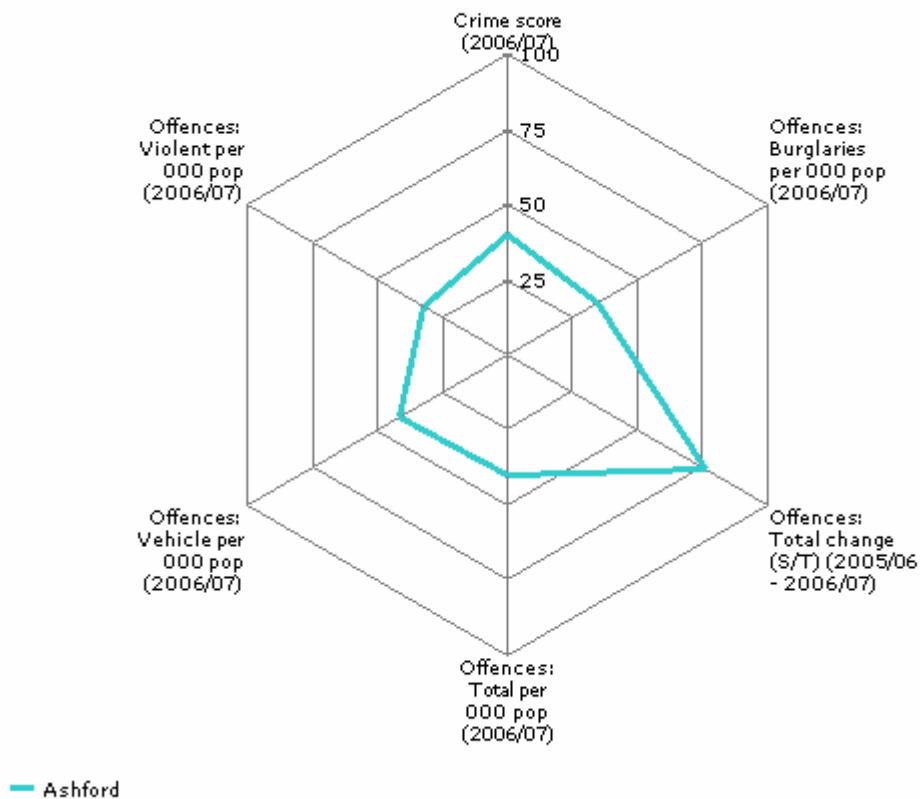
growth will be key in attracting and retaining new business investment and people.

Priority Theme 5 - Stronger & Safer Communities

Headline Objectives

- Improving the quality and appearance of the street scene and open spaces
- Reducing crime and the perception of crime
- Reducing the levels of offending
- Reducing domestic abuse
- Increasing community cohesion, participation and shared sense of belonging

