

## International Station Quarter

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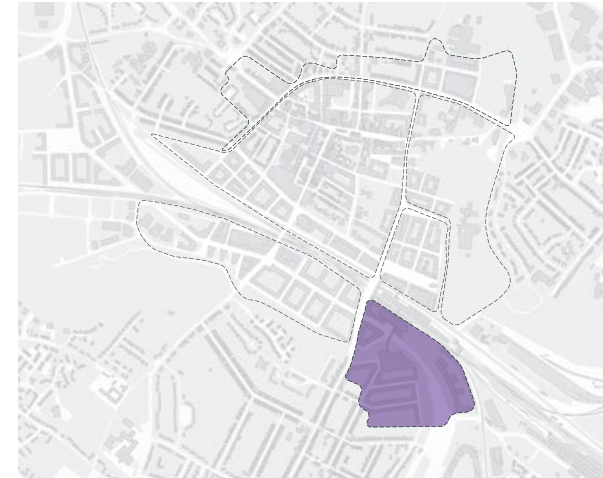
### Existing Character and Land Use

The existing townscape in this quarter consists of predominantly large scale single footprint built form with a coarse urban grain and poor quality, incoherent structure. Although the area is a strategic location within Ashford as a gateway to the town centre and a key connection between the town core and the Designer Outlet Centre to the south east, it performs neither of these functions successfully.

Romney Marsh Road is currently a four lane, traffic dominated highway with heavy flows of fast moving vehicles. The highway is elevated along most of its length with no built development to create any enclosure or edge to the road. As a pedestrian environment it is therefore noisy, exposed and uninviting, and as an arrival experience for the motorist it is a 'non-event'.

The International Station, which is one of the most important institutions for the town, provides a poor first impression for those arriving by train and exiting on the south side of the station. Dense planting cuts the station forecourt off from Romney Marsh Road, and the first time visitor is forced to negotiate a confusing series of back routes and service roads in order to access other parts of the town.

Much of the land either side of Romney Marsh Road is taken up by overflow surface car parks, which although well used, contribute to the lack of character and 'out-of-town' appearance of this part of Ashford. The provision of standard highway infrastructure to facilitate vehicular access and



Location map

movement has driven the layout of this part of town over its recent history and there is little in the way of activity generating development. As a consequence pedestrians and cyclists pass through isolated areas with poor natural surveillance and have to navigate a townscape of service roads, underpasses and abrupt changes in level (in particular between Romney Marsh Road and the areas either side).

The river corridor provides a natural landscape resource running through this area and although there are existing well used pedestrian and cyclist links following its course, it appears 'squeezed' into a narrow strip surrounded by the poor quality townscape characteristic of this area.

## Proposed Character and Land Use

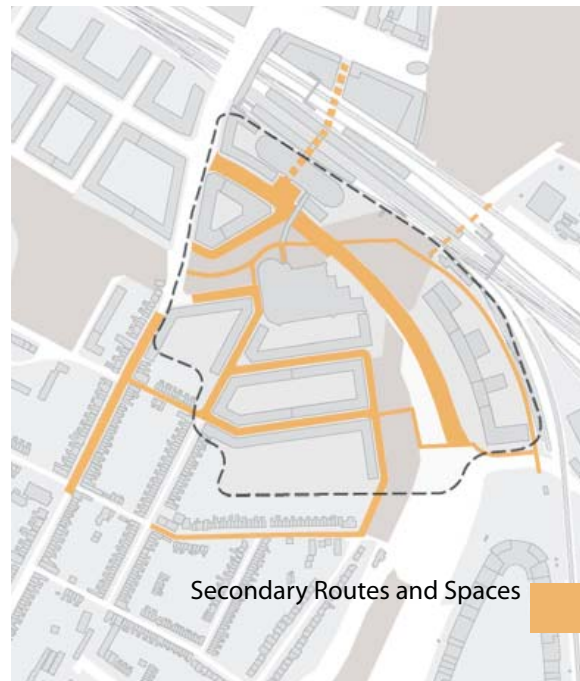
This quarter proposes a number of different land uses closely related to specific parts of the quarter, their relationship to adjacent land use (both existing and proposed) and their function in overcoming the problematic issues of the existing townscape.

Around the International Station it is envisaged that additional development, which would take up the existing B&Q site on the south side of Romney Marsh Road, will create a critical mass of economic activity focussed on the International Station and including the provision of conference and hotel facilities associated with the Commercial and Southern Expansion Quarters. The new development would help to establish a better related built edge to Romney Marsh Road and improve the image of the town upon arrival.

