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Ashford Borough Council

**ART & CULTURAL INDUSTRIES
STRATEGY REPORT**

MAY 2016



Arts & Cultural Industries Strategy Report, May 2016

PREPARED FOR ASHFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL TO INFORM
LOCAL PLAN WORK, MAY 2016.

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1. Introduction

1.1 The study

James Kennell Associates were appointed by Ashford Borough Council in June 2015 to undertake a study that made recommendations for a 'cultural spatial strategy' for the Borough of Ashford. The brief went through a number of revisions between June 2015 and January 2016 and the following report reflects this changing emphasis. During the study, a brief report into the use of the now empty Dover Place site by the Ashford Youth Theatre was also produced at the request of the Council. This final report brings together analyses of the cultural opportunities offered by the significant development projects that are driving the growth of Ashford, intelligence on national cultural priorities and audience development trends, and interviews with key stakeholders in Ashford's creative community and within the Borough Council. The aim of this study was to provide direction for the formulation of a new cultural strategy for Ashford, which can inform the emerging Local Plan and the work of the Borough Council over the coming years. The key cultural strategy recommendations made by this report are:

- The should support the creation of an 'Ashford Creative Partnership' to drive innovative arts and creative industries development in the Borough.
- The new cultural strategy should emphasise the provision of excellent cultural experiences.
- The cultural strategy should have a strong focus on enhancing the economy of the town centre area.
- A Hub and Spoke approach should be taken to developing the arts and creative industries infrastructure across the Borough.

1.2 The context

1.2.1 Ashford has been identified as a priority growth area by successive national and regional government policies and continues to grow at a faster rate than other towns in the south-east region, with this growth forecast to continue in terms of both jobs and population under most scenarios until 2030. There are many factors driving this growth including funding for housing development, increasing inward migration and infrastructure improvements. The factor identified as most significant by most observers when accounting for Ashford's growth has been enhancements to its connectivity, in particular by rail. International rail services to Europe began to visit Ashford in 1996 and HS1 was launched in 2009, dramatically reducing commuting times to central London to 38 minutes, increasing the attractiveness of the town for commuters and frequent leisure travellers. More businesses are now making the decision to relocate or start-up in Ashford, drawn by lower business costs and ease of connection to London and Europe.

1.2.2 Although Ashford is now within 40 minutes of central London, other towns within this radius include Reading, Chatham, Guildford, Milton Keynes, Tonbridge, and Redhill. Within one hour of London by train we can find Brighton, Maidstone, Oxford,

Cambridge, Southend and Colchester. This selection of towns shows the diversity of the regional competitive environment for attracting inward investment and in-migration. The quality of life offered to residents and the quality of the places and opportunities offered to business are key elements of this competition. The Arts and Creative Industries, in a broad sense, are a key element of this competitive environment.

1.2.3 The Creative Industries in themselves make a significant contribution to the economy in the United Kingdom. The most recent figures show that the Creative Industries contribute £84.1bn to the economy, approximately 5.2% of total GVA. Between 1997-2014, the Creative Industries outperformed the wider economy growing at 6.0% per annum, compared to 4.3% for the economy as a whole. Total employment in the Creative Industries grew by 5% between 2013-14, compared to 2.1% in the wider economy, indicating its potential as a significant source of economic development in a generally underperforming national economy that has remained sluggish since the financial crisis¹. The creative economy in the South-East accounts for approximately £2.5bn per annum GVA, a larger figure than for an LEP area outside of London and the drift of creative professionals and growth to the east of the capital² offers major opportunities for Ashford to capture elements of this fast growing sector. As Richard Florida's pioneering work on the 'Creative Class'³ shows, the clustering of creative industries attracts other businesses, in particular those in high value knowledge economy sectors, increasing the likelihood of inward investment and business relocation. A study of the relationship between creative industries, skills and economic development across the 257 European regions found that a well-educated workforce in creative businesses was the best indicator of high-productivity based competitiveness⁴; a conclusion supported by the recent CEBR report which found that engagement with the arts and culture, especially for young people, helps to support the creation of a more productive, knowledge driven economy in the UK⁵. Business relocation decisions are increasingly influenced by quality of life indicators such as the cultural and social environment for their staff and workplaces, with these factors recently indicated by global business leaders as more important than housing, transport and schools⁶.

1.2.4 The Arts and Creative Industries make a significant contribution to the quality of life of residents of a place. As well as contributing to wellbeing through providing economic development and employment opportunities, they enhance quality of life in a number of non-economic ways:

1.2.4.1 Sense of place – Culture, in particular the expression of local cultures and cultural heritage, is associated with the creation and maintenance of a strong sense of place and

¹ Creative Industries Economic Estimates, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, January 2016

² Towards a National Prospectus for the Creative Economy in the South East, South East LEP, 2015

³ Florida, R. (2014) *The Rise of the Creative Class – Revisited*, New York: Basic Books

⁴ Marrocu, E., & Paci, R. (2012). Education or Creativity: What Matters Most for Economic Performance. *Economic Geography*, 88(4), 369–401

⁵ Centre for Economics and Business Research, Contribution of the Arts and Culture to the National Economy, 2015

⁶ McKinsey, 2015 Relocating for Growth Survey

with local identities⁷. In addition, the arts and creative industries have a role to play in place-making strategies, such as the creation of cultural districts, landmark architectural statements, public art and the design of public space⁸.

1.2.4.2 Health – Research with more than 10,000 people by the Scottish Government shows that those who had attended a cultural place or cultural event in the previous 12 months were almost sixty percent more likely to report good health compared to those who had not⁹. Arts Council England conclude that engagement with community arts can have significant mental and physical health benefits, for all ages¹⁰.

1.2.4.3 Community Cohesion – Research for the Department for Culture Media and Sport by the London School of Economics has shown that people who engage with the arts are more likely to volunteer and to take part in voluntary sector activities¹¹. Cultural events and festivals are commonly cited as contributing to a sense of community and identity and recent research has demonstrated that cultural events can be particularly useful as policy instruments in this regard in urban growth areas, such as Ashford¹².

1.2.4.4 Environmental improvements – The arts and culture have a role to play in creating high quality public spaces, through design and public art, and in the revitalisation of run-down spaces and buildings, by bringing them into new use¹³.

1.2.5 In July 2015, the following definitional framework was agreed for this study to use regarding the Arts and Creative Industries:

Taking into account definitions and categorisations in frequent use, including those from Department for Culture, Media and Sport and from Arts Council England, the following sectors have been selected for inclusion within the scope of this report:

- The visual arts, including sculpture and photography
- Crafts
- Festivals
- Design: Product, Graphic and Fashion and New Media
- Film, TV, Video, Radio
- Performing arts
- Live music and music recording and rehearsal facilities

⁷ Smith, Stephen. "A sense of place: place, culture and tourism." *Tourism Recreation Research* 40.2 (2015): 220-233.

⁸ Smith, M. (2011) *Issues in Cultural Tourism Studies 2nd ed.*, London: Routledge

⁹ Scottish Government Social Research, Healthy Attendance? The Positive impact of Cultural Engagement and Sports Participation on Health and Satisfaction with life in Scotland, Scottish Government, 2013

¹⁰ Arts Council England, The Value of Arts and Culture to Society: An Evidence Review, ACE, 2014

¹¹ DCMS, Quantifying the Social Impacts of Culture and Sport, 2014

¹² Mair, Judith, and Michelle Duffy. "Community events and social justice in urban growth areas." *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events* 7.3 (2015): 282-298.

¹³ Kennell, J. *Cultural tourism and urban regeneration in Europe*. Vol. 317. The Routledge handbook of cultural tourism, 2012.

