

Southern Expansion Quarter

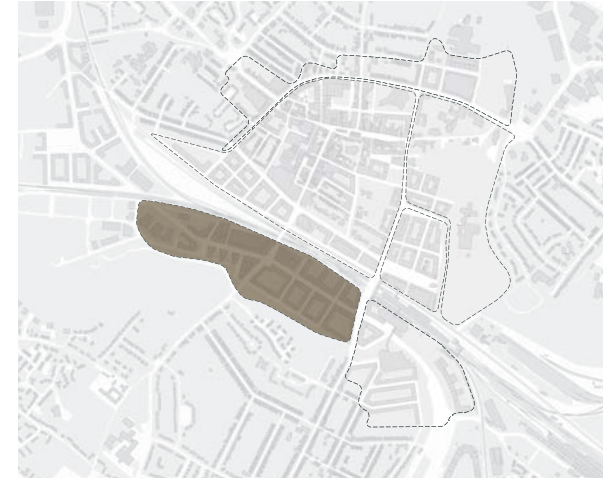
Existing Character and Land Use

Characterised by large areas of vacant land and primarily industrial uses with major transport infrastructure (the railway) creating severance.

Connections across the railway line are restricted to an existing pedestrian/cycle bridge which, although well used, is long and narrow and does not overcome the perception of the railway as a barrier to movement. Both ends of the bridge are poorly connected with areas of 'no man's land' either side.

To the south of the railway the land is currently occupied by mainly industrial uses. The Powergen/gas works site is located to the west of the pedestrian bridge, and to the east there is a mix of light industrial uses and small residential enclaves. Victoria Road Primary School is an attractive building located immediately to the east of the pedestrian bridge.

The River Stour provides an attractive southern boundary to the quarter. However the relationship between the river corridor and the existing development is poorly defined with development turning its back on the river.



Location map



Powergen site

Proposed Character and Land Use

The Southern Expansion Quarter is a key component of the southern extension of the town centre across Elwick Road and the railway. The concept is to bridge the existing site constraints and create a much denser mixed use neighbourhood. The urban structure is built around two principal routes – the Learning Link and Victoria Way - which serve this quarter and connect it with the wider Town Centre environment.

To the south of the railway, Victoria Way will form the key structuring route running east to west and will act as a catalyst for redevelopment of this area. The land between Victoria Way and the Emerald Necklace river corridor to the south will provide major opportunities for residential development benefiting from aspects over the park and with retail elements fronting onto Victoria Way. To the north, between Victoria Way and the railway line, development would be more mixed. A major multi storey car park wrapped with commercial and residential development is envisaged to the west; commercial and Learning and Skills Campus in the central section; and, commercial and hotel site at the eastern end towards Beaver Bridge Road.

The Learning Link is the name for a major structural route established in the Greater Ashford Development Framework as a sustainable transport corridor which links together a series of educational institutions between Elwick Road and the town centre to the north, and Discovery Park to the south.



Public Realm Vision

Physical and Visual Connections: The quarter is an important element in the growth and transformation of the town centre helping the town to transcend the barrier to movement formed by the railway line. This will be achieved both physically through the creation of better connections between south Ashford and Bank Street along the Learning Link, and visually through the perceived expansion of the dense town centre development southwards.

Interpersonal Connections: The concept of this quarter being the focus of learning and living activities shall be integrated and reinforced by encouraging social interaction in the public realm and manifested in pedestrian dominated spaces, such as the planned Learning Link and in opportunities for shared surfaces and homezones in residential areas. Victoria Square and Elwick Square will form two primary spaces at either end of the Learning Link Bridge.

Environmental Connections: Physically and visually connected with the natural environment of the river corridor (Emerald Necklace). New development shall face onto the river along the southern boundary of this quarter with residential accommodation overlooking the natural environment, and a linear riverside promenade establishing a well defined edge.

Low energy new build, integrated rainwater management systems and sustainable design and building practices would reinforce the vision for greater Ashford. SUDs should be fully considered as a part of all new development to ensure flood risk is not increased as a result of development and as a way of informing the character of the public realm and providing a leisure and visual amenity.