The area to the south east of the International Station is critical in improving the connections between the town centre and the Designer Outlet Centre. Subject to market conditions and to the relocation of existing surface car parks it is proposed that a mixed use residential and commercial development could be accommodated on this site with the intention of creating pedestrian attracting land uses between the two isolated parts of town.

To the south and south west of the International Station multi-storey car park, an existing area of commercial and small scale industrial units with some housing should form a zone of incremental residential led development which ties into the existing residential areas to the south. Development should follow the established urban form of the adjacent, terraced housing but respond with

contemporary architectural forms which respect the scale of development and help to provide active frontages to the pedestrian routes and the river corridor.



## Public Realm Vision

**Physical and Visual Connections:** The re-invention of Romney Marsh Road as an important linear gateway to the town and as the first section of the Victoria Way will provide strong connectivity between the town and existing peripheral development and help to convey a sense of arrival. New development fronting onto the road and public realm improvements will transform its appearance from an engineered highway to an urban boulevard, distinctly different in character from the rest of Romney Marsh Road.

The existing pedestrian and cycle routes along the river corridor will be better connected, more legible, and extended to link into proposed development areas.

**Interpersonal Connections:** At the entrance to the International Station a new square shall create an improved arrival experience for visitors disembarking on the south side of the station. International Arrivals Square will be a focus of activity and movement and form strong links between the station and the conference, business and hotel uses on the opposite side of Romney Marsh Road.

New development, street patterns and public realm improvements shall establish a more human scale in this quarter in order to create a more pedestrian friendly environment less dominated by large over-engineered infrastructure. This change in character and the use of development which fronts onto existing and proposed pedestrian links to provide natural surveillance will generate activity, encourage use of the public realm, and promote walking and cycling.

**Environmental Connections:** The river corridor and Emerald Necklace will play a much greater role in the character of this quarter. Development and public realm improvements should respect and enhance the river's natural characteristics. In addition, new development should seek to manage rainwater in a sustainable manner such that it controls the volume of water run-off from each site and contributes to creating a distinctive character in both the built form and the public and private spaces between the buildings.

**Cultural Connections:** An integrated art and lighting strategy investigating the role of Romney Marsh Road as a gateway zone to the town should be developed. The strategy should help to establish a sense of arrival and aid in the perception of the road as a multi-user urban avenue instead of a traffic dominated highway. Smaller, locally specific interventions should also be developed to improve the pedestrian experience along existing and proposed routes to encourage their use.





Design Principles

### SECONDARY ROUTES + SPACES

- Access roads downgraded to shared routes
- Residential homezone streets with integrated SUD's
- Romney Marsh Road connecting into Victoria Way
- International Arrivals Square with sculptural canopies
- The Emerald Necklace

### MISCELLANEOUS

- New development
- Existing development
- Key active frontage
- Connecting International Station and Domestic station
- Improved access to Designer Outlet
- Existing pedestrian/cycle routes improved
- Extension to pedestrian/cycle routes
- Improvements to pedestrian underpass.
- Existing canalised drainage ditch incorporated into development layout as amenity space/SUD's.
- Stormwater attenuation and wetland creation.
- Lighting, cladding and planting to enhance the appearance of the multi-storey car park

