

# ASHFORD FOR YOU

Issue 27 | Summer 2026

# YOU

YOUR BOROUGH, YOUR MAGAZINE



## WHAT'S ON THIS SUMMER

Where to go and what to do in the borough

EXPLORE THE BOROUGH ON FOOT OR BY BIKE

ASHFORD TOWN CENTRE IN FOCUS

### WIN

- A family safari adventure at Port Lympne Safari Park
- An evening of wine, food and live jazz

# A remarkable transformation: The story of EKC Ashford College

When EKC Group took over Ashford College in 2020, it had been graded 'Requires Improvement' and faced significant challenges.

Yet, EKC Group saw something more: a college with huge potential, a vibrant community that deserved stability, and a town ready for high-quality technical and vocational education and training.

EKC Group stepped in with a commitment to rebuild confidence, re-energise the curriculum, and create a college that truly served learners, employers and the wider community.

Following a competitive process, the Department for Education confirmed EKC Group as the preferred organisation to take on Ashford College and on 1 April 2020, it officially joined the EKC Group family.

However, with this huge milestone came something the nation never expected. As EKC Group took over Ashford College, it wasn't long before the doors had to be shut as the UK entered its first lockdown because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Yet, despite this extraordinary and uncertain period, EKC Ashford College emerged stronger. Six years on, its journey from takeover to today has been nothing short of remarkable. The College has not only weathered the challenges brought by the pandemic but has grown, evolved, and transformed into a thriving hub of education and opportunity.

Today, EKC Ashford College stands as a beacon of excellence for the communities it proudly serves and is proof that even in the most challenging circumstances, determination, investment, and collective effort can deliver extraordinary outcomes.



## A note from the Principal, Lucy Clark

"It's safe to say that EKC Ashford College has been on an inspiring journey of growth, innovation and transformation since being acquired by EKC Group," Lucy explains.

"We want every student to achieve their best, which is why we remain committed to investing in our facilities and our community.

## Phase 2: Investing in the future

In 2022, EKC Group unveiled Phase 2 of Ashford College's redevelopment – a striking extension designed to meet the needs of the local area. Inside are state-of-the-art classrooms and laboratories dedicated to Business, Information Technology and Engineering, placing cutting-edge skills at the heart of the curriculum.

Phase 2 means an extra 250 students can attend EKC Ashford College each year, giving more young people the opportunity to succeed in fast-growing, future-focused industries.

## Becoming 'Outstanding'

From one milestone to another, in 2023, Ofsted awarded 'Overall Outstanding' to all EKC Group colleges, including EKC Ashford College. It marked a complete transformation from a college requiring improvement to one delivering excellence.

This stands as a powerful example of what ambitious leadership, strategic investment, and a commitment to community impact can achieve. EKC Ashford College's journey is far from over, but what it's been so far is a testament to the staff and students who helped shape its success, and also a reflection of EKC Group's mission to empower communities to develop their economic and social prosperity in a rapidly changing world.

As the college looks to go from strength to strength and the need for high-quality technical vocational training in Ashford increases, leaders have submitted plans for Phase 3 – an expansion of the campus which aims to better serve the communities EKC Ashford College proudly serves.



"Being at the heart of the town matters to us, not just in location, but in the relationships we build.

"We're excited to grow even further to better serve our local community as we look to develop Phase 3."

## Welcome



Welcome to the latest edition of *Ashford For You*. As we move into the brighter months, there's a real sense of momentum across our borough. Residents are enjoying lighter days, getting outdoors, and making the most of the green spaces, walking routes and cycle paths that make Ashford such a great place to live. In this edition, you'll find a feature on active travel, highlighting opportunities to explore the borough on foot or by bike.

This year is already shaping up to be a positive one for local projects. In Tenterden, work is progressing on the refurbishment of the leisure centre, bringing improved facilities and a more modern environment for the community. We're also seeing encouraging developments in the town centre, where ongoing investment is helping to create a more vibrant, accessible space for everyone.

You can also find out about the important work taking place around Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and our Community Governance Review (CGR). These conversations are shaping how local services and representation will operate in the future, and we remain committed to keeping residents informed and involved.