State of Borough Analysis - Crime



Source: Local Futures Group

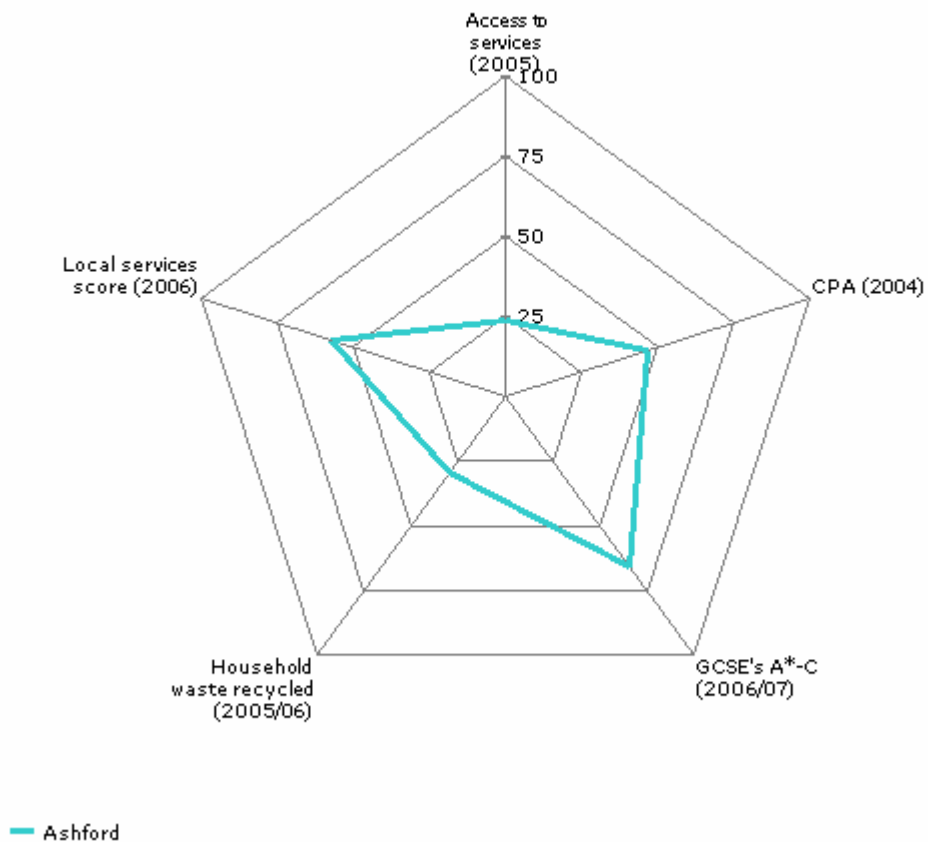
Although Ashford has experienced a relatively high upward change in total number offences, it is still below the national average for all forms of crime

Priority Theme 6 - Enjoying Life

Headline Objectives

- Improving play, cultural, arts, learning and leisure opportunities for all people in Kent
- Increasing involvement in active lifestyles, participation in sport for all ages and maximising the legacy of the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games
- Improving the participation and engagement of all children and young people in community activities

State of Borough Analysis - Services



Source: Local Futures Group

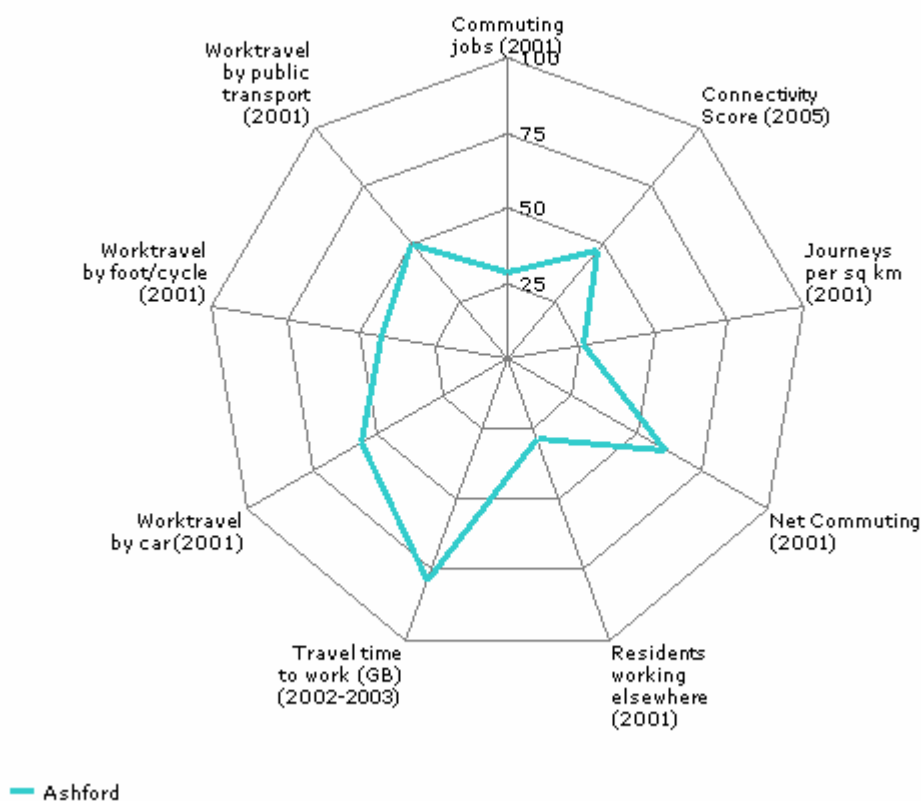
Access to services will always be proportionately lower in rural areas as compared to more urban areas. This being said the Ashford's current regeneration and growth agenda provides an excellent opportunity to improve the range and quality of services and amenities.