## Secondary Routes and Spaces

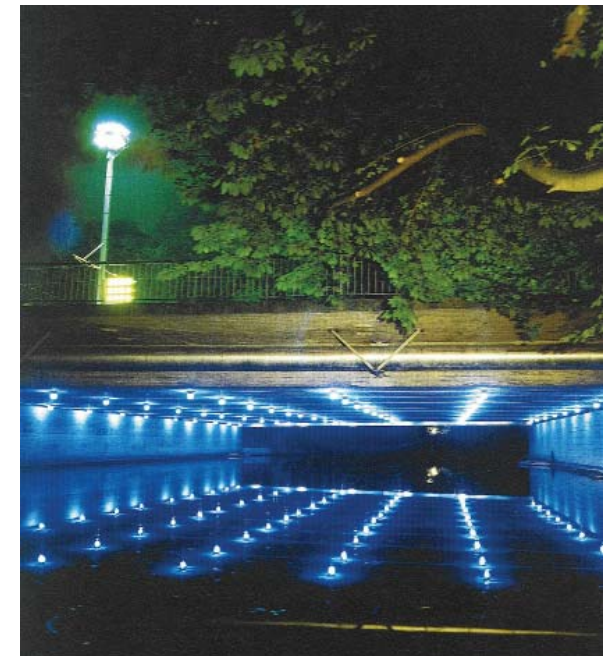
### Emerald Necklace

- The Emerald Necklace should be increased in width where possible through this quarter, and new development abutting the river corridor should form a well defined edge with regular tree planting as a contrast to more naturalistic informal planting within the corridor itself.
- Native planting within this quarter will be important in establishing a locally distinctive and appropriate character which respects the river corridor and creates habitats. Consideration should be given to the replacement and or diversification of existing 'landscape amenity' shrub planting introduced around the International Station and multi-storey car park.
- A combination of climbing/trailing plants and trees could be used to 'soften' the façade of the multi-storey car park where it faces the river corridor and new residential development.
- A series of swales and small retention basins along the edge of the residential areas would allow temporary storage, filtration and slow infiltration of stormwater run-off from adjacent roads and roofs.
- New connections shall be made between proposed development and the existing network of footpath/cycleways which follow the river corridor.

- The existing routes shall benefit from improved natural surveillance from adjacent development and improvements to the existing underpasses, potentially as part of an overall lighting strategy for the riverside



Soften the existing multi-storey car park



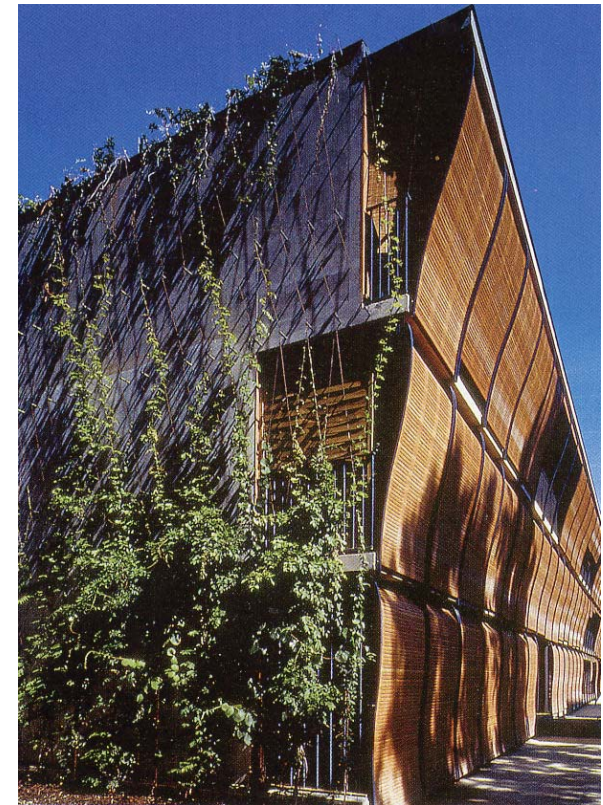
Improvements to existing subway connections

## Secondary Routes and Spaces

### Romney Marsh Road

- An urban avenue will be created, similar in character to Victoria Way. The treatment and materials proposed along Victoria Way should be extended along Romney Marsh Road up to its junction with the Designer Outlet Centre, such that visually it reads as one linear gateway with a distinct design language different from the southern stretch of Romney Marsh Road.
- The existing highway lighting should be improved through the introduction of columns which can accommodate both highway and pedestrian lighting with differing light intensities and colours.
- Avenue tree planting shall be introduced either side of the bridged section of the road to establish a boulevard character, improve the environmental conditions and help to provide some visual enclosure to the road.
- The provision of cycle lanes, improved materials along the footway, and removal of barriers and any other unnecessary highway paraphernalia will also help change the character of the road and improve connections along it for non-vehicular users.
- Built development proposed along the road should ideally have a direct relationship with the street creating frontages which face onto the footway. However, a more detailed study of this will be required to ascertain whether this is feasible given the level difference between the Romney Marsh Road and the land either side.

- An integrated art and lighting strategy should seek to enhance the road's new status as a gateway to Ashford. Opportunities for large scale interventions would be appropriate as beacons at specific points along the road. These could be stand alone pieces or closely integrated into the architecture of existing and proposed built form. For instance, the façade of the existing International Station multi-storey car park and the aerial link to the station building could be dramatically enhanced through cladding, planting or lighting.