We're continuing to focus on making Ashford a greener, more sustainable borough. This includes encouraging everyone to recycle well and make full use of our food and garden waste services. Alongside this, the council's solar PV project is progressing, supporting cleaner energy generation and reducing our carbon footprint.

Thank you, as always, for your continued support and for being part of what makes our borough such a strong and connected place. I hope you enjoy this edition and feel uplifted by the stories within it.

Tracey Kerly  
Chief Executive, Ashford Borough Council



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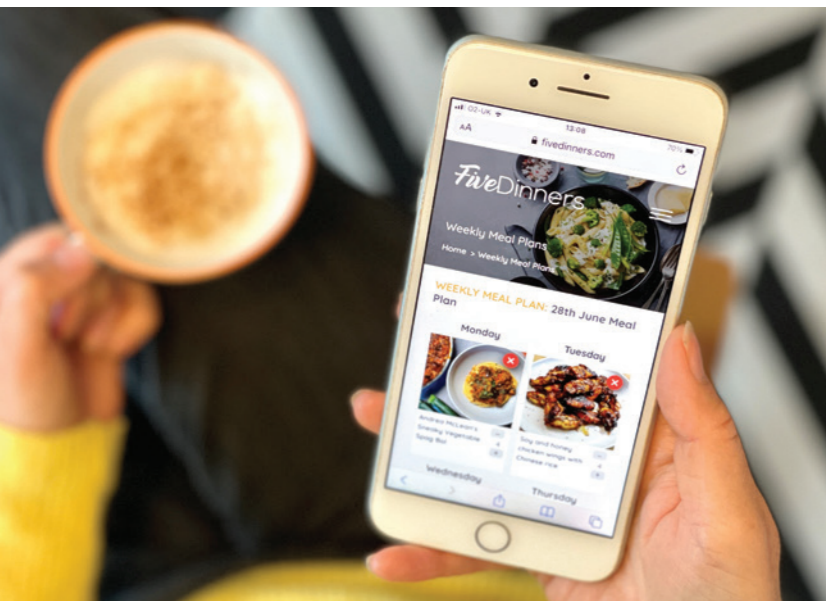
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**Please note:** To contact us regarding a specific council service, visit [www.ashford.gov.uk/contact-us](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/contact-us) and select the relevant category relating to your query.

# FiveDinners – a FREE weekly meal planner



We've teamed up with TV chef and author Theo Michaels, to support local families by giving away FREE premium membership to the platform (usually £86 per year).

Offering much more than just an online recipe resource, signing up to FiveDinners today will give ALL residents across the borough fully personalised affordable meal plans including low-calorie, gluten-free, diabetic, menopause, and family-friendly plans as some of the personalised nutritious options available.

You'll be able to benefit from receiving a complete shopping list every week and 'cook-along with Theo' video tutorials to allow you to save time, money and reduce food waste while never having to ask the question about what to cook for dinner again.

Hundreds of residents are now signed up to FiveDinners within the borough, what are you waiting for?

Visit [www.fivedinners.com/mycommunity](http://www.fivedinners.com/mycommunity)



# Ashford is an Age-friendly Community

We're delighted that our borough is now part of the UK network of Age-friendly Communities – a growing movement of places committed to making their communities a better place to age in.

Ashford Borough Council is working with the Centre for Ageing Better to make practical changes to our physical and social environment to allow people to remain healthy and independent.

We've joined the network because we value our older residents and want to take the necessary steps to ensure more people can continue to enjoy life and get the support they need as they age.

We've already started our planning and will be talking further to residents, local businesses, charities and others to identify what's next and to develop our action plan. For more information visit [www.ashford.gov.uk/age-friendly-communities](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/age-friendly-communities)

## Our Energy Advice Officer crowned at the National Energy Action Conference

We're proud to announce that Coral Allon, our Energy Advice Officer, has received the National Award for Positive Impacts on Health at the recent National Energy Action (NEA) Conference.

Coral leads on ABC's Warm Homes Healthy Futures (WHHF) project, which is funded by the NEA and sits within the Climate and Energy team at the council.

WHHF specifically seeks referrals from health professionals, such as GPs and asthma groups, which enables her to triage calls and provide support, either over the phone or through a home visit.