Cultural Connections: The southern expansion quarter incorporates culture as an integral part of everyday life with the provision of the Learning and Skills Campus and the concept of the Learning Link. There are also opportunities for education through the Environmental Connections described above. Larger scale public art interventions would be appropriate in the proposed squares at either end of the Green Bridge, and perhaps in the design of the bridge itself to form an iconic structure crossing the railway.



Reduced flood risk utilising SUDS systems



Environmental and educational links to the river



Design Principles

PRINCIPAL ROUTES	
	Victoria Way
	The Learning Link/Bridge
	The Emerald Necklace

PRINCIPAL SPACES	
1	Victoria Square

SECONDARY ROUTES + SPACES	
	SUD's streets - shared surface homezones with integrated SUD's
	Minor roads and small street trees
	North-south links crossing Victoria Way and connecting with the Emerald Necklace.

MISCELLANEOUS	
	New development
	Existing buildings
	Key views
	Stormwater attention and wetland creation where the urban edge meets the 'Emerald Necklace'.
	Potential landmark structure with integrated viewing platform.

Principal Routes

Victoria Way

- Victoria Way will establish a vital strategic route through south Ashford and will serve a number of important functions such as providing a catalyst for development of the Southern Expansion Quarter, providing east-west connections to the wider Ashford, and establishing an alternative route for traffic currently using the ring road. As another piece of east-west aligned movement corridor infrastructure, it is important that the road does not add a further barrier to north-south connections.
- Strong street frontages and continuous building lines along its route through the Southern Expansion Quarter will be important in providing a sense of enclosure to the road and establish the character of an urban street as an integral part of the quarter rather than an engineered highway dissecting it.
- Building heights between 4 and 6 storeys and an overall street width of 24m will provide the required enclosure and allow sufficient space for a single carriageway in each direction, on street parking, dedicated cycleways and footways
- Regularly spaced tree planting and lighting columns will add to the urban boulevard appearance of the street. Other street furniture should be kept to a minimum to limit street clutter.

- Pedestrian crossing points should be direct and preferably located at side road junctions to create good, logical connections between the neighbourhoods either side of the road. A key north-south connection will be located at the junction of Victoria Way and the Learning Link. A wide signalised crossing point shall be provided with opportunities to visually extend elements of the surface materials used in Victoria Square across the carriageway to reinforce the perception of this strong north-south connection.



Dedicated cycleways and footways



Tree lined street



Single carriageway and integrated on street parking

Principal Routes

The Learning Link

- The Learning Link is already a well used pedestrian route and is identified in the Greater Ashford Development Framework as a major structural feature in the growth of the town. The design principles for where the proposed route passes through Victoria Square and across the Learning Link Bridge to connect with Elwick Square have been dealt with above.
- A consistent palette of materials and furniture and a strong tree avenue along the length of the route will visually tie it together and help to define it from other secondary routes which connect into local neighbourhood areas and the Emerald Necklace. Opportunities at the detailed stage of development should be explored for the involvement of an artist and the local community / educational institutions in the design and implementation of the coordinated street furniture and lighting scheme.
- The route will be a predominantly pedestrian and cyclist only link. However, the stretch to the south of Victoria Square which runs along Victoria Park will need to allow vehicular access to adjacent residential properties. The existing road will therefore be downgraded to create a shared surface with minimal definition between pedestrian, cyclist and vehicular routes.
- As a Learning Link there is great potential

for the landscape to become an educational resource with sustainable water management and environmental issues forming a key theme. Opportunities also exist for the diversification of habitats along the route with the introduction of 'outdoor classrooms' for use by local educational facilities and interested local residents at specific points of interest.