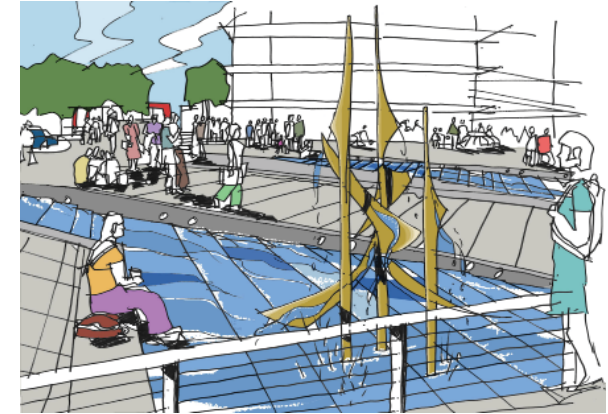
Landmark buildings with distinctive cladding and planting



## Secondary Routes and Spaces

### International Arrivals Square

- A predominantly hard space which will primarily function as an arrivals and departure space and its design should facilitate ease of movement through the space.
- A simple uncluttered space with integrated public art and bold contemporary architecture surrounding the square will convey a sense of arrival.
- Taxi pick-up and drop-off facilities should be fully integrated into the square but should not dominate the space. This could be achieved through the use of shared surfaces and subtle demarcation of vehicular routes through the square. Sculptural canopies within the space could provide shelter for those waiting for taxis and create a distinctive feature as a focus to the square. The canopy structures could also convey information about Ashford both through their form and through the integration of electronic information points.
- Direct crossing points should be provided between the square and the proposed hotel, conference facilities on the opposite side of Romney Marsh Road. A wide and direct signalised pedestrian crossing point with opportunities to visually extend elements of the surface materials used in International Arrivals Square across the carriageway would help to reduce the perception of the road as a barrier.



A legible arrivals space

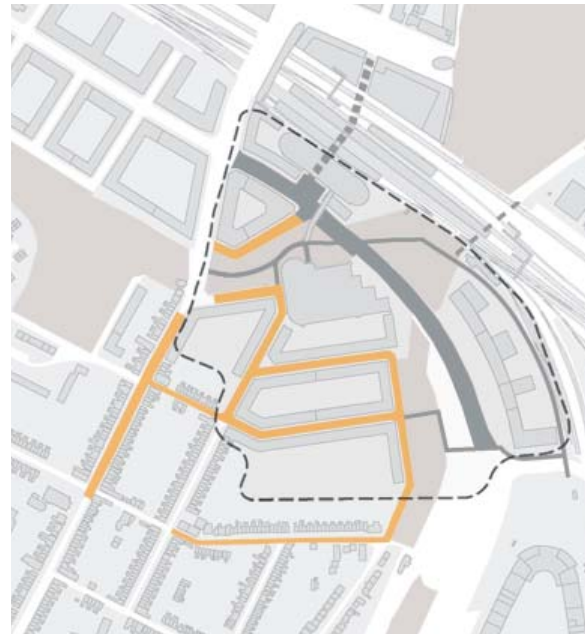
## Secondary Routes and Spaces

### Residential Streets and Spaces

- Shared surfaces and 'homezone' character with a built form and streetscape which has an 'intimate' human scale.
- Complete integration of water management to create a series of wet/dry basins, bioswales and other rainwater attenuation features within both public areas and private communal spaces.
- Retain and integrate existing natural landscape features to engender a better understanding of and greater interaction between local habitats/features and the local community.

### Existing access/service roads

- 'Downgrade' existing service roads, which currently lead to car parking facilities, to create shared access routes rather than over-engineered roads.



'Homezone' shared surfaces



Integrated water management and amenity space.



SUDS as a driving force

## Summary

### Commercial Quarter

#### Existing Character and Land Use

This quarter of Ashford by vacant structures with associated waste ground and carparking. There is a poor incoherent sense of arrival and unclear links from the train station to the town centre. To the west, Station Road forms a barrier though the River Stour provides a positive edge to the eastern boundary

#### Proposed Character and Land Use

The ATCDF proposes a business led commercial quarter with opportunities for high density development. A public space around the station would create a positive gateway to the town centre with associated legibility

#### Physical and Visual Connections:

strategic nodal point; downgrading of Station Road; improved crossing points at key nodal points

#### Interpersonal Connections

An animated, contemporary, pedestrian dominated quarter; informal meeting areas

#### Environmental Connections

connected with the natural environment of the river corridor; linear riverside promenade

#### Cultural Connections

listed buildings will be rejuvenated; large scale, permanent artwork; artwork as wayfaring

### Civic and Educational Quarter

### Town Centre Quarter

## Summary

### Civic and Educational Quarter

#### Existing Character and Land Use

This quarter consists of East Hill with its strong historic character; Tannery Lane with its modern, boxy office buildings and vehicular dominated road network; and Memorial Gardens, the only significant green space within the Town Centre