As such, she has been able to improve the warmth and comfort of their homes, save money on their energy bills, and, in some cases, reduce their energy debts.

The National Award for Positive Impacts on Health merits those who 'make a life-changing difference to people with physical and mental health conditions.'



## High Halden Hornets

The High Halden Hornets Under-7s are kicking off the season in style with a brand-new match kit, funded through a Ward Member Grant from Cllr Alan Pickering. The sponsorship has given the young players a vibrant new look as they head into their upcoming fixtures.

We wish the team the very best of luck for the season ahead - go Hornets!



## Wilder Kent Awards acclaim for Friends of Victoria Park group

Friends of Victoria Park have won Gold at this year's Wilder Kent Awards, recognising their work to help create a Wilder Kent and protect wildlife for future generations.

This award reflects the dedication of their wonderful volunteers and supporters, who help them with wildlife surveys, monthly litter picks, volunteer task days, educational walks, family-friendly events, outdoor classrooms and creating spaces for biodiversity to thrive.

Friends of Victoria Park are always keen to welcome new volunteers, whether you can give a little time or a lot.

To get involved and support your local park, visit [www.victoriaparkashford.co.uk](http://www.victoriaparkashford.co.uk) or search 'Friends of Victoria Park' on Facebook.

## Borough Brief – our newsletter for residents

Thousands of residents are currently signed up to receive monthly news and updates from the council, all in a bitesize format delivered straight to your inbox from our Communications Team.

Signing up is easy, just head to [www.ashford.gov.uk/newsletter](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/newsletter) or scan the QR code.



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# Supporting our Armed Forces community



Ashford is proud to stand alongside our Armed Forces community and we're grateful to the growing number of local businesses and organisations who have signed up to the Armed Forces Covenant.

The Covenant is a national promise that ensures those who serve, have served, or are part of Armed Forces families are treated fairly and face no disadvantage when accessing jobs, housing, healthcare, or other services. Here in Ashford, it reflects our shared commitment to respect, support, and inclusion.

Ashford Borough Council is a Silver Award holder under the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme, recognising our practical support for the Armed Forces community. This means we:

- Support staff who are reservists, veterans, cadet instructors, or military spouses and partners
- Champion an Armed Forces friendly workplace
- Actively welcome job applications from serving personnel and veterans

Whether you're a local employer, community group, or resident keen to show your support, you can play a part.

To find out more about the Armed Forces Covenant or to make a pledge of support, visit [www.ashford.gov.uk/armed-forces-covenant](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/armed-forces-covenant) or email [communitycovenant@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:communitycovenant@ashford.gov.uk)

## Grants for High Weald Champions

Applications are now open for the High Weald Lund Fellowship 2026, offering grants of up to £7,500 for people with a connection to the High Weald who want to develop ideas, skills or knowledge that will benefit this nationally important landscape.

The fellowship is open to anyone with a passion for the High Weald – from those working in farming, conservation or community projects to residents who simply care about the area. Funding can support training, study visits, conferences and other learning opportunities that bring fresh thinking back to local communities.

Previous recipients have explored regenerative farming stories and new opportunities for locally produced wool and leather, helping to inspire more sustainable approaches across the High Weald.

Applicants must be over 18, have a clear link to the area and have some relevant experience connected to their proposal.

Find out more and apply at [www.highweald.org](http://www.highweald.org).



## Competition winners

More than 450 entries were received for our competitions in the last issue. The winners of two annual gym memberships at Anytime Fitness in Ashford were David Lucas and Lin West, while Amanda Brown won the Kent Turkeys prize. See page 22 for our latest fantastic competitions.



# Keeping residents safe

## Partnership working

Over the past year, our Community Safety Unit (CSU) has continued to prioritise visibility, partnership working and meaningful engagement with residents. This approach has been supported by a wide range of community events, helping to strengthen relationships between residents, the council, Kent Police and local partners.

Community engagement has taken various forms, from school roadshows and youth focused outreach to neighbourhood meetings and targeted events addressing local concerns.

The Ashford Community Safety Partnership (CSP) has actively promoted awareness raising campaigns, ensuring residents understand how to report issues, access support, and shape policing and safety priorities.