Tree lined route



A good quality crossing at the Learning Link



The Learning Link - a strong tree lined route



An educational landscape

Principal Routes

Learning Link Bridge

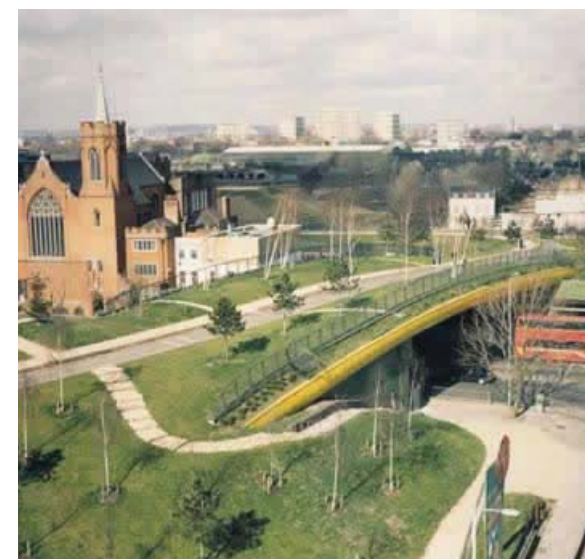
- The main pedestrian link across the railway line and an opportunity for a major sculptural statement and gateway scheme linking north and south Ashford.
- Sharp level changes between the bridge and Elwick Square to the north should be avoided. The transition across the railway should be smooth and apparently seamless. The width of the bridge should be between 6 and 12 metres and be sufficiently wide to accommodate both cyclists and pedestrians and give the perception of being a continuation of Elwick Square and Victoria Square at either end.
- A unified pallet of materials, furniture and integrated lighting should visually tie the bridge in with Victoria Square to the south and Elwick Square to the north.
- Opportunities for safe viewing platforms should be considered to allow people to view trains from the bridge.
- There should be careful consideration not to block important long views from the top of Bank Street looking south, but the bridge has the potential to also form a landmark as an integral part of these views. An iconic structure, representative of Ashford's ambitions.



Iconic structure



The Learning Link could become an icon for Ashford



A seamless bridged link

Principal Spaces

Victoria Square

- A linear space as an integral part of the Learning Link and the point at which the route connects into the town centre.
- The level difference between the Learning Link Bridge and Victoria Way shall be accommodated in a grand staircase or series of stepped level changes which provide informal south facing seating with viewing opportunities out to Victoria Park. A lift, integral to the adjacent multi-storey car park, structure shall provide access for disabled persons and cyclists.
- Adjacent buildings shall have active frontages which address the space forming a 'pedestrian street' with good natural surveillance.
- As with Elwick Square the level changes could be utilised to accommodate rainwater storage beneath the square.
- A wide and direct signalised pedestrian crossing point shall be provided at the intersection of Victoria Square and Victoria Way to facilitate ease of pedestrian movement across this road.
- The linear space between Victoria Way and Victoria Park should function as a transition space between the urban Southern Expansion Quarter and The Emerald Necklace parkland. The strong tree lined form proposed along the Learning Link (see below) should be continued into the square, A combination of hard paved

areas to the edges of the space to facilitate ease of movement along direct desire lines with the potential for a 'softer' gravel area in the centre of the square allowing informal tables and chairs to spill out into the space.

- The square also offers opportunities to make direct associations between rainwater run-off and its impact upon the river corridor. The expression of rainwater collection, and conveyance should be integral to this space offering the potential for education along the Learning Link.
- Development on the south west corner of Victoria Square would be ideally located to parkland facilities including external café areas overlooking the park.



A strong tree structure and informal seating



A grand south facing staircase to the Learning Link Bridge

Principal Routes

The Emerald Necklace

- Victoria Park and Bowen Fields Wetland Park already provide an important and well used amenity and ecological resource for the town. New development overlooking the park will improve natural surveillance with opportunities for new park facilities such as a café on the corner of Victoria Square.
- Access into the Emerald Necklace from the minor roads shall be realised as a series of raised boardwalks which negotiate the wetland areas and cross the river to meet up with the existing network of pathways and boardwalks around Bowen Fields Wetland Park and Victoria Park.
- A series of retention basins shall be established along the edge of the southern expansion quarter both as part of an integrated SUDs system to deal with rainwater run-off from adjacent development and as way of expanding existing wetland habitats. Planting would consist of native species of local provenance to foster the natural river habitat.