Priority Theme 7 - Keeping Kent Moving

Headline Objectives

- Reducing the need to travel and making better use of existing strategic transport infrastructure and reducing the impact of international traffic on Kent and it's communities
- Improving accessibility to jobs and essential services by sustainable modes of travel
- Saving lives and reducing injuries on the roads and pavements

State of Borough Analysis – Connectivity



Source: Local Futures Group

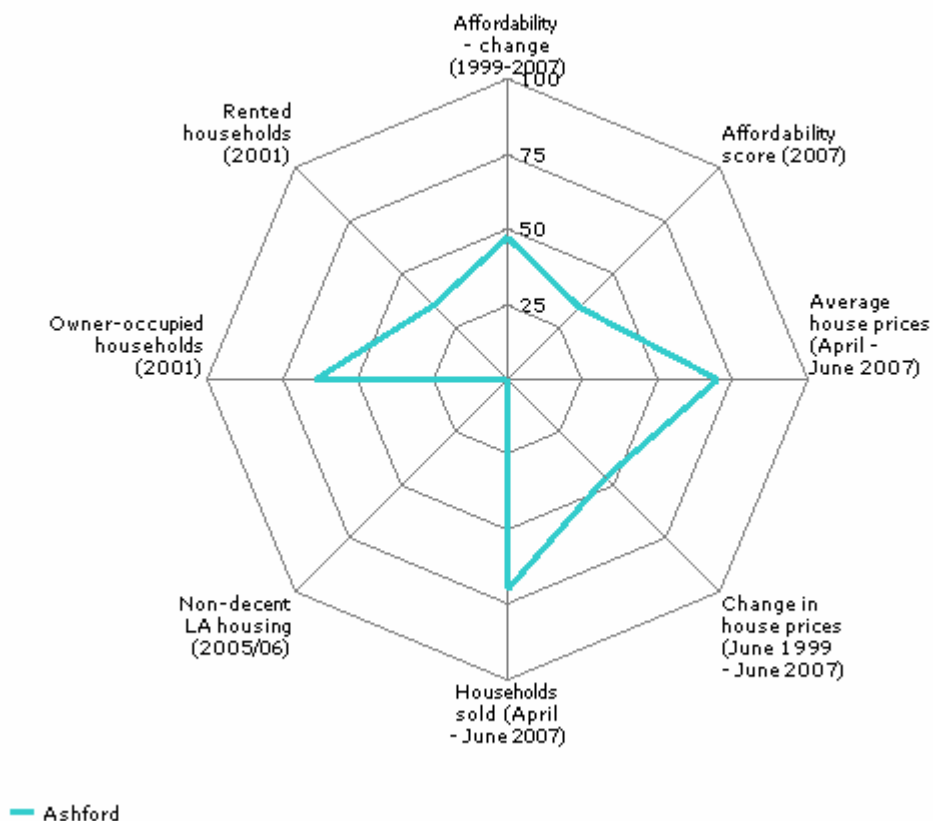
Ashford residents have a relatively high travel to work time which may be explained by a combination of a slow train service to London and poor connectivity to parts of Kent which provide jobs that reflect local skills. Although the new fast rail service will play an important role in improving train times to London, there will still be a need to consider local connectivity issues.