- Galleries
- Public Art

The following areas have been excluded from common definitions as falling outside the scope of this study:

- Advertising and Marketing
- Architecture
- IT
- Publishing
- Museums and Libraries

1.3 Key Influencing factors for this study

The following areas have been considered as being the key factors influencing the future direction of cultural strategy in the Borough:



1.4 Structure of this report

Section 2 identifies key development projects in Ashford and their likely impact on future cultural activity in the Borough. Section 3 examines the current cultural strategies and levels of local authority cultural provision in two comparator towns, chosen for their location in the regional competitive arena for inward investment and in-migration associated with improved commute times. Section 4 analyses the local stakeholder perspectives that were captured for this research. Section 5 explores the national, regional and local policies that

have been reviewed for this research. Section 6 outline key relevant cultural audience trends that may influence local provision. Section 7 sets out our recommendations for Ashford's future cultural strategy.

2. Key developments in Ashford

- 2.1 Ashford's recent growth has been housing-led. Ashford was identified as a growth area in the 2003 Sustainable Communities Plan, which required housing growth of 31,000 units by 2030, along with the creation of 28,000 jobs¹⁴. The Borough Council now has the ambition to have a jobs-led strategy for growth¹⁵, however many of the key drivers of growth over the coming decade will be a legacy of the increased housing and population in the Borough that will have been delivered in projects associated with the growth area initiative.
- 2.2 The following table outlines the key development projects that have been discussed in consultation during the process of preparing this report. Each development has been categorised in terms of its likely level of impact on the cultural strategy of the Borough. The opportunities provided by each development are noted and these will then be described in more detail, where appropriate, in section 2.3.

¹⁴ Sustainable Communities Plan, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2003

¹⁵ Strategic Employment Options Report, prepared for Ashford Borough Council by G L Hearn, 2012

Table 1 - Key developments affecting the cultural strategy

Development	Location	Description	Timescale	Impact on cultural strategy	Cultural strategy opportunity
Commercial Quarter	Town Centre	Mixed use commercial development	5 years	Significant	Workspace for creative industries businesses Public Art opportunities
International College Campus	Town Centre	New campus development for Further Education students	3 years	Significant	New cultural facilities New audiences to support cultural activity New Further Education provision in Arts and Creative Industries field
Park Mall	Town Centre	Revitalisation of retail area	5 years	Significant	Start-up / incubator space for creative industries
Elwick Place	Town Centre	Major mixed use development	5-10 years	Major	New cinema and leisure facilities supporting evening economy Public Art opportunities Community facilities Developer contributions Population growth
Mace Lane Industrial Estate development	Town Centre	New location for Jasmin Vardimon Company	3 years	Major	New location for professional arts company with performance and production space
Victoria Road	Town Centre	New residential development	5 years	Major	Population growth Community facilities Developer contributions

Chilmington Green	Urban / rural fringe	Urban extension of 7,750 homes	20 years	Major	Population growth Community facilities Developer contributions
Conningbrook	Urban / rural fringe	1000 unit housing development	10 years	Major	Population growth Community facilities Developer contributions
Westwell	Urban / rural fringe	3500 unit housing development	15 years	Major	Population growth Community facilities Developer contributions
Designer Outlet expansion	Town Centre	Retail centre expansion	3 years	Minor	Shuttle bus to support coherent town centre offer New events space
Ashford School development	Town Centre	Extension to existing campus	5 years	Minor	Development to include 250 seat theatre space

2.3 It is clear from the above review that the developments with the greatest impact on cultural strategy going forward are those with a town centre location. The Commercial Quarter development is a major opportunity to create a step-change in the perception of Ashford as a location for the Creative Industries. Research has shown that there are 1,500 creative industries and technology-based businesses in the Ashford area, and that this sector has significant growth potential¹⁶. Developing the existing offer at International House along with a potential new digital and creative hub using the Corn Store buildings will provide a catalyst for the emergence of local start-ups as well as attracting firms looking for space to grow. The scale of the development means that there are opportunities from this site to invest in public art and design-led public realm improvements that will be necessary to attract the kinds of businesses needed to ensure that the vision of a new digital and creative hub can come to fruition.

2.4 The new further education campus on Elwick road will impact on arts and creative industries in the town in three main ways. Firstly, it is likely that the new campus will contain facilities that can support the local arts and creative industries sector in terms of exhibition and performance space, specialist equipment and trained staff. Secondly, depending on the

¹⁶ Creative Space Management, Design specification advice and business models for catalyst business growth buildings at Ashford Commercial Quarter – Final report, 2015

curriculum mix on-site, the development has the potential to provide a new site of arts and creative production in the town centre. Thirdly, the presence of an additional 900 students in the town centre will provide an additional audience for the arts and creative industries in the town, and if leisure provision is appropriate, provide a boost to the evening economy, helping to support other projects such as St Marys.

2.5 Park Mall, as a 98,000sqft site owned by Ashford Borough Council in the town centre, offers a significant opportunity for the Council to support the development of a vibrant town centre through the support of arts and creative industries activity. Units within the site are already being used by local creative businesses and community groups and there is an ambition within the Council to use this site to support start-ups in knowledge economy sectors such as digital, technology and media.

2.6 The two other key town centre developments present opportunities to obtain contributions from developers towards supporting the aims of a cultural strategy, as well as having the potential to provide community facilities that could be used for arts and creative industries activity. The re-location of Jasmin Vardimon Company to the Mace Lane Industrial estate also creates a new location for cultural production and performance on the edge of the town centre.

2.7 Two town centre developments are characterised as having a minor impact on the development of a cultural strategy. The first of these is the planned 100,000sqft extension to the McArthur Glen Designer outlet. Although this will potentially enhance connectivity between the town centre as it stands and the expanded outlet through pedestrian and transport improvements, it is unlikely that this will affect the audiences for the arts and creative industries locally, or influence business investment decisions in this sector. Secondly, the planned expansion of Ashford School on East Hill, will make a contribution to the feel and use of town centre space, but the creation of additional facilities such as a proposed 250 seat performance space would most likely only increase the availability of space for community groups, and with constraints, rather than create dramatic new opportunities for local arts and creative industries organisations or those considering relocating to the town.

3. Comparator benchmarking

- 3.1 Two comparator towns have been chosen to show the approaches to cultural strategy being taken by areas within the same region as Ashford, who are competing with Ashford in terms of attracting inward investment and in-migration.
- 3.2 Reading is also less than 40 minutes by train from central London. It benefits from fast train links to London and is home to many digital and technology firms of the kind that Ashford wants to attract as part of its economic development ambitions. Like Ashford, it both benefits from and suffers from its proximity to London in terms of its arts and creative industries. Its larger population means that it is able to sustain a number of venues that would be unfeasible in Ashford at present, but it struggles to retain its creative businesses who migrate towards London when they reach their growth stage.
- 3.3 The Medway towns are between 35-50 minutes by train from London, depending on the route taken. Like Ashford, Medway has been part of a designated growth area, the Thames Gateway, and it shares a geographical context with Ashford. The largest town, Chatham, has a population comparable to Ashford at the present time, but it also envisages significant population growth over the next thirty years, driven in a large part by out-migration from London. The Medway Towns, like Ashford have suffered from a weak reputation in terms of cultural and leisure opportunities and have developed a cultural strategy that aims to address this and to support local economic and quality of life priorities.
- 3.4 Reading's Cultural Strategy runs to 2030. It has three key priorities: **Enhancing the distinctive identity of Reading; Increasing Opportunity and; Celebration**. In terms of facilities, the strategy identifies the need for both cultural hubs where excellent work can be developed and performed, and community facilities that can support grassroots cultural activity. Through this twin approach, the strategy aims to support diverse expressions of community identity and to showcase activity that improves and promotes the image of Reading as a cultural destination. The strategy is framed in terms of supporting both the generation and maintenance of good community relations and enhancing local economic development through the visitor economy and attracting and retaining businesses. The Celebration aspect of the strategy has involved developing a 'year of culture' project and a 'made in reading' brand – both of which are being used to promote the town and its creative identity. Reading's Cultural Strategy was developed by a new 'Cultural Partnership', established in 2010 to promote and support the local cultural sector. Within this partnership, the Council plays a significant role, but is joined by organisations and individuals from across a range of sectors to support the delivery of cultural strategy aims. This partnership has been successful in accessing, for example, Arts Council England grants and in managing funds from Section 106 contributions.
- 3.5 Medway's Cultural Strategy runs to 2019. The strategy has four priorities: **Stewardship; Engagement; Prosperity and Wellbeing**. Like Reading, Medway has also established a Cultural Partnership that brings together multiple stakeholders to support the delivery of Medway's cultural ambitions. The first priority of the Medway strategy is stewardship,

