

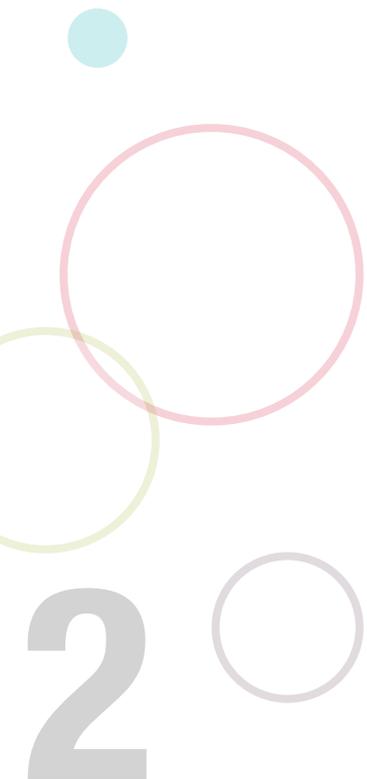
people
serving
people



Ashford Borough
Council
Annual Report
2016 - 2017

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GERRY CLARKSON, CBE

LEADER, ASHFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

Welcome to the fourth of our Annual Reports, which reflects on the achievements and milestones seen across our borough over the course of the last year.

From the building of a brand new town centre college, to work beginning on the Commercial Quarter, Ashford is developing fast – while a new heritage trail now helps residents and visitors explore the unique history of our borough.

Exciting plans for a town centre brewery and supermarket, a boutique cinema and entertainment development, and a mixed-use regeneration on Victoria Way, have all progressed. Alongside the fewest empty shops since records began, and staying at

the top of Kent's recycling table, Ashford has much to be proud of.

Our Five Year Plan is helping to make the borough a great place to live, work and play. Launching ASPIRE, a new in-house landscape team, shows this commitment to quality local services.

I look forward to sharing news of Ashford's continued progress with you all in next year's Annual Report.



TRACEY KERLY

CHIEF EXECUTIVE, ASHFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

Through an entrepreneurial approach, careful planning and working with local partners, our services remain effective and good value for money – while we retain the lowest council tax level in Kent. Indeed, our innovative approach to delivering local housing led to the borough being named 'housing business ready' last year, and the newly-opened dementia-friendly accommodation at Farrow Court was named joint winner in the residential category of the Kent Development Awards.

The 'One You' hub in Park Mall now helps everyone lead a more healthy life, and the new community toilet scheme has opened up more

facilities to the public free of charge.

I hope that you enjoy reading our Annual Report – it offers just a snap shot of all of the good work which has gone on over the last year. We agreed our priorities in 2015, covering up to 2020, so please check out the dedicated web page for the report, including an interactive Timeline with more details on all of the achievements which are making this vision a reality.

A vibrant town centre and strong local businesses



The vacancy rate in Ashford town centre fell to its lowest ever rate during the year, standing at just 8.9% by March 2017 - half of what it was four years ago. Since the council purchased the Park Mall shopping centre off the high street, footfall there is up 7% year-on-year, while an average of over 135,000 people visit the high street each month. Initiatives such as the Farmers' Market and free parking are very popular, and are clearly having a positive impact on the town centre's fortunes.

With a borough that boasts beautiful countryside, the 'Jewel of the Weald' that is Tenterden, alongside award-winning vineyards and producers, tourism remains crucial. The latest figures from independent research commissioned by Visit Kent showed that the total value of tourism across the borough is £278 million. Ashford saw 400,000 more visitors than in the year before (4.3 million in total), while the sector supports 1 in 10 of all jobs in Ashford.



Major developments

Building on the success of being named the number one business location in Kent, a number of major developments have seen real progress in the last twelve months -

- Since 'topping out' in September, the new Ashford College is nearing completion, and will play a major part in unlocking the aspiration, opportunity and skills of the borough's young people.
- More and more businesses are moving to the borough, seeking to capitalise on Ashford's excellent location. The Commercial Quarter, where work started in August, will create almost 600,000 square feet of office space and create hundreds of jobs.
- Work has begun to build a boutique cinema, family hotel, restaurants and bars at Elwick Place, while plans were also approved to expand the cinema complex off Junction 9.
- In October plans were approved for a £55 million scheme for a new supermarket and homes along Victoria Way. A brewery will also open, offering a visitor centre and tours.



Delivering quality homes for all

It is important that we keep growing the borough and providing the homes all residents need. In June plans were approved for a mixed-use redevelopment of the former Powergen site in the town centre, and in March 2017 a deal was signed to move forward with 300 new homes at Conningbrook Lakes.

The council also received over 1,300 Planning applications during the year, including almost 1,000 from householders and companies seeking to develop their properties. It is important to determine these quickly, and we have decided over 85% within eight weeks – with over 95% approved.

The council also works hard to ensure that homes are affordable, having been declared ‘Housing Business Ready’ for its strength in delivering affordable housing in the borough.

The innovative dementia-friendly facilities at Farrow Court in Ashford, where the first phase opened during the year, and Danemore at Tenterden will make sure that those who need additional support to lead fulfilling lives receive it.