Priority Theme 8 - High Quality Homes

Headline Objectives

- Creating sustainable communities/ Promoting social and physical regeneration
- Delivering sustainable homes incorporating high quality design
- Increasing the supply of housing of all types and tenures
- Improving access to high quality housing for all

State of Borough Analysis - Affordability



Source: Local Futures Group

Housing affordability is a key issue that is restricting local residents, particularly the young, who are finding it almost impossible to get onto the housing ladder. This is reinforced by a high proportion of owner occupation and a low level of accommodation available for rent. It will be important to monitor this situation over the coming years as improved connectivity to London may only exacerbate the problem as more people choose to move to the area and commute.

5.4 As part of the process of refreshing the current Strategy each **Priority Theme** will be considered and developed further with regard to:

- Key Challenges
- Policy Objectives
- Vision position statements for two key dates in the future (say 2019 and 2031)
- Targets for Performance Indicators to reflect the above time horizons
- Signposting to delivery & governance mechanisms that will translate the vision and strategic priority themes into action on the ground.

The workshop and subsequent consultation will be critical in ensuring that stakeholders help shape this process

Key Agreement Indicators

5.5 The following table suggests an initial alignment of the Kent Agreement Indicators against the Priority Themes:

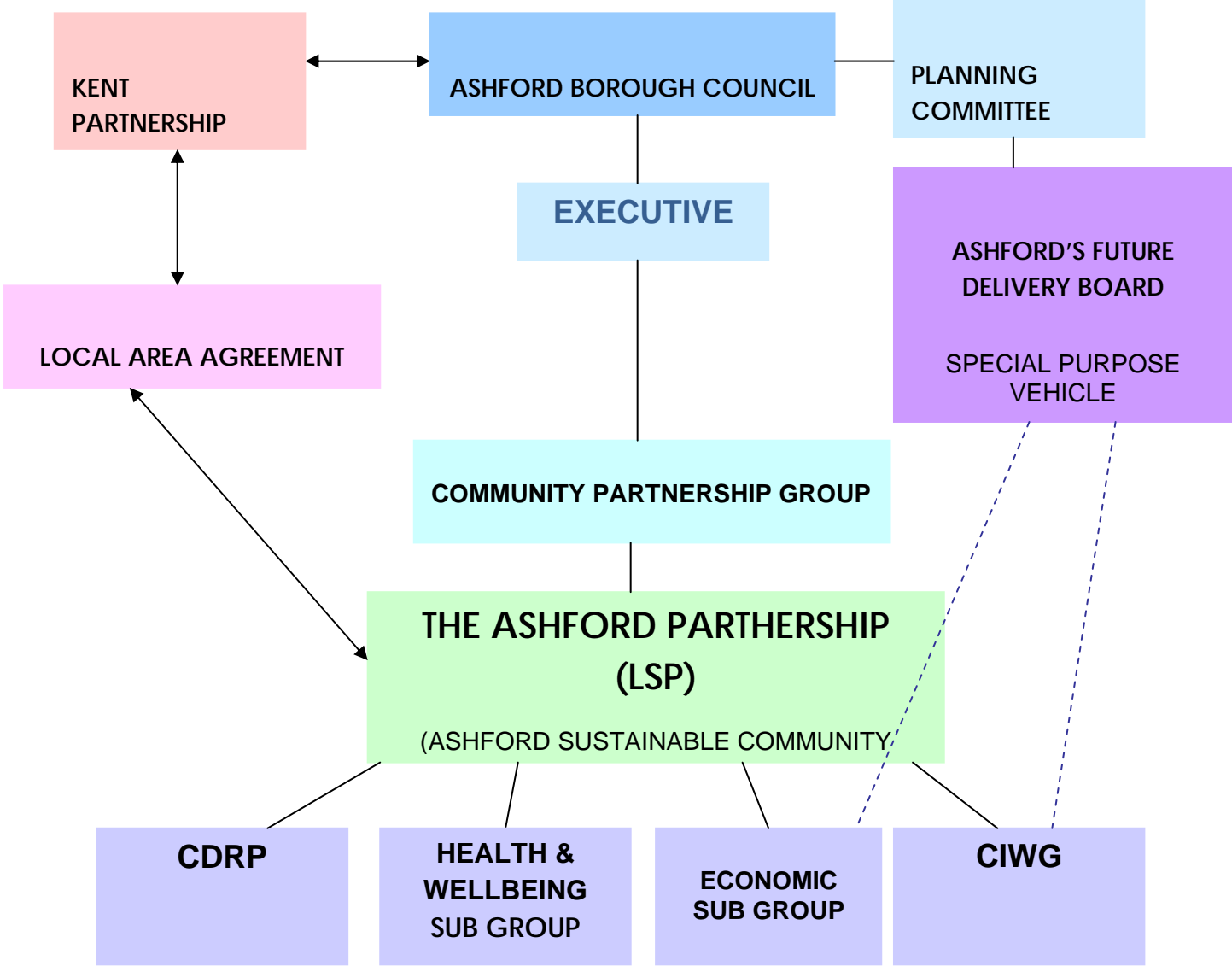
Priority Theme	Kent Agreement Indicator
Economic Success – Opportunities For All	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NI171 VAT registration rate • NI152 Working age people on out of work benefits
Learning For Everyone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NI163 Working age population qualified to at least level 2 or higher “Super Indicator” (see footnote) • NI161 Learners achieving a Level 1 qualification in literacy “Super Indicator” • NI162 Learners achieving an Entry Level 3 qualification in numeracy “Super Indicator” • NI117 16-18 year olds who are not in education, employment or training “Super Indicator” • 16 DCSF Statutory Indicators
Improved Health, Care and Well Being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NI120 All-age all cause mortality rate “Super Indicator” • NI55 Obesity among primary school children in reception year “Super Indicator”