which reflects the presence of a number of significant built and natural heritage sites in the area. The engagement priority is supported by the promotion of more than 30 days of free festivals and events, allowing the engagement of more than 350,000 people each year in cultural activity in Medway and although these are open events, they are conceived mostly in terms of their ability to increase local community participation in culture and social inclusion, with a secondary aim being the promotion of the local area to external audiences. The prosperity theme is linked to two aspects of economic development: the visitor economy and investment in the creative sector. Although the towns of Medway (with the exception of Rochester) do not have a significant visitor offer, the strategy complements the Destination Management Plan for the area and is responding to the London Paramount development, which will bring an additional 15 million tourists a year into the wider North Kent area. Medway also plans to use its cultural strategy to support the creative industries by highlighting ambitions to develop a new creative quarter with creative industries workspace provision and to support graduates from its Further and Higher Education institutions to start and work for creative businesses in the area, rather than to re-locate to London. The wellbeing priority is mostly concerned with sport and leisure, as opposed to arts and culture, but also includes ambitions to extend local work that uses the arts to combat social exclusion.

4. Stakeholder research

4.1 Research took place in the form of face-to-face and telephone interviews with 15 arts and creative industries stakeholders of relevance to this project.

4.1.1 The interview data from this phase of the study was analysed, with the following key findings highlighted:

4.1.2 There appears to be a high level of regular amateur arts activity taking place in the Borough, although this needs benchmarking to be sure of its relative significance.

4.1.3 Some respondents identified a lack of local capacity for hosting, promoting, and working with professional arts organisations.

4.1.4 A lack of available space for rehearsal and performance in the town was consistently identified.

4.1.5 Many organisations felt that their work was not sufficiently promoted as part of the life of the Borough.

4.1.6 Many organisations felt that the council did not adequately support arts activity.

4.1.7 Some organisations identified the need for greater ambitions for arts and culture in the Borough in terms of facilities and projects.

4.1.8 A multi-purpose arts facility in the town centre was universally recommended.

4.1.9 Local parking and transport links were identified as a brake on arts development.

4.1.10 Poor signage and local promotion were identified as problems for arts development.

4.2 Additional consultation was carried out with key internal stakeholders from Ashford Borough Council. These included representatives from: a number of teams, as well as a series of meetings from the project's inception. The interview data from this phase of the project was analysed and the following key findings highlighted:

4.2.1 In term of economic development priorities, this study should focus on the attraction and retention of creative and technology industries businesses.

4.2.2 The jobs-led approach advocated by GL Hearn is an accurate reflection of current council thinking on its economic development strategy.

4.2.3 The arts and culture in the borough are mostly seen in terms of their role in place-making and urban design, rather than as a viable economic sector.

- 4.2.4 Although the council is concerned with the role of Tenterden and the rural areas of the Borough, the main focus of this report should be the town centre and the urban area of Ashford as this is the main focus of growth.
- 4.2.5 The vitality of the town centre is a key concern in the growth of the town.
- 4.2.6 A key economic issue that the cultural strategy should address is the problem of leakages: The affluent residents in the Borough spend a large portion of their leisure spending in other areas, including Canterbury and London.
- 4.2.7 Outside of the town centre, community facilities that host arts and cultural activity suffer from problems regarding access to specialist equipment and services needed for holding some events. They have no significant difficulties with capital funding, but ongoing revenue support is difficult.
- 4.2.8 There is a strong perception within the Council that the Council's role in the arts and cultural sectors is to provide support for voluntary sector organisations, who are over-dependant on local authority support. This is not sustainable in the current local authority funding context.
- 4.2.9 There is a lot of variability perceived by the Council in terms of the capacity of different areas of the Borough to deliver cultural activity, which reflects a patchwork of small grants, funded projects and established or new voluntary groups.
- 4.2.10 In terms of planning and the emergent Local Plan, it is important that the new Cultural Strategy reflects the development agenda in Ashford and contains key guiding themes for the council's role in supporting the arts and creative industries, especially where this may involve the allocation of sites and developer contributions. The arguments presented in this report should allow the Council to suggest specific developments that can be included in infrastructure lists going forward.

5. Strategic fit

The following policy and strategy documents have been highlighted to show policies and initiatives that provide strategic support for this study.

5.1 The 2012 National Planning Policy Framework,

This provides support for the role of culture in planning where it can contribute to over-arching sustainability goals, contribute to economic development, ensure the vitality of town centres, promote good design and support healthy communities.

5.2 Town and Country Planning Association

The brief referred to the TCPA good practice guide for this area, published in 2009. However, this has since been revised, with new guidelines published in 2013. This guidance is supported by central government and was produced in partnership with Kent County Council. The guidance outlines the key benefits of providing for 'culture, the arts and sport' in the planning process as:

- Economic Value
- Physical and Psychological Health and Wellbeing
- Place-making
- Support for education, skills and lifelong learning.

This guidance also provides a typology of relevant physical asset descriptions, highlights the importance of contributing to the local plan, lists relevant data sources that can inform this study and suggest guidelines for the auditing of existing provision. The guidance identifies the benchmark of 45 square metres of arts space provision per 100 people, but suggests that local benchmarks should be set through the planning process.

This guidance states that Section 106 agreements are a possible source of funding for new cultural provision, although it also identifies that 'the co-ordination and pooling of resources results in better outcomes from planning and delivery', implying that mechanisms such as the Community Infrastructure Levy should be explored by the council to fund aspects of the new Cultural Strategy..

5.3 Arts Council England – Arts, Museums and New development, A Standard Charge Approach.

This report describes planning considerations for galleries, multi-use arts facilities and theatres and production and rehearsal space. The reports places arts provision within social and community aspects of the planning process. Again, the opportunities provided by S106 agreements and CIL are explored.

The guidance emphasises the growth of local multi-use arts facilities, as well as arts spaces within educational establishments, wider civic facilities, or local community facilities. It goes on to make specific recommendations for their provision and specification. Typologies are provided, with examples, of kinds of arts provision and their usage.

The Benchmark calculations in this report estimate that:

45 square meters of arts space should be provided for every 1000 people at an average cost of £141 per person in new housing.

Gallery provision = £153pp/h

Multi-use arts venue and theatres = £116.50pp/h

Production, rehearsal and education space = £141pp/h

These calculations refer to publicly provided arts space and are additional to any space provided by private or third sector organisations.

5.4 South East of England Local Enterprise Partnership – Growth Deal and Strategic Economic Plan.

SELEP identify a number of relevant themes for regional growth in this document that support the ambitions of this project including: Growing the knowledge economy and moving towards high value services; support for the Cultural and Creative Industries as a key economic sector; plans to provide a CCI supply chain to feed into London's world-leading CCIs; supporting business start-ups and innovation.

5.5 Kent County Council – Unlocking Kent's Potential.

This over-arching policy document for growth and regeneration in the county highlights creating sustainable communities as a key ambition – within which a role for arts and cultural provision would be part of the mix; "We will support the identification of leisure, open space and cultural provision in planning for new infrastructure". The document offers support for business start ups, as well as "community, health and cultural facilities". Creative, media and cultural industries are identified as an opportunity sector for economic development; "A critical element in Kent's future economic success is to nurture the creative economy". In *21st Century Kent*, Ashford is envisaged as a place where communities will be drawn to live by its "exceptional quality of life".

5.6 A range of Ashford Borough Council policies, strategies and supporting documentation have been reviewed for this work.

