



The Ashford Energy Strategy

2026-28

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Time for review

2021 saw Ashford’s first dedicated Climate Action Plan, which looked to ensure climate, and carbon mitigation in particular, was embedded as a consideration in all we do and recognised as a shared cross-departmental responsibility from procurement to planning. ABC have made good progress, and we are seen as a proactive and strategic thinking local authority in the climate space. We are the first Local Authority in Kent to have commissioned a Local Area Energy Plan which maps the energy needs and requirements of the present and the future, we are proactively exploring options for a heat network in Ashford town centre; have made significant strides in decarbonising much of our property portfolio and have secured over £12m in grant funding for renewables and domestic retrofit programmes to date. Our successes have laid the groundwork for further ambitious and integrated action so we can meet our target for net zero in our operations for 2030 and Borough wide for 2050.

The climate agenda is fast paced, and it is timely to review our approach to ensure that our activities reflect the vision of the administration and the evolving opportunities available to us.



The Ashford Energy Strategy

Ashford's strategy reflects a broader national trend: local authorities are no longer passive recipients of energy policy—they are now central actors in shaping and delivering the energy systems of the future. Whilst acknowledging the urgent need to address the climate crisis, this energy strategy also recognises the social and economic benefits that a thoughtful and fair transition to renewables can bring, empowering and benefitting residents and driving a thriving green economy.

We will maintain the net zero targets of 2030 in our own operations and 2050 for the Borough but our revised plan will emphasise how we can support people in the present by addressing health inequalities and the cost-of-living with a climate lens. This approach ensures that our efforts are not only about long-term environmental goals but also about immediate benefits and improvements in the quality of life for our residents. By making these connections, we believe our climate initiatives will resonate more deeply with the community, fostering wider engagement and support.

The need to decarbonise is central but this must be achieved in a sustainable and equitable manner.

Core Principles

Decarbonisation

Rapidly reducing dependency on fossil fuels with a focus on increasing renewable energy generation and energy efficiency. Complimented by integrating principles of a circular economy into our own practice and areas of influence.

Just Transition

Prioritising the needs of all residents, ensuring that the benefits of the energy transition are shared equitably and are accessible. Creating a thriving green economy and empowering communities to lead the charge.

The Road map

This strategy serves as a high-level roadmap for achieving a sustainable and equitable energy transition for all. It will outline where further work on policy is required, areas for potential investment and exploration, and actions across several departments. It will highlight the local authority's advocacy and enabling role, supporting residents and businesses to benefit from better environmental, health and economic outcomes.

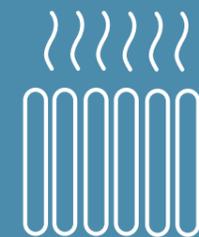
Building on the successes of our work-to-date, we are committed to leading by example and taking an ambitious approach.

Leading by Example

We are committed to exploring the feasibility for an Ashford Heat Network in the Town Centre - providing stable pricing and lower cost, low carbon heating for our own buildings, expanding to homes and businesses in a phased approach. We also have ambitions for more rural decentralised heating and energy networks run by and for the community. Imagine local energy sources supplying local energy demand, using clean air or ground source heat pumps, utilising any available waste heat, eg from substations and generating own solar.



As part of this work we are supporting local business innovation and looking at new renewable technologies that might help provide the heat sources. For example we are commissioning a new ground source heating system at the Julie Rose Stadium which embeds pipework in a permeable resin surface, with a view to understanding if this could be scaled up to deliver heat to larger areas.



The critical work streams: -

This section outlines the key work streams that will drive delivery of our energy strategy. It is intentionally high-level—designed to provide strategic direction without prescribing rigid pathways. We recognise that the pace of technological innovation, policy shifts, market dynamics and budget availability demands agility. By avoiding over-specification, we create space to adapt, evolve, and integrate emerging solutions as they arise. This approach ensures we remain responsive to new opportunities while staying focused on our overarching decarbonisation goals.

Energy Solutions	Seeking opportunities and funding for decarbonised heat, electricity generation and infrastructure project delivery. At a strategic level and for our own assets.
Energy Advice	Providing advice and practical support to residents: introducing energy efficiency measures; Save Energy, Save Money messaging.
Green Finance	Offering a broad suite of financing measures, from Green Bonds and Loans, to government grants to support home improvements and retrofit.
Community Energy	Supporting communities to set up decentralised energy schemes; negotiate community benefit and shared ownership options for renewables projects, capacity building.
Green Economy	Driving a green USP for Ashford: attracting sustainable businesses, supporting skills, capacity and supply chains that deliver a new green economy.
Data	Using an evidence led approach to prioritising communities and homes in most need. Optimising energy use in our own assets; carbon reporting.
Policy development	Aligning strategies e.g. emerging Local Plan. Integrating circular economic practice. Taking an advocacy role at regional and national level.