Priority Theme	Kent Agreement Indicator
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NI39 Alcohol-harm related hospital admission rates • NI40 Drug users in effective treatment • NI125 Achieving independence for older people through rehabilitation/intermediate care • NI51 Effectiveness of child and adolescent mental health (CAMHs) services
Environmental Excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NI 188 Adapting to climate change • NI189 Flood and coastal erosion risk management • NI186 Per capita CO2 emissions in the LA area “Super Indicator” • NI191 Residual household waste per head • NI197 Improved local biodiversity – active management of local sites
Stronger and Safer Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NI195 Improved street and environmental cleanliness (levels of graffiti, litter, detritus and fly posting) • NI15 Serious Violent Crime Rate • NI21 Dealing with local concerns about anti-social behaviour and crime by the local council and police • NI111 First time entrants to the Youth Justice System aged 10-17 • NI32 Repeat incidents of domestic abuse • NI3 Civic participation in the local area • NI6 Participation in regular volunteering
Enjoying Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NI11 Engagement in the arts • NI8 Adult participation in sport • NI110 Young people’s participation in positive activities
Keeping Kent Moving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NI198 Children travelling to school – mode of travel usually used • NI175 Access to services and facilities by public transport, walking and cycling • NI47 People killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents
High Quality Homes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NI170 Previously developed land that has been vacant or derelict for more than 5 years • NI187 Tackling fuel poverty – people receiving income based benefits living in homes with a low energy efficiency rating • NI154 Net additional homes provided “Super Indicator” • NI155 Number of affordable homes delivered (gross) “Super Indicator” • NI141 Number of vulnerable people achieving independent living

Note - “Super Indicator” = as part of a Whitehall cross check 19 super indicators of the 198 national indicators have been identified where targets will be set nationally. High level working groups are now drawing up guidance for target setting on these indicators and GOSE will share any negotiation detail with us over the next couple of weeks. Discussions on baselines, data and activity can still begin to take place during this time.