- 5.6.1 The *Strategic Employment Options Report* clearly suggests a jobs-led strategy for economic development, supporting the ambition of this project to develop the conditions for inward investment and business re-location in the creative industries.
- 5.6.2 The *Ashford Sustainable Community Strategy* identifies growth in high quality jobs and those linked to the visitor economy as necessary for sustainable economic development, as well highlighting the role of "cultural, sporting and leisure activities" as a key component in people's quality of life. It specifically mentions the ambition to provide a new arts/cultural venue in the town centre.
- 5.6.3 The recent *Retail Needs and Leisure Assessment* in the Borough showed that although residents do take part in arts and cultural activities, these were most often in London, with limited demand present for these in Ashford itself.
- 5.6.4 The *Strategic Economic Framework* identifies the Commercial Quarter as a key focus for growth, supporting the aims of this project, along with enhancing the town centre. High

quality architecture and design is identified as a factor influencing growth, an area with strong links to the arts and creative industries. Under the section 'developing the Ashford offer', the framework makes a strong case for providing enhanced arts and creative industries supply in the town, including discussions of proposals for a 5,000 seat arena.

5.6.5 The 2015 update to the *Strategic Housing Market Assessment* has been received and the data for Ashford has been extracted from it to supplement the Ashford-specific report from 2014. The original data indicates a requirement for 13,800 dwellings for the 2011-2030 period, built at a rate of 720-730 per annum. This has been specified at 727 homes per annum in the 2015 update.

5.7 Key regional and national bodies and agencies and their relevant priorities and initiatives

5.7.1 Arts Council England

5.7.1.1 Corporate Goals

Goal 1: Excellence is thriving and celebrated in the arts, museums and libraries

Goal 2: Everyone has the opportunity to experience and be inspired by the arts, museums and libraries

Goal 3: The arts, museums and libraries are resilient and environmentally sustainable

Goal 4: The leadership and workforce in the arts, museums and libraries are diverse and appropriately skilled

Goal 5: Every child and young person has the opportunity to experience the richness of the arts, museums and libraries

5.7.1.2 **NATIONAL PORTFOLIO ORGANISATIONS (NPO)** Investment in 696 organisations for three year period, to address the 5 goals, largely funded by the Treasury via Grant in Aid to ACE. Current round, 2015-18, saw Kent lose two NPOs (Propeller Theatre and Ashford based Stour Valley Arts) and gain one (Gulbenkian Theatre). Advice is that there will be further cuts to the Grant in Aid and that 2018-21 will see further reduction in the portfolio. New scheme likely to be developed to support key organisations who need core funding.

5.7.1.3 **GRANTS FOR THE ARTS** – open access programme, applications up to £15,000 with a 6 week decision and over £15,000 with a 12 week decision

5.7.1.4 **STRATEGIC FUNDING** – Funded through the National Lottery – used help ACE to target particular challenges, opportunities or gaps. Relevant programmes are set out below:

5.7.1.4.1 **Ambition for Excellence** - a £35.2 million programme aimed at stimulating and supporting ambition, talent and excellence across the arts sector in England. The fund aims to realise significant impact on the growth of an ambitious international-

facing arts infrastructure, especially outside London. A rolling programme, from 28 May 2015 to 27 October 2017

It aims to contribute to the development of strong cultural places; to grow and develop talent and leadership in the regions and across artforms; give an international dimension to excellent work, and create the highest quality new work including for outdoor and festival contexts

Expectation is that 80-90 per cent of this fund will be committed outside London, to support the Arts Council's intent to ensure that a minimum of 75 per cent of Lottery funding is committed outside the capital by 2018.

The Arts Impact Fund is a new £7m initiative set up to demonstrate the potential for social investment in arts www.artsimpactfund.org - repayable loan finance between £150,000 and £600,000.

Creative local growth fund – This recognises how arts and culture can contribute to local economic growth and will support arts and cultural organisations to contribute to local economic growth by helping fund activity to support the creative industries, tourism and a stronger cultural sector by leveraging in EU Structural and Investment Funds from Local Enterprise Partnerships.

The fund seeks to put arts and culture at the heart of growth plans by: securing long term partnership between LEPs, the Arts Council and other local partners to support the cultural sector; helping to leverage European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIFs) - particularly European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) - investment within the LEP area into the cultural sector; and investing in new approaches to achieve these objectives, while at the same time developing learning that can inform policy and practice.

Strategic touring programme. £33 million is available for Strategic touring 2015-18.

Through the range of applications ACE will support, the aim is to ensure that:

1. People across England have improved access to great art visiting their local area:

- better access to high quality work for people in places in England which rely on touring for much of their arts provision
- more high quality work to reach people and places with the least engagement
- extending the reach of high quality touring work by widening audience access and broadening the range of venues presenting the work

2. Stronger relationships forged between those involved in artistic, audience and programme development on both the demand (eg venues, audiences, promoters) and supply (eg artists, producers) side of touring.

3. A wide range of high quality work on tour, including in particular more work which reflects the diversity of the local community and/or contemporary England, more incoming international work and more mid-scale theatre.

5.7.2 Heritage Lottery Fund

HLF strategy 2013-2018 “A lasting difference for heritage and people” - a single strategic aim.

Lottery distributor for heritage – three key funding approaches, each with a number of underpinning programmes

- Open Programmes
- Targeted Programmes - rolling programmes or programmes running every year with fixed application deadlines and decision points. This includes Heritage Enterprise, (see below) and the Townscape Initiative
- Special Initiatives

Heritage Enterprise - The cost of repairing a neglected historic building is often so high that restoration simply isn't commercially viable. Heritage Enterprise makes such schemes possible by funding some of the repair costs with grants of £100,000 to £5million. Rolling programme to August 2016. Heritage Enterprise is designed to bridge the funding gap that prevents a historic asset in need of repair from being returned to a beneficial and commercial use.

5.7.3 South East Local Enterprise Partnership

The South East LEP is the largest LEP in the UK outside of London. It currently has a population of over 4m people, which is set to increase further (+284,600) by 2021.

Four key priority areas as identified in the Local Enterprise Partnership's Strategic Economic Plan:

- Enhancing Transport Connectivity
- Increasing Business Support and Productivity
- Raising Local Skill Levels
- Supporting Housing and Development

Where these apply directly to Ashford:

- Transport - “Investing In Our Transport Growth Corridors/Areas” M20 London - Maidstone -Ashford Corridor
- Homes - “Government agreeing to work with specific local authorities in the SE LEP area to identify potential locations for new large scale housing developments, including garden cities or garden suburbs, such as at Chilmington Green, Ashford.”

Ashford is Kent and Medway's fastest growing urban centre outside the Thames Gateway, building on its excellent connections to London and direct international rail services to Paris and Brussels. Planned investment in M20 Junction 10a will help to unlock Ashford's growth potential, helping to deliver around 10,000 jobs and 7,000 homes.

Growth Deal

The South East Growth Deal agreed on 7 July 2014 and expanded on 29 January 2015 aims to contribute to the Local Enterprise Partnership's Strategic Economic Plan by helping to renew the physical and intellectual capital of the South East.

The Deal will *focus initially on transport infrastructure and meeting the skills capital requirements* identified by the LEP but will lay the foundations for increased growth across the SELEP area. It will give renewed impetus to the delivery of much-needed new jobs and homes in the Thames Gateway and in other key growth locations, including at a new garden city of Ebbsfleet and will act as a spur to the revival of the area's many coastal towns.

The South East Local Enterprise Partnership has secured £488.2m from the Government's Local Growth Fund to support economic growth in the area – with £64.6m of new funding confirmed for 2015/16 and £189.7m for 2016/17 to 2021. This includes:

- as part of the Government's ongoing commitment to the South East LEP a provisional award of a further £164.4m of funding for projects starting in 2016 and beyond; and
- £69.5m of funding which the Government has previously committed as part of Local Growth Deal funding to the area.

