



THE NATURAL AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT MONITORING 2019/2020

This section of the Authority Monitoring Report covers the period from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020 and contains information on the natural and built environment performance against environmental policies/ indicators.

Key statistics:

- **No decline in condition of SSSIs, BOAs and LWS.**
- **0 planning applications permitted against Environment Agency advice.**
- **73% of development proposals compliant with SuDs policy.**
- **4 development proposals for renewable energy generation schemes.**

Biodiversity

Ashford borough contains numerous areas designated for their landscape or ecological value. These include:

- Two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) – Kent Downs and High Weald
- Three National Nature Reserves (NNR) – Hamstreet Woods, Wye and Crundale Downs, Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay
- 186 units for Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- 5 Special Landscape Areas (SLA) – North Downs, High Weald, Greensand Ridge, Low Weald, Old Romney
- 68 Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) of County-wide importance
- Two Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) – Wye and Crundale Downs and Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Ashford borough has 12 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), which are broken down into 186 SSSI units. The SSSI units within the borough are predominately lowland and grassland environments.

The SSSI units within the borough are predominately in favourable conditions, according to Natural England assessments. Compared to the previous year, 2018/19, there has been no decline in quality of any of the SSSI units found within the Ashford Borough.

Monitoring Indicator – Biodiversity

iii. Condition of the 186 SSSI units

Target	No decline
Favourable	117 sites (63%)
Unfavourable	0
Unfavourable/Declining	5 sites (3%)
Unfavourable/No Change	2 sites (1%)
Unfavourable/Recovering	62 sites (33%)

Source: Natural England, Condition of SSSI Units

Also in the borough are 9 Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs). The council monitors all the BOAs that cross into the borough, even if only a small portion crosses the boundary. The BOAs are:

- East Kent Woodlands and Downs
- High Weald
- Lower Stour Wetlands
- Low Weald Woodland
- Mid Kent Downs Wood and Scarp
- Medway and Low Weald Grassland and Wetland
- Romney Marshes
- The Blean

The BOAs have been maintained by the Kent Nature Partnership in 2019/20.

The Kent Nature Partnership Biodiversity Strategy 2020 to 2025 was adopted in February 2020. This strategy sets out the targets and objectives for the future condition of the BOAs found in the borough.

View the 2020 – 2025 Biodiversity Strategy at <https://www.kentnature.org.uk/biodiversity-strategy.html>

Monitoring Indicator – Biodiversity

ii. Condition of Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOA's)

Target	No decline
2019/2020	No decline in conditions

The borough is home to over 80 Local Wildlife Sites (LWS). These are areas selected as they can protect local species and habitats. LWS and the nature reserves have been maintained by the Kent Wildlife Trust in 2019/2020.

The Kent Nature Partnership undertook a consultation of the draft Kent Nature Partnership Biodiversity Strategy 2020 to 2045 in summer 2019. This document aims to set the targets

for the future condition of the LWS found in the Ashford borough. The Kent Nature Partnership Biodiversity Strategy 2020 to 2045 was adopted by Kent County Council in May 2020, after the 2019/20 monitoring year ended.

Defra together with Natural England, documents the percentage of Local Wildlife Sites across England in positive conservation management. The most recent results, recorded in January 2020, documented that 41% of Kent Local Wildlife Sites are in positive conservation management. However, we are unable to determine the percentage on the borough-scale. This is a 2% decrease from the measurement taken in January 2019.

Source: https://www.kent.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0005/91058/Kent-environment-strategy-indicators.pdf

Monitoring Indicator – Biodiversity

iii. Condition of Nature Reserves and Local Wildlife Sites

Target	No target
2019/2020	Unknown

Green Corridor

The Green Corridor is a connected network of largely green open areas that are predominantly located alongside the Great and East Stour rivers, the Aylesford Stream, and other watercourses which flow through Ashford's urban area. The Green Corridor is mainly undeveloped and includes riversides, woodlands, orchards, ponds, lakes, nature reserves, meadows, and play, leisure and recreation spaces.