Extend existing boardwalk access and Wetland Park



Quality pedestrian and cycle route



Expanded wetland habitats

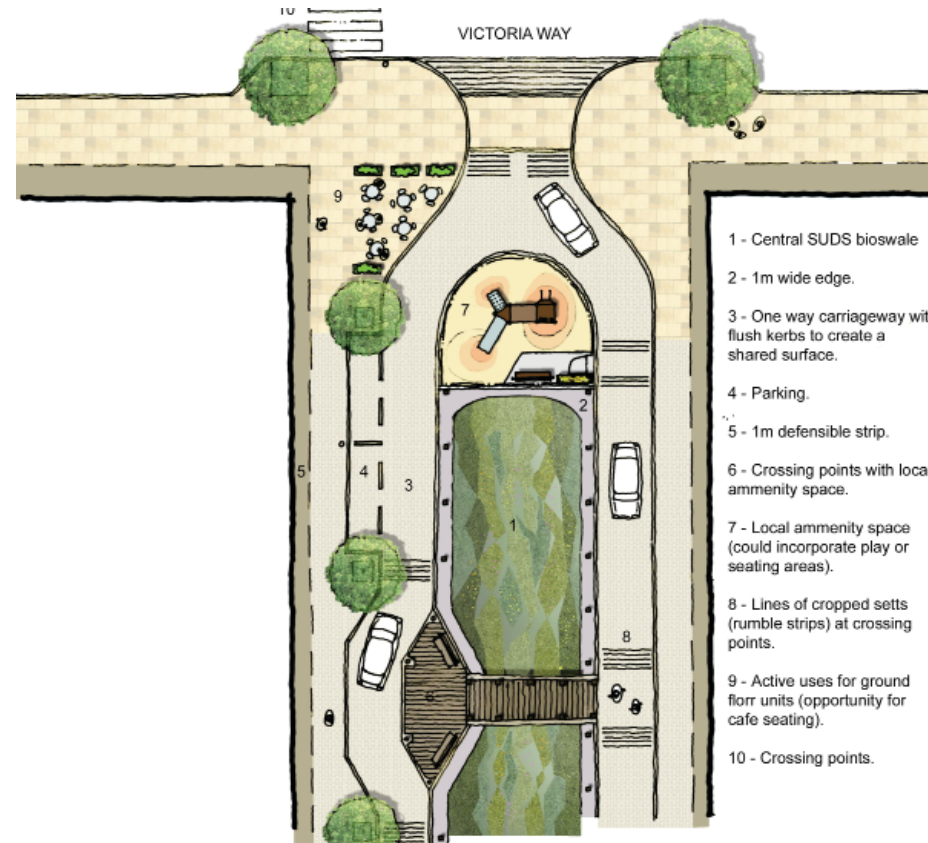
Secondary Routes and Spaces

Minor roads

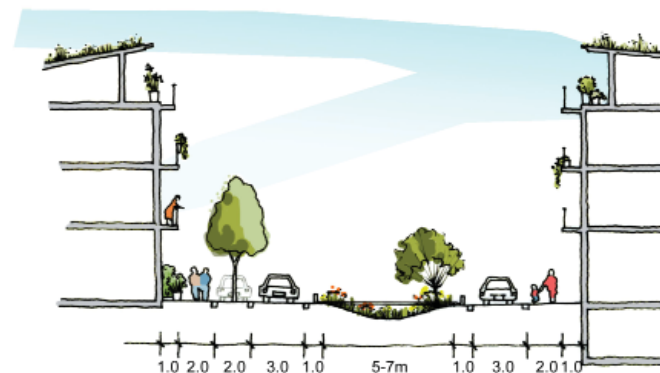
- Local neighbourhood streets with shared surfaces and 'homezone' character.
- Opportunities for SUDs as an integral part to the public realm. For example, minor roads could function as 'SUDs streets' consisting of a series of linked bio-swales which would function as rainwater retention areas for slow infiltration and purification, and for conveyance of runoff to a linear wetland along the edge of the Emerald Necklace.
- The swales would be planted with indigenous marginal species capable of growing in wet and dry conditions, and would establish a distinctive element within the public realm and visually link the quarter with the river corridor.



People friendly residential streets



- 1 - Central SUDs bioswale
- 2 - 1m wide edge.
- 3 - One way carriageway with flush kerbs to create a shared surface.
- 4 - Parking.
- 5 - 1m defensible strip.
- 6 - Crossing points with local amenity space.
- 7 - Local amenity space (could incorporate play or seating areas).
- 8 - Lines of cropped setts (rumble strips) at crossing points.
- 9 - Active uses for ground floor units (opportunity for cafe seating).
- 10 - Crossing points.



Southern expansion SUDs street