Skills Strategy

Overall rates of economic activity in the LEP area are above the national rates but below those of the wider south east, with employment rates showing a similar pattern. LEP will see the strategic direction and practical application of its skills work driven through its three employer-led Employment and Skills Boards.

5.7.4 Kent & Medway Learning and Skills Board

- Formed in March 2013, developed from the existing 14-19 County Planning Forum, to support delivery of the 14-24 Learning Education and Skills Strategy
- The Board includes representatives from employer groups, Further Education, Higher Education, secondary schools, funding organisations (EFA and SFA) and CXK (formerly Connexions)
- The employer group representatives are from the Kent Business Advisory Board, the Chambers of Commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses, providing a link from the Board to these groups.

Priority Skills Sectors for Kent

- Life Sciences
- Creative and Media
- Low Carbon
- Land based
- Manufacturing
- Construction
- Tourism
- Higher Education

5.7.5 SE LEP Creative and Cultural Industries Leaders Group

Facilitated by Andrea Stark, Chief Exec High House Production Park. Membership includes local authority cultural managers, leaders from the sector and agency representatives.

Developing a 'National Prospectus for the Creative Economy in the South East' – currently at draft stage and not in public domain. "With a GVA contribution of £2.5 billion per annum, the creative industries in the South East LEP area contribute more to the UK economy than those of any other LEP outside of London. Creative sector business leadership in partnership with SE LEP, are in an unparalleled position to drive innovation to grow the creative workforce, generating high skilled, high value employment in places that can most benefit from diversifying their local economies."

Key Initiatives (proposed)

- A South East Creative Industries Innovation Network based around 7 locations
 - Hastings
 - Margate
 - Southend
 - Thurrock
 - Folkestone
 - Colchester
 - Chatham

- South East Creative Industries Business Support Programme
- South East Creative Industries Progression and Skills Programme
- London and South East Creative Sector Workspace Plan
- Place Making Innovation from City to Sea
- UK Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries Craftsmanship (Thurrock)
- Cross Sector Innovation (Margate)
- Jasmin Vardimon Dance Laboratory
- Digital and Creative Colchester Cluster

5.7.6 Kent County Council

Corporate plan 2015-2020 “Increasing Opportunities, Improving Outcomes”

Three key outcomes:

- Children and young people in Kent get the best start in life
- Kent communities feel the benefits of economic growth by being in-work, healthy and enjoying a good quality of life
- Older and vulnerable residents are safe and supported with choices to live independently

Commissioning agenda across the council. Cultural Services now well placed, within Economy and Regeneration and having demonstrated through the pilot Cultural Commissioning/Wellbeing programme that cultural services can deliver against key corporate outcomes.

Kent Cultural Strategy 2010-2015 – will undergo a refresh for next 5 years but essentially built around the same key priorities

- To grow Kent’s creative economy by being welcoming and cooperative hosts to the creative workforce
- To protect Kent’s existing strengths by being passionate and responsible stewards of Kent’s built and natural environment
- To increase Kent’s potential by being ambitious and resourceful cultural planners

Creative Workspace in Kent Study – 2014 Tom Fleming

A report which sets out a development agenda for KCC and partners “For the creative industries to grow and add value across Kent, it will be necessary to support the continued development of key clusters, to connect key clusters across the county and to do so through the connective tissue of smaller and emergent clusters”.

This is in line with the approach being developed for the SELEP area by the CCI Leaders group and plans for a *Creative Industries Innovation Network*. (see under 3. SE LEP)

- No Simple Formula for Growth – public sector cannot work alone, needs entrepreneurial landlords and passionate and engaged creatives.
- The Kent Creative Cluster Portfolio – partners and KCC should work to ensure that creative workspace provision is suitably diverse, connected and flexible. By undertaking the portfolio approach, supporting clusters where they emerge, then work to connect these to one another. Three main drivers for this portfolio approach:
 - Think local and encourage specialism – A set of distinctive, place based clusters
 - Join the dots and build a network – individual locations in Kent do not yet have sufficient ‘pull’ to attract significant numbers of creative businesses from elsewhere i.e. London
 - Converge activities in priority clusters – identify 1 or 2 areas for large scale demonstration projects (with the LEP)

To give focus, the report identified 7 clusters, West Kent - Tunbridge Wells, Maidstone; East Kent - Thanet, Canterbury, Folkestone; Central Kent – Ashford. With three key priority clusters, Thanet, Folkestone and Tunbridge Wells.

5.7.7 NCVO Cultural Commissioning Programme

Supporting arts and cultural organisations to engage in public sector commissioning - a three year Arts Council England funded programme which runs to June 2016. Delivering a range of workstreams to:

- help the arts and cultural sector develop skills and capacity to engage in cultural commissioning
- enable commissioners to develop awareness and know-how of commissioning arts and cultural organisations to deliver public service outcomes
- encourage relationships between cultural providers and commissioners
- influence policy makers and raise the profile of this area of work

This programme has been particularly high profile in Kent as the county was selected as one of three national pilot projects. There is strong buy-in and leadership at county council level through the Strategic Commissioning unit

5.7.8 Artwork - Bridge Organisation

Artwork is part of a national network of Arts Council England funded organisations. Their role is to ensure all children and young people experience the richness of the arts both in and outside of school. Funded £4.7m of National Lottery money to deliver this role from 2012 to 2018, Artwork is one of 10 Bridge organisations nationally who support the Arts Council's strategic work with children and young people.

As a Bridge, Artwork connects arts and cultural organisations, children and young people, families and schools across the South East of England; also further enhance and strengthen the learning offer of arts and cultural organisations through increased connectivity, skills and development and knowledge exchange.

Key activity 2015-18 will be establishing a series of Cultural Learning Networks – strategic groups focused on specific localities.

Cultural Learning Partnership will aid and support strategic work, to ensure that arts and cultural development with, for and by CYP responds to identified need and reaches those young people hardest to reach. They will aim to bring added value to investment, create economies of scale and address needs through joint planning and collaboration. The inclusion of senior leaders from schools and wider CYP sectors will be crucial to ensuring strategic planning and delivery. Cultural Learning Partnerships should seek to effect a step change in the way that cultural learning is delivered and supported in particular localities.

5.7.9 Warwick Commission

Report 2015 “Enriching Britain: Culture, Creativity and Growth”

Key recommendations

Goal 1: A Cultural and Creative Ecosystem generating stronger cultural wellbeing and economic growth and opportunity for all citizens and communities.

Goal 2: Production and consumption of culture and creativity should be enjoyed by the whole population and deliver the entitlement of all to a rich cultural and expressive life.

Goal 3: A world-class creative and cultural education for all to ensure the wellbeing and creativity of the population as well as the future success of the Cultural and Creative Industries Ecosystem.

Goal 4: A thriving digital cultural sphere that is open and available to all.

Goal 5: A vibrant creative life at local and regional levels that reflects and enriches community expressions of identity, creativity and culture across the UK.

6. Trends in arts and cultural audiences

6.1 Multiple studies of arts and cultural audiences in the UK have produced remarkably consistent results when explaining the reasons why people attend arts and cultural events. The most recent national data comes from the Audience Agency's¹⁷ survey of more than 100,000 people attending a variety of events across the UK from 2013-2015.

6.2 The most significant reason reported by audiences for attendance is entertainment (84-87%), with the second being to spend time with friends and family (49%).

6.3 The breakdown of popularity of categorised art-forms in the South-East is as follows:

1. Plays / Drama (17.5%)
2. Music (14.9%)
3. Musical Theatre (8.8%)
4. Christmas Shows (6.8%)
5. Dance (6%)
6. Film (5.8%)
7. General Entertainment (5.7%)
8. Children / Family (3.6%)
9. Literature (0.6%)

6.4 For the South-East, the Audiences Agency breaks down audiences into the segments below. Although these segments are not specific to Ashford, they give an indication of the profile of local and regional arts and culture audiences. It is a strong recommendation of this report that further research is carried out to develop sophisticated audience data for Ashford.