#### Proposed Character and Land Use

New development would be limited to the southern area. Bold contemporary architecture around Tannery Lane would improve definition. A bold, vibrant high street would continue though from Commercial Quarter. A proposed space of Memorial Square would provide leisure and cultural opportunities

#### Physical and Visual Connections:

Improved connections with East Hill; Tannery Lane as new urban square; strong connectivity through Memorial Gardens; down grading of Station Road

#### Interpersonal Connections

Memorial Gardens as important open space with improved natural surveillance; Memorial Square to accommodate arts and cultural uses

#### Environmental Connections

Improved east-west connections with River Stour; water used to reinforce links to river

#### Cultural Connections

Memorial Square for temporary performances and exhibitions; exploration of connections between old and new; new architecture and public realm should be unashamedly bold

## Summary

### Town Centre Quarter

#### Existing Character and Land Use

The town centre is physically defined by a series of roads and streets. It forms the main economic and cultural and has nine distinct character areas

#### Proposed Character and Land Use

The conservation and enhancement of the existing core will be the main driving force behind development. There are a number of vacant development plots around the former ring road that have potential for new development. South of the new improvements to Elwick Road are large plots.

#### Physical and Visual Connections:

Re-stitch the fragmented edges; the Medieval T and Bank Street as key connections; new spaces where they connect with the former ring road; existing grid pattern of secondary street to be preserved, enhanced; Passageways to be extended and enhanced with a focus on St. Mary's church; additional pedestrian routes

#### Interpersonal Connections

A vibrant mixed use core; additional residential accommodation; increased dominance of pedestrian over vehicles

#### Environmental Connections

market town intimately linked to River Stour; retention of long hilltop views out to greater Ashford

#### Cultural Connections

## Summary

### Southern Expansion Quarter

#### Existing Character and Land Use

Characterised by large volumes of vacant land and the railway line creating severance. Connections are limited to the existing cycle/ pedestrian bridge. The river Stour provides an attractive southern boundary to the quarter.

#### Proposed Character and Land Use

This quarter is a key component of the extension of the town centre. The proposed routes of Victoria Way and the Learning Link are a catalyst for this development along with large unit commercial and educational development

#### Physical and Visual Connections:

Transcend the barriers of movement formed by the existing railway line; expansion of the dense town centre southwards

#### Interpersonal Connections

focus of learning and living; social interaction in the public realm; shared surfaces and homezones in residential areas; Victoria and Elwick squares as two principal spaces

#### Environmental Connections

Physically and visually connected with the natural environment of the river corridor; overlooking the natural environment; low energy build; SUDs integrated to reduce flood risk

#### Cultural Connections

Education through environmental connections; larger scale art interventions; iconic bridge structure

## Summary

### Residential Transition Quarter

#### Existing Character and Land Use

This area suffers from weak connections to the town centre with the former ring road creating severance and fragmenting the historic urban grain.

#### Proposed Character and Land Use

It is proposed to improve the connections between the residential area north of Somerset Road to the Town Centre. New development on the north side of the road should comprise of small scale infill. South of Somerset Road, redevelopment of the Park Mall site would present larger scale commercial development

#### Physical and Visual Connections:

overcome the physical and psychological barrier presented by the former ring road; direct crossings; re-stitch the historical grain re-establishing connections; hierarchy of spaces; celebrate key gateways; facilitate equality of movement

#### Interpersonal Connections

multi-use, multi-activity public space; not just a corridor; conduit for cultural and social exchange

#### Environmental Connections

wide central reservation; arc of space, light and energy; strong tree lined avenue and other planting

#### Cultural Connections

cultural and artistic interventions; transitional short term interventions; transformational, large scale and permanent installations

## Summary

### International Station Quarter

#### Existing Character and Land Use

The existing town scape in this quarter consists of predominantly large scale single footprint built form with coarse urban grain. Romney Marsh road has a poor sense of arrival. Arrival at the international station is also a poor first impression. The river corridor provides a natural resource

#### Proposed Character and Land Use

Create a critical mass of economic activity around the international station to establish better built edges with Romney Marsh Road. Connections between the Town Centre and the designer outlet are important. South and south west of the international station provides an opportunity for mixed use residential development

#### Physical and Visual Connections:

Re-invention of Romney Marsh Road as gateway to the town; improved pedestrian and cycle routes

#### Interpersonal Connections

new square at international station as a focus of activity; new street pattern and public realm on a human scale

#### Environmental Connections

respect the river's natural characteristics; management of rain water

#### Cultural Connections

integrated art and lighting strategy; smaller locally specific interventions to improve pedestrian experience