6.0 Governance and Joint Working

- 6.1 Since the first Community Strategy was agreed in 2004 there have a number of changes in the structures involved delivering Ashford’s Growth. The diagram below sets out the key players and their relationships. In particular, the Ashford’s Future Delivery Board and the proposed Special Purpose Vehicle anticipated from April 2008, will drive forward projects to deliver Ashford’s Growth. Two of Ashford’s Future’s working groups (Community Infrastructure and Economic Development) will need to come into a closer relationship with the Ashford Partnership alongside the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership and the Health and Well Being Sub Group.
- 6.2 The second Kent Local Area Agreement will also provide a critical link between the county and borough community strategies. Ashford Borough Council’s Community Partnership Group, established in 2007, now provides a member level review facility for all partnership working in the borough.



7.0 Prompts for Discussion

This section highlights a number of prompts to provide food for thought for the stakeholder event and subsequent consultation.

1. Structure of Strategy

- Do you agree with the suggested proposal in Appendix 1?
- What core values should be emphasised in the strategy?
- Is there an appropriate balance between vision, priorities & delivery?

2. Priority Themes

- Are the suggested themes the right ones?
- Is there a need for greater prioritisation?
- Can housing affordability be effectively dealt with via local/ sub regional policy or is there a need for national approach? (especially with impact of buy to let on the demand side of the housing market)
- How best can the rural / urban mix of the area be expressed in the strategic priority themes?

3. Governance

- What governance structures are in place to lead and co-ordinate a strategic approach to each of the Priority Themes? Are there any gaps and if so how best can they be filled?
- What role should the local authority play in terms of their community development and leadership functions as part of the learning for everyone Priority Theme?
- How does the local partnerships relate to wider regional, national and international organisations, partnerships, networks and agendas?
- How best should business be engaged?
- How best should the voluntary and community sector be engaged?
- How can the Ashford Partnership make best use of the Government's Transport Innovation Fund to improve connectivity and sustainable travel?
- How best can joint working with neighbouring areas (outside formal partnership arrangements) be developed, expressed and managed?
- What could be the focus for a multi area agreement ?
- Do you have sufficient resources to effectively translate the Strategy into local action in your organisation?

4. Policy Issues

- How will local land use policy relate to the emerging Strategy?

- How can the strategy shape and influence the plans and policies of partner organisations?

5. Future Thinking (These are just initial prompts)

In the next 3 years

- What will be the impact of a fall in house prices?
- What businesses will move into/ out of the area?
- How will a change of Government impact on Ashford?
- What social tensions may arise within the area?
- What environmental hazards will the area face?

In 2019

- What will be the skills challenges facing local business?
- What will be the movement patterns of residents and workers?
- What will local government/ governance look like?
- What environmental hazards will the area face?
- How will greater/ less integration with Europe impact on the area?

In 2031:

- What will be the connectivity challenges facing the area?
- What will be the dominant business sectors in the area?
- What will be the spatial requirements of business?
- How will business relate to local labour force?
- What will business support mechanisms look like?
- What will be the demographic profile of the area?
- What environmental hazards will the area face?

8.0 Next steps

8.1 The next steps over the coming months will include:

- **6 March** – Hold Stakeholder event to help shape overall vision, priority focus and direction of travel
- **17 March** – produce and circulate note of Stakeholder event for further and wider feedback and comment
- **March - April 08** - Draft consultation version of strategy for further and wider stakeholder consideration
- **May – June 08** - Feedback report: Capture and analyse feedback on consultation version and seek partner approval
- **July 08** - Produce and launch Sustainable Communities Strategy

Appendix 1 - Proposed Structure of Sustainable Community Strategy

It is suggested that **Ashford Partnership's Sustainable Community Strategy** is drafted around the following headings:

Foreword – This will provide an opportunity for the Ashford Partnership to promote and champion joint working arrangements and introduce the strategy as the key policy tool that will provide a vision and strategic direction for economic, social and environmental prosperity for the Borough over the coming years.