THE UK'S INTERNATIONAL TOWN

38
MINUTES
from
LONDON



3.6 MILLION
PASSENGERS
travel through
ASHFORD
INTERNATIONAL STATION
each year



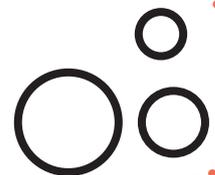
Internationally
CONNECTED 

PARIS 1HR 52MINS
away

BRUSSELS 1HR 37MINS

LILLE 56MINS

OFFICE RENT
73%
LOWER than
LONDON




NUMBER 1
BUSINESS
LOCATION in Kent


SUPERFAST

IN THE
TOP TEN%
of the most
DESIRABLE
PLACES TO LIVE

TOURISM brings in over
4 MILLION
VISITORS PER YEAR

TO OVER
30
attractions
across the borough
£ 270
MILLION
PER YEAR

224.5 SQ
MILES
the largest borough in
KENT

ONLY
UNPOLLUTED
DARK SKIES
in the SOUTH EAST

MORE THAN
3,000,000
PEOPLE VISIT
THE OUTLET EACH YEAR

OVER
80
DESIGNER
BRANDS

183,000
SQ FEET



Planning for the future

Meeting the future challenges of an expanding borough are also important. That is why the council is currently preparing a new Local Plan, which sets out the land that needs to be provided in the borough to accommodate new homes and jobs up to 2030 – with the first draft of the plan having a public consultation over the summer of 2016. March 2017 also saw a crucial milestone in the Chilmington Green development, with the signing of the Section 106 funding agreement with developers.

It is crucial that the borough has the facilities to meet the needs of the future, through new community buildings like Repton Connect – a community centre which will have space to host activities such as sports clubs, educational courses, cooking workshops and social events - which is set to open in November 2017.

January 2017 saw the launch of a high-specification minibus service, branded 'little & often', which now provides buses every five or six minutes along key routes serving the hospital, town centre/rail station, Kennington and Park Farm.



active and **creative** Ashford

Making Ashford a great place to live, work and play

June saw the launch of the new Ashford Heritage Trail, taking visitors on a journey through history to discover heritage sites around the town centre. The council has also produced a Museum and Heritage Trail, which introduces visitors to sites further afield across the borough.

The council invests a lot of money to support local good causes and community groups. Over the last year the council and ward members have given over £110,000 to over 140 local voluntary and community groups and parish councils in both the urban and rural areas.

The summer again saw 12,000 people enjoy the sights and sounds of the Create festival, and by the end of the year Revelation St Mary's, the arts space in the heart of town, had welcomed its 10,000th visitor.

Healthy, vibrant communities

Local facilities for sport and leisure form the focal point for many communities. That is why the council has supported new facilities such as the newly refurbished Spearpoint Pavilion in Kennington, and new play areas like Kestrel Park in Kingsnorth.

It is important that residents have ways to stay fit and healthy. A new spin room at the Stour Centre, opened in June, quadrupled the number of spin cycle classes that can be held - while in early 2017 a new 'Health Hub' opened in Park Mall, offering support and advice on how to adopt a healthier lifestyle.

The council also held a successful one-month trial for a new health and fitness activity campaign, called Active Everyday, to encourage those aged over 60 to consider at least 10 minutes of exercise a day – including fun and local sports sessions.



Upholding quality and high standards

We all want to live in a clean and pleasant borough, which is why from Autumn 2016 the council began trialling a new enforcement regime to tackle littering and other environmental blights in the borough. To complement this, in November the council launched a new online reporting system – making it easier for residents to report issues such as fly-tipping, littering, dog fouling, vandalism, anti-social behaviour or planning enforcement issues.

To make sure Ashford keeps looking its best, the council brought responsibility for grounds maintenance across the borough back in-house and created Aspire Landscape Management. Aspire covers the day-to-day work of mowing, pruning, planting, clearing and litter picking on various spaces owned by the council, including open green space, parks, floral beds, cemeteries, areas around housing sites, hedges, sports pitches and associated footpaths.

The Community Toilet Scheme, which sees local businesses including shops, cafes and restaurants working in partnership with the Council to open up their toilet facilities to the public free of charge, rolled out across Ashford in September.

DEFRA's latest recycling league tables have confirmed that Ashford remains the top recycler in the county, and the borough's recycling rate of 53.1% makes it the 44th best recycling local authority in the country.



financial information

Earlier this year, the council agreed to keep the borough's council tax at the lowest level of any Kent authority. This, alongside an entrepreneurial approach, means that the council can continue to provide well-resourced services in the most efficient ways.

Our budget

Service	2016/17 £000	2017/18 £000	Per Head £
Cultural	1,851	1,966	15.82
Environmental	8,108	8,339	67.09
Planning	3,455	3,424	27.55
Parking & Highways	1,641	1,680	13.52
Housing	68,558	72,396	582.43
Central services to the public	9,033	8,846	71.17
Gross expenditure	92,646	96,651	777.58
Less grants & other income	(78,547)	(82,965)	(667.46)
Net expenditure	14,099	13,686	110.12
Contribution to/(from) reserves	1,464	1,141	9.18
Budget requirement	15,563	14,827	119.30
Financed by:			
Government grants	(9,001)	(7,926)	(63.77)
Collection fund surplus	0	0	0.00
Funding requirement	6,562	6,901	55.53