These activities include collaborations with local organisations such as Kenward Trust, Freedom Leisure, and the Amber Foundation, which are all supported by Kent Police and Crime Commissioner funding directed at reducing antisocial behaviour (ASB) and improving community wellbeing.

The initiatives have helped divert young people away from risk and increased confidence in local services, whilst offering practical, inclusive opportunities for engagement.

## Walksafe app launched

Our Community Safety team was delighted to partner with WalkSafe on the launch of their personal safety app within the borough. Local engagement events were organised to promote the launch of the app and to keep residents informed about ongoing initiatives,



local crime issues, and positive outcomes delivered in their area. Scan the code to find out more and download WalkSafe now.

## Addressing ASB concerns

We are also developing and managing our Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs), which remain an important tool in addressing ASB and protecting public spaces. This emphasises close liaison between the council, Kent Police, and other stakeholders, ensuring coordinated implementation, enforcement, and communication.

Recent work has included consultations for the renewal of current PSPOs of Singleton Lake, and Ashford Urban focusing around the town centre to ensure restrictions remain responsive to emerging challenges. These updates reflect partner intelligence and local ASB patterns, and officers have linked enforcement with wider safety initiatives to ensure a balanced approach.

Community feedback remains vital to our work. Through continued partnership work, targeted activity, and an expanding programme of local engagement, Ashford remains focused on reducing harm, improving perceptions of safety, and empowering residents to play an active role in shaping their communities.

## My Community Voice

Kent Police have played a central role in increasing resident involvement through My Community Voice (MCV), a free two-way communication platform that enables residents to share concerns, participate in surveys, and receive real time policing updates.

For more information, visit [www.mycommunityvoicekent.co.uk](http://www.mycommunityvoicekent.co.uk)



# Changing times for Ashford Town Centre

How we use centres today is very different, so creating a town centre that continues to work, now and in the future, is key.



Exciting plans to revamp the former Odeon have been revealed.  
Photo credit: Haworth Tompkins

Ashford Town Centre has always evolved with the way people live their lives. In today's digital era, people no longer come into town simply to shop. Instead, they seek family time, restaurants, entertainment, a bit of personal pampering or to meet a friend over coffee. That shift isn't unique to Ashford; it's happening across the country. To keep our town centre active and relevant, the council has to take a longer-term, joined-up view of what it needs to regenerate.

## Retail still matters

Shops continue to be important in Ashford. County Square Shopping Centre and the High Street provide a strong and varied offer and supporting these areas to thrive, within a smaller town centre footprint, is a priority. A busy retail core brings people into town where the footfall supports jobs in the cafés, services and leisure venues that, equally, bring people to the shops. They need each other.

The Designer Outlet on our doorstep is a real strength, creating hundreds of jobs locally and attracting visitors from across Kent. It also presents challenges for traditional town centre retail. The council's approach is to find ways for the town centre to complement the Outlet, giving reasons to stay that help both to thrive.

## A place to spend time

Reasons to stay means strengthening the leisure, culture and entertainment offer is essential. Plans for Elwick Place will turn the space under the cinema into an all-day, all-evening family destination.

Proposals for a new long-term lease with The Big Picture are taking shape, bringing together the existing cinema, a wide range of social gaming, live space for events and community use, plus individual, shared workspace and meeting rooms, supported by a food and drink offer, throughout.



Photo credit: Matt Wilson

The aim is to create a place where people can meet friends, work during the day, enjoy a film or spend an evening out socialising all in one visit.

It is part of the vision for a town centre that works as a whole; from Elwick Place at one end, to the historic Odeon soon to be transformed into a new community arts theatre at the other, with County Square, markets, cafés and independent businesses in between.

## A town centre where people live

People used to live in the town centre, until retail took over. Today more residents call the town centre area home, as the pendulum of change swings back. This brings a responsibility to create a place that feels active, welcoming and safe both day and night.

Ashford has a lower proportion of people living on or near a high street than many other parts of Kent, alongside higher-than-average numbers of younger people aged 0 to 24\*. This makes creating a town centre that works for families and younger people, as well as businesses, important.

That focus is reflected in new play spaces and events to bring people together from the Food and Drink Festival in the summer, to Create Music Village in the autumn, and Carnival of the Baubles at Christmas all provide reasons to spend time in town.