6.5 *Commuterland Culturebuffs (34%)*. These are an affluent and settled group with many working in higher managerial and professional occupations they are keen consumers of culture, with broad tastes but a leaning towards heritage and more classical or traditional offerings. Often mature families or retirees, living largely in leafy provincial suburban or greenbelt comfort. A group willing to travel and pay for premium experiences, their habits perhaps influenced by commuting. Motivations are multiple, ranging from social and self-improvement, to the pursuit of learning opportunities for older children. Tend to be frequent attenders and potential donors

6.6 *Dormitory Dependables (24%)*. A significant proportion of arts audiences are made up of this dependably regular if not frequently engaging group. Most live in suburban or small towns and show a preference for heritage activities alongside popular and more traditional mainstream arts. Many are thriving, well off mature couples or busy older families. Lifestage coupled with more limited access to an extensive cultural offer mean that culture is more an occasional treat or family or social outing than an integral part of their lifestyle

¹⁷ <https://www.theaudienceagency.org>

- 6.7 *Trips and Treats (11%)*. While this group may not view arts and culture as a passion, they are reasonably culturally active, despite being particularly busy with a wide range of leisure interests. Tend to be comfortably off and living in the heart of suburbia. Children range in ages, and include young people still living at home. With a strong preference for mainstream arts and popular culture like musicals and familiar drama, mixed in with days out to museums and heritage sites. This group are led by their children's interests and strongly influenced by friends and family
- 6.8 *Home and Heritage (10%)*. A more mature group that is generally conservative in their tastes. Large proportion are National Trust members. Classical music and amateur dramatics are comparatively popular. While this is not a highly engaged group – partly because they are largely to be found in rural areas and small towns – they do engage with local cultural activity. Likely to look for activities to match their needs and interests, such as accessible day-time activities or content exploring historical events.
- 6.9 *Experience Seekers (8%)*. Make up an important and significant part of urban arts audiences. This group are highly active, diverse, social and ambitious singles and couples and younger people engaging with the arts on a regular basis. Often students, recent graduates and in the early to mid-stages of their careers. Tend to live close to city centres, so have easy access to and attend a wide variety of arts, museums, galleries and heritage. Interests cover mainstream, contemporary and culturally diverse offers and attending is at the heart of their social lives. They are mostly in search of new things to do and have disposable income to spend on a variety of leisure activities like sports/arts memberships, visits to cafes, bars and restaurants. Typically digitally savvy, they will share experiences through social media on their smartphones
- 6.10 *Up Our Street (3%)*. Often living reasonably comfortable and stable lives. A group that engage with popular arts and entertainment and museums, and are also visitors of heritage sites. Many are older and have some health issues. Living on average or below average household incomes, so access in all its forms can be an issue. Characterised as modest in their habits and in their means, value for money and low-risk can be important factors in leisure decision making
- 6.11 *Facebook Families (2%)*. A younger, cash-strapped group living in suburban and semi-urban areas of high unemployment. Least likely to think themselves as arty, arts and culture generally play a very small role in the lives. Less than a third believe that the arts is important. Often go out as a family: cinema, live music, eating out and pantomime being most popular.
- 6.12 *Metroculturals (2%)*. Prosperous, liberal urbanite group. Often choose a city lifestyle for the broad cultural opportunity it affords. Interested in a very wide spectrum of activity, but many tend towards their own preferred artform or style. Apt to be active museum attenders, but tend to be more engaged with the arts and many on a weekly basis. Represent good prospects for new, innovative work. Likely to be working in demanding but rewarding professions, including arts professionals, they are highly educated and have a wide variety of other interests

- 6.13 Given the nature of planned and contemporary development in the Ashford area, with an emphasis on commuter in-migration and population growth, coupled with an economic development strategy that emphasises knowledge intensive industries, it is likely that the most significant growth in local audience segments will be *Experience Seekers* and *Metroculturals*, but with a continuing dominant presence of *Commuterland Culturebuffs*.
- 6.14 Research published by Ticketmaster in 2013¹⁸ into theatre audiences across the United Kingdom identified two key emerging trends in performing arts, with young audiences in particular embracing interactivity and streaming of live performances. Audiences of all ages are increasingly likely to use technology at all stages of their audience journey, from information search, to booking their tickets and sharing their experiences online. Although 76% of the population have been to at least one theatre show in the last three years (more than music concerts at 53% at sports events at 47%) , the segment with the highest likelihood to attend is 16-19 year olds – a fact no doubt explained in part by school visits but also indicating the continuing presence of the performing arts in the lives of young people. 25-44 year olds remain the core audience for theatre in the UK.
- 6.15 Although much recent audience research has suggested that audiences have become increasingly omnivorous in their cultural consumption, and more open to a diversity of cultural experiences, recently published research from a national survey in the United Kingdom shows that this is not the case for music¹⁹. *Classic Enthusiasts* like only classical music, with a marked dislike of all other music genres and an ignorance of popular music. The *Aversive* group dislike all music, but especially popular music. They are different from the *Uninformed* group who do not actively listen to music and show no interest in attending music events. The largest cluster is *Pop-oriented*: they demonstrate a marked dislike for traditional music forms such as classical and jazz, but an enthusiasm for urban and electronic music in particular. The fifth cluster are the *musical experts*; they are aware of a number of genres and have preferences within each, but are least in favour of contemporary music, with quite conservative tastes. This is in opposition to the *culturally privileged group*, who are generally university educated, and well aware of emerging trends in contemporary music across all genres. The final cluster is the *pop-voracious* group who are similar to the *pop-oriented* cluster, but who are enthusiastic about a greater range of popular music including rock and country.
- 6.16 The Galleries and Visual Arts Network published research in 2015²⁰ that showed that the visual arts are attracting audiences from across the age spectrum, with almost one in five visitors aged between 16-24 and the ethnicity of audiences broadly reflecting the general population. Using the Audience Agency categorisation in section 7.14, the groups with the highest attendance are the *Metroculturals*, *Commuterland Culturebuffs* and *Experience Seekers*. They found that most gallery visitors are repeat visitors and are highly engaged with the arts forms that they view. On the whole, the visual arts is the part of the arts and creative industries spectrum that is reliant most on audiences with high levels of art-form experience and knowledge. It is popular with segments who are not necessarily the

¹⁸ State of Play: Theatre UK, Ticketmaster, 2013

¹⁹ Savage, M. & Gayo, M. (2011) 'Unravelling the Omnivore: A field analysis of contemporary music tastes in the United Kingdom' in *Poetics*, 39, 337-357

²⁰ National Visual Arts 204/15 Cluster Benchmark Report, CVAN, 2015

core arts and cultural audience in Ashford, but whose presence within local audiences is predicted to grow.

8. Recommendations for a new Cultural Strategy

8.1 This section of the report contains specific recommendations and proposals that can be used to inform the development of Ashford's next Cultural Strategy. Each recommendation and proposal is explicitly linked to insights gained during the research phase of this project, and set out above.

8.2 There are two core elements to these proposals: People and Place. Ashford's Cultural Strategy should have the twin aims of enhancing the quality of life for current and future residents and contributing to a creative place-making agenda that encourages business investment, especially in the creative and technology industries.

8.3 Ashford Creative Partnership

8.3.1 Ashford Borough Council should support the creation of a new partnership structure to set a creative vision for Ashford and to take ownership of parts of the Council's cultural strategy. This partnership would involve key arts and creative industries stakeholders, including those not traditionally involved in cultural partnerships, such as property developers and technology businesses.

8.3.2 The vision for the arts and creative industries created through this partnership would be independent of the Council and would engage a variety of stakeholders in delivering on an agreed set of priorities. This partnership would be able to pool resources from the public, private and third sectors and create new delivery relationships.

8.3.3 These kinds of partnership arrangements are used widely across the United Kingdom, but most 'cultural partnerships' involve only a narrow range of partners and have an exclusively traditional cultural / arts focus. The Ashford Creative Partnership would be explicitly linked to the town's growth agenda and would facilitate productive conversations between partners who do not normally sit around the same table.