Energy Strategy - Building Blocks



1. Energy Solutions – Project Delivery

Why it matters?

Renewable energy is the cornerstone of decarbonisation, but it also reduces dependency on fossil fuel markets, enhances energy security and resilience, and supports local economic development. Exploring ways we can positively increase the renewable infrastructure in the borough, with commercial developments where appropriate but also exploring the existing roof top assets in our domestic and commercial buildings is essential to meeting our net zero targets. Leading by example in our own assets is vital, to raise confidence and start to normalise new technologies.

Key Activities:

- Progress the Ashford Heat Network - Seek funding for a detailed design and explore commercial options.
- Integrate net zero design into new led council developments.
- Develop asset decarbonisation plans for our remaining properties and housing.
- Incorporate high ambition net zero solutions into Local Plan
- Capitalise on dual use options for our car parks, such as renewable energy sources, e.g. solar arrays, ground source heat.
- Seek to invest in community energy projects e.g. rooftop solar schemes and microgrids.
- Explore Peer to Peer energy trading platforms to create local energy markets.
- Explore temporary - moveable solar 'allotments' – on brown field sites.
- Continue roll out of EV infrastructure, with particular focus on areas with high levels of on street parking.
- Continue with fleet electrification and increase access to affordable EVs for essential car users.
- Develop battery storage capacity in the Borough.



2. Energy Advice and Communications

Why it matters?

Public understanding and engagement are critical to the success of energy transition strategies and behaviour change at scale. But more importantly correct energy advice and support for residents in retrofitting properties can help tackle fuel poverty and impact wellbeing.

Key Activities:

- Seek funding to continue and expand energy advisor service which provides personalized guidance to households and businesses.
- Train front line officers who do home visits on energy advice and retrofit.
- Continue to work with Health sector to ensure those with health problems that may be exacerbated by damp or cold housing – expand Healthy Futures programme into new areas.
- Communications plan to develop and disseminate clear, accessible information on energy efficiency, renewable energy, and government support schemes.
- Explore set up of Regional Retrofit Advice and Experience hub.
- Produce a domestic retrofit guide – with specific guides for generic housing types.



3. Green Finance – to support Domestic Retrofit

Why it matters: Financing is a major barrier to retrofitting homes, especially for middle-income households, who are not eligible for government support but are not either in the 'able to pay' bracket. It is important we provide and facilitate access to a suite of financing measures from means tested grants to low interest loans, providing inclusive financial mechanisms to unlock private investment and reduce energy bills.

Key Activities:

- Continue to bid for, manage and deliver government grants schemes for home improvement for both social and private sector. E.g. Warm Homes Local Grant and means tested grants and subsidies for home insulation, renewable energy installations, and other energy-saving measures.
- Promote uptake of national schemes like ECO4 and the Boiler Upgrade Scheme through targeted outreach.
- Actively promote bulk buying schemes such as Solar Together, so that Ashford residents can access savings.
- Facilitate community-led energy projects that deliver local benefits.
- Source partners to deliver a Green Loans scheme and innovative financing mechanisms, such as Lendology, that make upfront investments more affordable to a wider group of residents.

4. Community Energy Projects – Supporting Our Communities

Why it matters: Community-led initiatives can empower residents and promote a sense of community, alongside more tangible economic benefits –like job creation and lowered energy costs - keeping benefit within the community. In a world where some feel overwhelmed by the climate crisis and unsure where to begin—especially when cost is a barrier—community energy offers a practical and inclusive starting point.

Key Activities:

- Facilitate the development of community-owned renewable energy projects in Ashford by promoting the opportunity, providing signposting and information.
- Annual community energy engagement event
- Seek funding to support community energy groups in the Borough.
- Integrate the concept of community energy into Local Plan
- Provide training and resources to enable communities to develop and implement their own energy solutions and develop capacity.
- Set up legal advice and mechanisms to support communities to negotiate with commercial energy companies for shared ownership options and appropriate community benefits.
- Explore options to provide Parish Charters and Parish Energy Plans



5. Green Economy and Skills Capacity

Why it matters: The energy transition presents significant opportunities for economic growth and job creation. Investing in skills development is essential to ensure a skilled workforce for the future and ensure the Borough benefits. There is an opportunity for Ashford to strive to be a green economic hub.