1.0 **Introduction** – It will be important to introduce the strategy in terms of:

- **Purpose** – To galvanise and direct strategic action over the coming years
- **Work Programme** – Introduce and explain the work programme that has underpinned the development of the strategy
- **Sustainable policy** – Reinforce importance of the dynamic between the economic, social and environmental dimensions of place in shaping policy fit for the 21st century
- **Structure** – Provide a rationale for the sections of the strategy including how they relate to each other
- **Timescales** – Explain how the future has been considered
- **Geography** – Introduce and explore the different economic, social and environmental geographies and how they will shape joint working and delivery

2.0 **Strategic Context** - This will introduce quantitative and qualitative analysis undertaken to date:

- **Global and European trends** - An improved awareness of these issues would be needed for Ashford to be able to respond to global economic challenges and opportunities
- **State of Ashford Analysis** – This will reflect how the Borough fits into a national picture and therefore will help partners understand how best to secure investment and resources
- **Policy context** – This will include a brief overview of relevant policies and their potential impacts on the Borough e.g. EU Cohesion Policy, Sub National Review, SEEDA's new Corporate Plan, Local/ Multi Area Agreements, Nottingham Agreement, Transport Innovation Fund and Sustainable Communities Plan.

- 3.0 **Drivers of Change** – This will explore key drivers of change with regard to how they might impact on and across the area and how in turn these impacts need to be considered as part of the vision, prioritisation and strategic direction:
- Globalisation
 - Industrial structure
 - Science and technology
 - Organisational change
 - Demographic change
 - Inequality and social cohesion
 - Environmental and climate change

 - Government and Politics
 - Security
 - Global Health Threats
- 4.0 **Future Thinking** - This will provide a summary of the outputs and outcomes from the Stakeholder events and consultation which will include consideration of the future as a basis for shaping and refining the overall vision and priority themes
- 5.0 **Shaping an Approach for Ashford- Core Values** – Based on consultation and analysis with stakeholders it is suggested that the key core values are expressed so as to indicate the common political and ideological drivers behind the vision and strategic priority themes and approach to policy development and delivery e.g. Quality in Place Shaping, intelligence led policy, form following function in partnership development, fit for purpose delivery, social cohesion to reduce inequalities and economic prosperity that respects social and environmental dimensions of place (and not growth at any cost)
- 6.0 **Vision and Strategic Priorities – (see section 3 below)**
- Overall Vision
 - Each Priority Theme will be considered with regard to:
 - Key Challenges
 - Policy Objectives
 - Vision position statements for two key dates in the future(say 2019 and 2031)
 - Targets for Performance Indicators to reflect the above time horizons
 - Signposting to delivery & governance mechanisms that will translate the vision and strategic priority themes into action on the ground.

Together the vision and Priority Themes express and detail the Ashford partnership's policy emphasis

- 7.0 **Governance and Joint Working** – This will provide an opportunity to explore the structure and approach to joint working across area. This will involve considering the most appropriate joint working arrangements to reflect the flexibility demanded by the different economic, social and environmental dynamics and geographies of the area. It will be important for any working arrangements to enable and encourage individual partner organisations to network and communicate outside any formal structures.
- 8.0 **Linkages** – This section is suggested in order to provide a narrative and commentary as to the dynamic and interrelationship between the Priority Themes.
- 9.0 **Performance Management** – This will include pulling together all the strategic contextual targets (as per scorecard format) and developing a process through which to measure and manage performance. It is envisaged that this could include the development of a ***State of the Borough Report***, as a baseline, through which to capture, analysis and present datasets to help monitor and manage progress.
- 10.0 **Delivery** - This will reinforce the signposting element of section 6. It is suggested that this is expressed as a summary table with policy expressed against delivery mechanisms, strategies and leads. Consideration will be given as to whether this can be put into a timescale so as to reflect a strategic critical path for action.

Publication – design and format - It is proposed at this stage that the finished published strategy reflects the following design /format principles:16-24pages, hard copy and website versions, signed up by all partners within Ashford Partnership, and includes photos and images to illustrate policy and narrative