\*ONS data.

## Taking centre stage




Modern town centres need culture and entertainment, which is why protecting the cinema has been such a priority.

When Picturehouse indicated in early 2024 that it intended to leave, the council stepped in because losing a town centre cinema would have been a significant blow. Since then, the cinema has been stabilised, audiences are growing and community use has increased. The proposals for Elwick Place build on that progress and give Ashford Cinema the strongest possible chance of long-term success.

Town centre regeneration doesn't happen overnight. What matters is setting clear direction and delivering improvements supporting retail, investing in leisure and culture to create a town centre that continues to work for Ashford, now and in the future.



For more information visit:

-  [www.loveashford.com](http://www.loveashford.com)
-  [www.theashfordcinema.co.uk](http://www.theashfordcinema.co.uk)
-  [www.ashford.gov.uk/odeon](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/odeon)

Artist's impression, facing Southwest from Tannery Lane.



# A fresh new chapter for Ashford's Civic Quarter

Exciting changes are on the horizon for Ashford's Civic Quarter, with three major projects coming together to create new homes, greener energy and more welcoming public spaces. These improvements will breathe new life into an area with strong links to the town's heritage, while shaping a more sustainable future for residents today and for generations to come.

Like many councils across the South East, Ashford has a shortage of council homes. This results in families on the council's Housing Register waiting a long time to be offered a suitable home. Often households that have become homeless wait for a home whilst living in temporary accommodation. ABC is committed to address the need for more council housing.

## A New Riverside Community at The new Tanyard

Many residents will know The Tanyard as the former home of Kent Wool Growers. This historic riverside site is now set for a sensitive transformation inspired by its setting and heritage, creating a new neighbourhood shaped around people, nature and Ashford's proud history. Plans propose a landscape led residential community with around 160 homes across four apartment buildings, each six storeys or fewer.

### The plans include:

- Brand new, high-quality, energy efficient council-owned homes
- Restoring the Grade II listed Whist House, bringing an important piece of the town's past back into active use.
- Reopening Tanyard Lane for pedestrians and cyclists - reviving a route that has been closed for more than a century.
- Creating new courtyards, shared spaces and a riverside walkway along the Great Stour.
- Improving connections to Ashford International Station, the Stour Centre, Civic Park and the town centre.

Together, these changes will create a well-connected, landscape-led neighbourhood, inspired by the area's industrial legacy and its close relationship with the river.

## Breathing new life into the Former Civic Centre

Just across Tannery Lane, the empty Civic Centre building will be brought back into use, providing around 60 new apartments in a location that's perfectly placed for town centre living. Made possible by making the most of an existing brownfield site, this project will help meet local housing need while improving the overall look and feel of the area.

### The redevelopment includes:

- A café kiosk overlooking Civic Park, creating a welcoming new spot for residents and visitors.
- Improved outdoor space and communal areas.
- A vibrant public art mural bringing colour and character to the side of the Stour Centre.

This project will reintegrate the building with the community and enhance the wider streetscape as part of the town's regeneration.

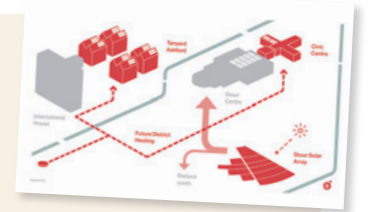
## Greener energy at the Stour Centre

The Stour Centre car park is set to become home to a major solar installation, generating clean energy for the borough and supporting Ashford's ambition to reach carbon neutrality by 2030.

Around 1,544 solar panels would be installed on canopies across the car park, producing approximately 1MW of renewable electricity each year.