Key Activities:

- Promote and where possible invest in training programs for green jobs, such as renewable energy installers, retrofit experts, auditors and engineers.
- Utilise social value opportunities in procurement to assist with agenda, e.g. green skills apprenticeships to expand capacity.
- Support businesses to innovate, commercialise new clean energy technologies.
- Support businesses with own green transition through advice and work with Chamber of Commerce
- Work with East Kent College to provide apprenticeship opportunities for renewable infrastructure skills development.
- Develop a green USP (Unique Selling Point) for Ashford – by attracting industry and SMEs in the clean energy supply chain and developing a green economic hub.
- Work with UKPN to ensure we lay the foundations for growth, ensuring network supply is not a barrier to economic growth.
- Consider heat network, energy requirements when attracting businesses to move in Ashford, e.g. heat producers and offtakers.

6. Data and Evidence-Led Approach to Policy

Why it matters: Decisions about energy policy and investments should be based on sound data and evidence. This ensures that resources are allocated effectively and that interventions have the desired impact.

Key Activities:

- Use our Digital twin of the Borough and Local Area Energy Plan to prioritise actions and understand where to target comms and support.
- Monitor and evaluate energy efficiency of renewables projects – to continuously improve and share learning. Assessing the environmental and economic impacts of various energy technologies.
- Explore move to dynamic energy management systems in ABC assets – switching to renewables when available and charging batteries when electricity prices are low.
- Conduct regular assessments of energy consumption patterns, emissions trends, and the effectiveness of existing policies.
- Develop data sets to help understand which areas/property types are most at risk of health issues relating to overheating.
- Take evidence led approach to targeting and developing cooling support for residents.
- Resident survey on retrofit and home improvement to understand support required.
- Develop carbon and energy dashboards for our own assets.



7. Policy Development

Why it matters: – to ensure alignment with other strategies, acknowledging the broad cross-cutting agenda and its co-benefits (e.g. health impacts, cost of living, wellbeing, biodiversity). It is vital to ensure there is a framework to integrate energy and sustainability considerations into broader governance mechanisms such as local planning, procurement, and procedures. This is also an opportunity for ABC to build on its reputation as a leader in this space and continue to innovate and benefit from the funding opportunities afforded to early adopters.

Key activities:

- Facilitate collaboration across departments and stakeholders – matrix working groups.
- Practice the principles of a circular economy – reuse, repair, recycle in our supply chains, buildings and new developments.
- Strive to integrate net zero best practice into our Local Plan, climate policy.
- Set net zero design standards for our own developments and building commissions.
- Further develop our procurement practice to support SME supply chains and monetise the social value of low carbon options.
- Champion progressive environmental practices – Join UK100 Network of Leaders committed to Net Zero
- Attract funding for innovative projects and pilots.

Monitoring Delivery – Our Approach to Measurement

In developing this strategy, we have deliberately adopted a high-level approach rather than tying our actions to overly specific or prescriptive measures. This reflects our commitment to achieving our overarching targets—net zero emissions from our own assets by 2030, and borough-wide by 2050—while maintaining the flexibility to adapt and respond to emerging opportunities and challenges.

Our focus is on meaningful progress and delivery—taking practical steps to reduce emissions and support the transition to a low-carbon future—rather than becoming overburdened in pursuit of perfect metrics. However we will capture and monitor relevant data on our activities to inform our direction of travel, support continuous improvement and ensure we are having meaningful impact.

We intend to track the following measures:-

KPI Name
Number of households reached through energy advice services
Percentage of residents reporting improved understanding of energy efficiency
Number of internal referrals to retrofit grants or financial support
Customer satisfaction score for energy advice services
Engagement rate in priority zones for Fuel Poverty
Number of homes upgraded to EPC C or above (our own Housing and private sector)
Annual carbon savings from funded retrofit measures
Total investment leveraged for retrofit (public + private) and renewables
Percentage of council buildings energy use from direct fossil fuel
Carbon emissions (Scope 1 and 2) Measured every 5 years
% of council fleet vehicles electrified
Renewable energy generation on council-owned sites – in MWh and % of total
Total borough-wide emissions vs. Tyndall carbon budget
% of planning applications incorporating low-carbon technologies
Progress toward LAEP/Energy Strategy implementation milestones
Public perception of council climate leadership

Conclusion

Ashford is committed to support an equitable energy transition away from fossil fuels. Leading by example, collaborating across departments and working with a wide pool of stakeholders and experts, we are confident that our efforts will result in meaningful progress.

But it is together with our residents and businesses where we will have most impact and build a sustainable future for Ashford. When environmental, social, and economic benefits are intertwined, we can create a better quality of life for all.