8.3.4 This would address the concerns of the town's existing cultural organisations, many of whom feel that they do not have a strong voice in the decisions being taken that affect them, or in the wider context of Ashford's development. Whilst the Council would take a leading role in setting up the partnership, and be a core member, it should not chair the partnership or determine its membership. It would also create the conditions for the sharing of expertise and resources in the context of a general national reduction in Local Authority spending in this area and the specific context of Council spending in Ashford.

8.3.5 The partnership would take the lead from the Council's Cultural Strategy, and work towards publishing its own 'Creative Ashford' vision within a year of being set up. This builds on the idea pioneered in Ashford's Arts Manifesto, but extends this to a more ambitious, strategic level.

- 8.3.6 This recommendation relates to the *people* element of this report by creating opportunities to link the arts and creative industries sector more clearly to a diverse group of stakeholders who are delivering on other quality of life aspects of Ashford's growth such as property developers, health providers and schools, depending on the membership of the partnership.
- 8.3.7 This recommendation relates to the *place* element of this report by offering the opportunity to create an innovative new approach to the promotion of the creative environment of the town that will not be led by the public sector and will increase the visibility of the opportunities available to creative businesses in Ashford. By publishing an ambitious creative vision for the town with the buy-in of the private sector, it will send a clear message to prospective investors.

8.4 Excellent experiences

- 8.4.1 Population growth in Ashford over the next fifteen years is planned to involve the relocation of workers who commute into London as well as being based on the creation of new knowledge economy opportunities for workers in the Borough. This suggests that the growth segments in terms of local cultural audiences will be from the *Commuterland Culturebuffs*, *Experience Seekers* and *Metroculturals* segments. These segments are willing to pay for high quality cultural experiences and their consumption habits have often been formed through their access to excellent cultural experiences in London, at University or from living in other cities and towns. These segments are prepared to travel for their cultural experiences and the existence of a high speed train link to central London and good links to other cultural hotspots such as Canterbury and Folkestone is a mixed blessing in terms of retaining the spending of these affluent cultural consumers in Ashford.
- 8.4.2 Ashford's cultural strategy should include a focus on developing excellent cultural experiences to meet the needs of these segments. These excellent experiences should include not only high quality artists and performances, which the town has recently seen more of, but high quality venues and public spaces, an appropriate evening economy in terms of eating and drinking opportunities, and a marketing communications strategy that is appropriate for these audiences.
- 8.4.3 Revelation St Mary's is an example of an ambitious high quality performance space with some regionally and nationally significant touring artists, but it is not currently supported by wrap-around provision to help it to achieve its potential and to provide an excellent overall experience for its audiences.
- 8.4.4 Other areas of East Kent have begun to develop excellent cultural offerings. Canterbury has an international arts festival and a regional theatre, whilst the cultural regeneration schemes of Margate and Folkestone have attracted national attention. Ashford should work together with these towns as part of the 2023 European Capital of Culture bid to signal its intent to be part of an excellent cultural region.

- 8.4.5 There are 39 Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisations in the South East of England. In the past, retaining one of these in Ashford was not a clear priority for the Council. The attraction of one NPO, Jasmin Vardimon Company, to Ashford was an important step forward in promoting an image of the town as somewhere that is open to excellent cultural provision, but a long term vision for the cultural strategy should be to support the emergence of another NPO in the Borough. The benefits of this are not just in terms of the image of the town; an NPO would partner with other organisations and support them in their growth and they would also attract funding into the Borough that could be matched into other projects.
- 8.4.6 It is clear from the stakeholder consultation phase of this project that there is a strongly felt need for a new cultural facility in the town centre, in addition to St Mary's. This is especially important now in light of the closure of Ashford Youth Theatre's Dover Place space which, as appendix one shows, provided a valuable resource to the local arts sector. Consultation within the Council suggests that this is a possibility, but this report recommends that a feasibility study is carried out for a town centre site for this development. Based on consultation, and an assessment of similar facilities elsewhere, this study recommends that the Arts Council England standard charge model for 'Production, rehearsal and education space' is used when considering this development²¹. This has been suggested in preference to the larger 'Multi-use arts venue and theatre' category, as the latter category envisions the inclusion of a 250+ seat performance space, which it is unlikely that the town could sustain in the medium term in addition to St Mary's. According to Arts Council England: "This category includes artist studios, education and workspace with associated public space, as well as space for sales. Spaces can encompass media and recording studios, incubation spaces for visual and performing arts development organisations and facilities which are used by universities, community groups and schools for arts based activities or teaching." This kind of space would replace the lost facility at Dover Place, whilst also offering a step-change in terms of professionalization, and opportunities for use by a range of different types of organisations. Arts Council England recommend that the mean construction and fit out costs of such a development would be £3,700 per square metre and (based on a 45 square metre per 10,000 population benchmark), the facility should be around 350 square metres, at a cost of around £1,295,000.
- 8.4.7 This recommendation relates to the *people* element of this report by proposing the shift towards a cultural strategy that emphasises the high quality of local arts and culture and the creation of excellent cultural experiences for residents. This reflects the changing demography of the town and the effect of this on cultural audiences. The creation of a new cultural facility in the town centre that can house community and education level activity as well as provide production and rehearsal space supports the community arts and cultural organisations who are already in the town and who contribute to the quality of life of its residents, especially young people.
- 8.4.8 This recommendation relates to the *place* element of this report through its focus on retaining the expenditure of high spending cultural audiences. In the research for this report

²¹ Arts Council England – Arts, Museums and New development, A Standard Charge Approach, 2011

it became clear that bringing the spending of more affluent residents from the fringes of the borough into the town itself should be a priority for this strategy, and this recommendation will contribute to this. An excellent cultural offering will also help to attract and retain business investment in the town centre and support the development of the evening economy.

8.5 Focus on the Town Centre

- 8.5.1** Town centres have been the focus of much policy attention nationally and numerous reports have identified the centrality of the cultural offer of town centres as central to their attractiveness to shoppers and residents²². In Ashford, an area that is seeing the emergence of a polycentric approach to development with numerous out of town and edge of town developments, a vibrant town centre area is vital to the success of the growth agenda. In addition, the town centre area will be home to an increasing number of new residents who will see it primarily as a place for leisure, rather than retail. The town centre currently has a vacancy rate that is 5% higher than the national average²³ and so attracting new investment, in retail and other sectors for the town centre is key. The developments in Elwick Place will provide a much-needed improvement in the quality of leisure and restaurant options in the town and the McArthur Glen expansion will increase the attractiveness of Ashford in terms of fashion retail in particular.
- 8.5.2** In addition to the anchor retail area of County Square, the Park Mall development is an important retail centre in the town. Because Park Mall is now owned by the Council, it presents particular opportunities for the cultural strategy in the Borough. Although it currently houses some small scale creative organisations, in retail and the visual arts, as well as the administrative functions of St Mary's Arts Trust, it is envisaged that this space will be primarily for private sector use in the future, with a focus on a start-up / incubator function for knowledge economy businesses.
- 8.5.3** This report recommends that the developments in Park Mall are considered as apart of the new Cultural Strategy, both in terms of attracting arts and creative industries businesses to locate in the units, but also in terms of how the arts and culture can contribute to creating an environment that encourages start-up businesses to locate themselves within a problematic area of the town centre, for reasons other than cost.
- 8.5.4** In order to encourage small and start-up business investment, the quality of the business environment is key. Some aspects of this relate to the provision of business support services and subsidised rental prices, but the types of businesses that form a part of Ashford's economic plans are attracted by the quality of the wider environment in terms of available spaces to meet, network, eat and drink and socialise outside of the office. The new cultural strategy should support arts-led improvements to the spaces inside Park Mall and the management of the development should encourage a mix of uses including the retention of existing cultural activity and its establishment on a more secure footing. In doing this, improving the quality of the development and its uses should be a core consideration in

²² Wrigley, N. & Lambiri, D. (2015) *British High Streets from Crisis to Recovery: A review of the evidence*, University of Southampton

²³ Ashford Retail and Leisure Needs Impact Assessment, Carter Jonas, 2015

order to attract and retain business investment. Mixing together commercial and third sector organisations, along with social enterprise will generate productive synergies between organisations and help to generate a ‘buzz’ around the area.

