

7.0 IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation of the public realm strategy will make a significant contribution to achieving a step change in the image of Ashford generally and in fulfilling its role as a sustainable community.

Implementation of the strategy represents a significant financial investment for both the private and public sectors. It is important that improvements to the public realm are undertaken in a co-ordinated manner and pay due regard to the timing of developments on individual sites.

The Greater Ashford Development Framework (GADF) sets the strategy in terms of the phasing of growth across the whole of the town. A principle of GADF is the requirement to 'mend it before you extend it' this translating into the need to focus efforts on the town centre in preference to urban extensions on the edge.

The town centre Development Framework does not contain a formal phasing plan as it is considered that this would be largely theoretical and unlikely to predict accurately the timing of major investment opportunities. The Framework does however refer to the rate at which development comes forward as being related to site availability and market confidence. In addition to this the Framework does identify key sites and projects within the Phase 1 of GADF (2005-2011) these being:

1. Sites at the western end of Victoria Way – ZedHomes
2. Short term public realm projects at Bank Street and Station Forecourt
3. EP Site on Victoria Road – Bellway Homes

4. SEEDA Site on Victoria Road – South Kent College
5. Elwick Road/Station Road corner site

In terms of the scale of development within the town centre there are a number of quarters that will be subject to wholesale redevelopment. These are Memorial Square, Commercial, International Station and Southern Expansion. It is expected that within these quarters implementation of the strategy will be achieved with little difficulty. Design briefs will be able to draw on the Public Realm Strategy and specify what is required for each site. Developers will then be able to incorporate the public realm requirements into their overall assessment of individual sites in terms of financial viability. As part of planning consent developers would be required to implement the public realm strategy on new or existing streets and/or make a contribution via Planning Gain Supplement for the design and implementation of specific spaces e.g. Memorial Square and Station Square.

A key element of the movement strategy for the town centre is the conversion of the uni-directional ring road to two way working with an emphasis on creating streets that balance the needs of all road users rather than focussing on motorised vehicles. Kent County Council who are taking the lead on this project have been successful in securing around £10M of funding for this project from the ODPM. This funding covers design and construction for the Elwick Road and West Street Avenue/Somerset Road (known as the Ashford Arc) sections of the ring road. The conditions on the ODPM funding are such that construction of the ring road needs to be complete by end March 2008.

This project presents a great opportunity to implement the public realm strategy on the most heavily trafficked roads in the town centre. Conversion of Station Road will be needed in due course although funding for this has not yet been identified. The Framework proposed a number of new developments on Station Road and it is likely that contributions from these could be secured to part fund completion of this section with the associated public realm improvements.

The Bank Street public realm project is well advanced and is expected to be implemented in conjunction with the ring road project. Funding has been secured only for the section between Queens Road and Tufnell Street. Further funding should be secured for completing the Elwick Road-Queen Street and Tufnell Street-High Street sections. Potential funding sources would include central government (ODPM), PGS contributions from developments on Elwick Road and the Strategic Development Tariff for GADF.

Outline designs have been prepared for the Station Forecourt. This scheme is essentially an improvement to the existing forecourt which ultimately would be removed in accordance with the Framework. This project is currently on hold due to conflicts with access requirements for the CTRL depot and a lack of funding. A decision is required as to what would be an appropriate way of taking forward this whole area. It has been suggested that development in this area could come forward quite quickly and therefore implementing a public realm scheme would not be an appropriate use of resources.