All along the green corridor highly valuable habitats for wildlife are found, providing an important network for the movement of wildlife through the urban areas, between designated nature sites and out towards the countryside.

Policy ENV2 (*The Ashford Green Corridor*) sets out the criteria for development proposals within or adjoining the Green Corridor.

Monitoring Indicator – Green Corridor

i. Development permitted within Green Corridor Designation Areas

Target	Not permitted, unless policy criteria applies.
2019/2020	No developments granted planning permission were located in the Green Corridor.

ii. Development proposals contributing to projects identified within the Green Corridor Action Plan

Target	No target.
2019/2020	No development proposals in 2019/2020 contributed to projects identified in the Green Corridor Action Plan.

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Large parts of the Borough lie within two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Kent Downs AONB and the High Weald AONB. The distinctive landscapes of these AONBs play an important role in defining the overall character of the Borough.

Within the setting of the AONBs, priority will be given over other planning considerations to the conservation or enhancement of natural beauty, including landscape, wildlife and geological features. Policy ENV3b of the Local Plan 2030 sets out the criteria for applications located within AONBs.

Monitoring Indicator – AONBs

Percentage of major planning applications in the AONBs approved contrary to Policy ENV3b.

Target	0%.
2019/2020	0%, no major planning applications in the AONBs were granted.

Dark Skies

In all areas of the borough, obtrusive external lighting can result in harm to residential amenity and to the diurnal rhythms of biodiversity. Light control is therefore a key planning consideration in all development proposals. Policy ENV4 (*Light Pollution and Promoting Dark Skies*) and the Dark Skies SPD (2014) set out the requirements of external lighting schemes.

Monitoring Indicator – Dark Skies
Percentage of applications where external lighting levels on new developments comply with standards in policy and guidance.

Target	100%.
2019/2020	33%* of all housing development either met the requirements of ENV4 or had a condition applied to the planning permission to do so.

* Due to the monitoring system we are unable to remove from this percentage the number of housing applications which are not subject to Policy ENV4, due to their location outside the Dark Skies Zone.

Protecting Important Rural Features

The borough is home to a variety of important rural features including river corridors, ancient woodland and rural lanes. Policy ENV5 (*Protecting Important Rural Features*) details that rural features, including those listed above, should be enhanced by development proposals.

The Kentish Stour Catchment Partnership and Environment Agency have worked with various community groups during 2019/20 to undertake projects to improve the river corridors, as well as rationalising the drainage networks. Work was completed in August 2019.

For more information including information relating to improvement schemes, please see the [River Stour \(Kent\) Internal Drainage Board](#) and the [Environment Agency](#) websites.

Source: River Stour (Kent) Internal Drainage Board

Monitoring Indicator – Rural Features

- 1 Loss or gain to Ancient woodland or semi-natural woodland
- 2 Loss or gain to River corridors and tributaries
- 3 Loss or enhancement to rural lanes and/ or PROWs

Rural feature	Target	2019/2020
Ancient woodland or semi-natural woodland	No net loss	No net loss
River corridors and tributaries	No net loss	No net loss
Rural lanes and/ or PROWs	No net loss	PROW network net gain of 2.91km.

Source: Kent County Council

Flood Risk

Ashford is at particular risk from fluvial flooding. The convergence of five main rivers in Ashford, topography and geology of the borough give these rivers ‘flashy’ characteristics. This can lead to an increased risk of fluvial flooding.

Policy ENV6 (*Flood Risk*) sets out the requirements for development proposals to take steps to reduce vulnerability to flood risk.

Monitoring Indicator – Flood Risk

Percentage of planning applications granted on Flood Zones 2 or 3 against Environment Agency advice.

Target	0%.
2019/2020	0%, no planning applications were granted against Environment Agency advice.

Water resources, supply and efficiency

Water is a finite resource and household demand for water in the borough places stress on the water network, it therefore needs careful management. The council considers it critical that adequate water supply and wastewater treatment facilities are in place to serve development.

Policy ENV7 (*Water Efficiency*) requires new residential development to achieve an estimated water efficiency of 110 litres per person per day. Policy ENV8 (*Water Quality, Supply and Treatment*) sets out the criteria for proposals regarding adequate water supply and connection to the sewerage system.