- 8.5.5 This recommendation relates mostly to the *place* element of this report by improving the quality of an underused town centre site and creating more favourable conditions for investment within it. By creating a more attractive retail area and a more vibrant business environment, it contributes to local economic development and the local visitor economy in particular. As the residential density of the town centre increases with new development, this recommendation will also impact on the *people* element of this report by improving the quality of life of town centre residents through public realm improvements and the creation of employment opportunities.

8.6 Hub and spoke development

- 8.6.1 In order to balance the competing needs of the arts and creative industries in the town centre, urban areas and rural areas of the Borough, this report proposes a hub-and-spoke approach to the planning of arts and creative industries facilities in Ashford.
- 8.6.2 Developments around the town centre will provide opportunities for new community and cultural facilities, but these multi-use spaces will be more suitable for grassroots activity. These spaces will not compare favourably to the specialist provision in towns within Ashford’s competitive region of a one-hour journey time to London. Mixed use spaces will also not, on their own, meet the future needs of the sector, or the demands of future audiences.
- 8.6.3 In order to deliver excellent cultural experiences and to support the economic development priorities of attracting creative and technology businesses to the area, it is important that the town centre, in particular, contains high quality, specialist provision for the arts and creative industries.
- 8.6.4 St Mary’s and Jasmin Vardimon are already examples of high quality provision in this regard, and Park Mall and the proposed new cultural facility for the town centre will also fall into this category. Each of these projects has the potential, if properly funded and engaged, to become a hub within a new arts and creative industries infrastructure of the town that would demonstrate a clear strategic approach to the promotion and development of these sectors.
- 8.6.5 Hub developments should be external facing, supporting an ambitious vision for the arts and creative industries in the Borough and making a contribution to the development of the local economy and the visitor economy. They would be the major contribution from the sector to providing excellent experiences in the town.
- 8.6.6 Each hub would have its own area of specialisation, and its own audiences. The hubs would be able to provide specialist advice, support and content to spoke facilities, which would be

delivered as part of multi-use community spaces in existing and emerging residential developments in the Borough.

- 8.6.7 Existing community centre provision in many areas of the Borough already operates as mixed use provision, hosting a range of arts and cultural activity, from amateur exhibitions through to music and theatre performances. However, many of these spaces suffer from a lack of specialist technical knowledge and specific pieces of equipment necessary to host these events successfully and at an affordable cost. Creating a network of hubs and spokes would allow for specialist equipment and expertise to be centrally supported in key hubs and available to spoke facilities when needed.
- 8.6.8 It is clear from the research for this project that Ashford has a high level of grassroots cultural activity, much of which is not funded or promoted by the Council. Drawing these spaces more strategically into a hub and spoke model of cultural development would create a more meaningful arts and culture infrastructure in the Borough, developing relationships between organisations at all levels.
- 8.6.9 In terms of planning for new spoke facility development, this would allow for planning for mixed-use, flexible community facilities, fitted out with a minimum specification to connect them into an arts and creative industries infrastructure. Arts Council Guidance²⁴ suggest that there is an increased need for multi-use community facilities for arts and culture which can be bespoke, created within existing community facilities or within educational establishments. Development in Ashford has the potential to use all three of these models. In order to form part of a meaningful arts and creative industries infrastructure, spoke facilities would need to have the ability to host a minimum standard of features including: Reception / ticketing facilities, cloakrooms and toilets, rooms for public use, performance space, rooms for private use such as dressing rooms, space for technical equipment and adequate signage. Each spoke facility would have its own characteristics, but would share a minimum specification. Importantly, trends in audience behaviour and cultural production suggest that a new minimum requirement for these facilities would be high speed broadband and wireless capability and sufficient mains power to support technology such as projection and broadcast.
- 8.6.10 This infrastructure would support the *people* aims of using arts and culture to enhance the quality of life for all residents, by maintaining and enhancing the significant grassroots activity that already takes place in the Borough and widening the availability of cultural activities in the Borough by ensuring a baseline level of technical provision available to each community facility.
- 8.6.11 This approach also supports the *place* aspects of this report by emphasising the excellent experiences available in the priority town centre area of the Borough, creating links between hubs of high quality production including existing and new facilities. This would generate increased exposure for work being produced and shown in the borough, supporting the marketing of Ashford town centre as a cultural and visitor destination.

²⁴ Arts Council England, Arts Museums and Galleries: A Standard Charge Approach, 2011

Appendix One: Ashford Youth Theatre – Dover Place site

Ashford Youth Theatre (AYT) was founded in 1983 by Darryl Brown and Stella Critchley. In 2006, Stella was awarded an MBE in recognition of this work. AYT are a registered charity who draw their membership from schools and other youth organisations in Ashford and south-east Kent.

Over the last thirty-two years, AYT have staged more than 50 performances in and around the Borough in mostly non-traditional sites including the old Railway Works, disused industrial units on the Orbital Park, Mace Lane and Victoria Road and in schools and community facilities. Since 2005, AYT have been based in the former coachworks building at Dover Place. From this building, AYT provide support and resources to schools, colleges, other arts organisations, touring companies and emerging artists in the Borough.

In 2005, financial and technical support was provided to AYT by the South East of England Development Agency, to bring the building up to an acceptable state of repair to enable it to be used for its current function. Now, the Dover Place facility has become a cornerstone of local cultural and arts activity in the town centre, especially for young people and for organisations who need access to easily accessible and affordable performance and rehearsal space. AYT are also providing a vital training and skills development facility for people wanting to develop their skills in lighting, electrical trades and the technical aspects of performing arts management.

Use by other organisations

Because of its size, location and the availability of technical and managerial support, the Dover Place building continues to be used by a wide range of other organisations and individuals. These have included Ark Drama, Sk8Side Youth Centre, dancers affiliated to Jasmin Vardimon Company, local street / graffiti artists and more than a dozen local bands who use the space for rehearsals and recordings. Occasionally, the facility is used by professional arts organisations such as the Actors Touring Company, who work in Broadway and the West End and who are in discussions to return to develop a new work in 2016. The building has also been used by local photographers and film makers seeking unique locations for shoots.

Other organisations supported by AYT services in Dover Place

Over many years, AYT have built a store of technical equipment which is now housed at Dover Place and this has been used to support the arts and culture across the Borough. Local schools including Highworth, Norton Knatchbull, High Halden Primary and St Simon's Primary have recently benefited from equipment and technical support from AYT. Tenterden Folk Festival, Shiva Nova events and the Festival in the Park are all supported by services from Dover Place, as well as Margaret Giles School of Dancing and Dance Visions.

Work experience and employability

All secondary schools and the college in Ashford send pupils aged between 14-19 to Dover Place to gain work experience, for placement ranging from 1-14 days. Recently, around six pupils per year have been supported to develop skills in areas such as lighting, stage management, set design, sound and general electrical trades skills. CXK, a local charitable organisation who support young people and families to gain access to employment, skills and training also refer service users to the Dover Place facility to gain work experience.

In addition to providing general work experience and training opportunities, AYT have continued to provide opportunities, at this site and at other similar sites in the past, for young people in Ashford

to develop their acting and production skills. Their current lighting director is the youngest ever team leader at the English National Opera and a former stage manager is now stage manager on the Lyttleton Stage at the National Theatre. Young people who have worked with AYT have gone on to star in television and film in productions including Band of Brothers (HBO), Poldark (BBC) and Skins (E4), amongst others, and others now work professionally in the performing arts in London, Chicago, New Zealand and Hollywood.