Monitoring Indicator – Water Resources

- i. **Percentage of new residential development applications granted meeting the requirements of water efficiency regulations – 110 litres per person per day.**

Target	100%.
2019/2020	9% of applications had a condition applied for the 110 litres per person requirement

- ii. **Percentage of major development proposals not providing adequate water supply and connections to wastewater treatment facilities.**

Target	0%
2019/2020	0%

All major applications either have adequate water supply and connections to wastewater treatment facilities or had conditions attached to their permission to ensure this provision.

- iii. **Percentage of non-residential major applications meeting 40% improvement in water consumption against baseline performance.**

Target	100%.
2019/2020	67%

Note: The 67% relates to applications granted planning permission subject to a condition to achieve ‘Very Good’ BREEAM status, which includes a 40% improvement in water consumption. See the BREEAM indicator below for more details.

Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDs)

Water supply, flood risk and water quality have all been identified as critical constraints to the sustainable growth of Ashford. Ashford’s water environment needs to be managed carefully and the multi-benefits of implementing SuDs within local developments cannot be overstated.

SuDs are designed to control surface water run off close to where it falls and mimic natural drainage as closely as possible. Within the Ashford Borough, the requirement for the inclusion

of SuDs is for all developments, including permitted developments. These requirements are set out in Policy ENV9 (*Sustainable Drainage*).

Monitoring Indicator – SuDs	
iv. Percentage of compliance of development proposals with SuDs Policy, SPD and subsequent revisions.	
Target	100%.
2019/2020	73% of all housing development proposals were either compliant with the SuDs Policy or had conditions to submit a sustainable urban drainage scheme.

Renewable Energy

There is an increasing need to secure a more sustainable supply of energy to reduce carbon emissions and minimise the impact of climate change. This can be sought through energy generation from renewable and low carbon sources. Renewable and low carbon energy includes heating and cooling as well as the generation of electricity.

Policy ENV10 (*Renewable and Low Carbon Energy*) sets out the criteria for development proposals which generate energy from renewable and low carbon sources.

Monitoring Indicator – Energy	
New development which generates energy from renewable and low carbon sources.	
Target	No target.
2019/2020	4 proposals.

BREAAM

Non-residential and commercial sectors of development account for a significant proportion of carbon emissions. Policy ENV11 (*Sustainable Design and Construction – Non-residential*) sets out requirements for major non-residential to achieve BREEAM standards.

Monitoring Indicator – BREEAM**Percentage of Major non-residential development granted permission to achieve BREEAM ‘Very Good’ standard.**

Target	100%.
2019/2020	67%

Air Quality

Ashford Borough generally has very good air quality. There are currently no areas within the Borough where the air quality fails to meet the required standards, and there are no designated Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs).

Policy ENV12 (*Air Quality*) sets out that proposals would not be permitted if they exceed National Air Quality Objectives and all major development proposals should seek to minimise the impact on air quality.

Monitoring Indicator – Air Quality**Percentage of proposals permitted which result in National Air Quality Objectives being exceeded**

Target	0%.
2019/2020	0%

Agricultural land

Grade 1 or 2 land is highly valuable agricultural land. Development is typically focused in lower grade agricultural land. 4 applications were granted for major development on Grade 2 land. This includes the Reserved Matters application for Highmead House (Site allocation S17), Waterbrook (Site allocation S16) and the site allocations S28 and S55 in Charing.

Monitoring Indicator – Agricultural Land

Amount of high grade agricultural land (Grade 1 & 2) lost to major development (ha).

Target	No target.
2019/2020	19/00702/AS – Reserved Matters application for Highmead House, Ashford (S17) 18/00098/AS – Outline application for Waterbrook, Ashford (S16) 18/00029/AS – Outline application for Land south of the Swan Hotel, Charing (S55) 17/01926/AS – Outline application for Northdown Service Station, Charing (S28)

Source: Kent Landscape Information system (K-LIS); Natural England; Agricultural Land Classification (ALC)