### This investment will:

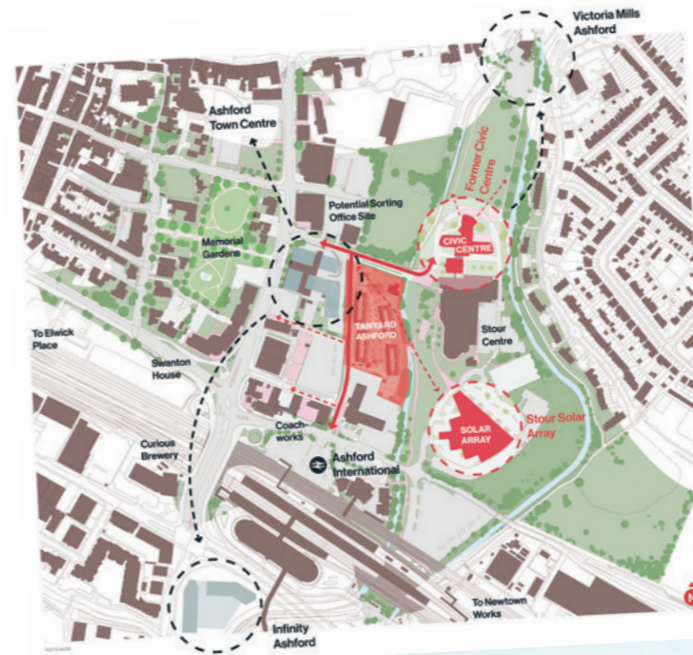
- Reduce carbon emissions.
- Lower energy costs at one of Ashford's busiest public facilities.
- Increase resilience to rising energy prices.
- Improve lighting, shelter and security at the car park.



## A joined up vision for Ashford's future

These three projects come together as a unified regeneration programme aimed at broadening housing options, protecting and celebrating the borough's heritage assets, expanding renewable energy generation, strengthening walking and cycling links across the town, and creating greener, safer and more inviting public spaces.

Together, they will help shape an attractive, accessible and future-ready town centre - one that reflects Ashford's history, supports its communities and champions sustainability.



Artist's impression, facing South from Tannery Lane.



# Get moving this summer!

As work at Tenterden Leisure Centre nears completion, now is the perfect time to get active in the borough

Winter is now a distant memory and the sun is shining, so what better way to celebrate than to get active?! The Ashford borough has some wonderful leisure facilities, offering a vast array of activities for you and the family to get stuck into. Here's just a taste of what's available...

## The Stour Centre

The award-winning Stour Centre is home to a top of the range gym, but also several indoor sports options, a host of fitness classes, soft play for kids and perhaps most notably, a swimming pool to meet all your fitness needs. It's also used as a community beacon, including hosting SEN disco nights!

## Tenterden Leisure Centre

The new and improved Leisure Centre will be a gamechanger for the borough, introducing a new soft play area, a new gym entrance and new interactive pool features. In addition, there's been a total refurbishment of the spin studio and updated facilities! We're sure you'll love the changes.

## The Julie Rose Stadium

Famed for its athletics track and running facilities, The Julie Rose Stadium – like The Stour Centre – is also home to a high quality, community focused gym, complete with state-of-the-art equipment!

## Spearpoint Pavilion

Summer is coming, so that means Wimbledon is coming! If you want to get involved with tennis, the Spearpoint Pavilion has you covered, with two outdoor tennis courts available for hire.

To find out more, visit the Freedom Leisure website at [www.freedom-leisure.co.uk](http://www.freedom-leisure.co.uk).



# Make the most of the outdoors by getting active this spring!



The days are getting lighter, the sun is shining and the air feels that little bit fresher – what better way to celebrate spring than getting out and about to explore our wonderful borough?!

With miles of footpaths across our countryside to explore, either on foot, by bike or on wheels, Ashford is superbly situated within Kent for people to take in natural beauty.

When it comes to walking there's the Stour Valley Walk, which incorporates the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and provides you a panoramic view of the Devil's Kneading Trough. Then there's plenty to explore and discover in and around our villages, including the lovely Tenterden and St Michael's circular route.

There's also Ashford's Green Corridor, which is made up of several parks, recreation grounds and other green spaces alongside the rivers that flow through Ashford.

If you're more of a cyclist, then there's a host of options – from family friendly riding at Victoria Park, Singleton Lake and Conningbrook Lakes Country Park, to scenic and picturesque routes like the four-mile route at Willesborough Dykes or even Cycle Route 18 from Ashford to Canterbury, or Ashford to Tunbridge Wells. Head to Cycle Ashford and plan your next walk or cycle. You can even download routes to your phone!

Enjoy spring by exploring our borough, taking in fresh air and beautiful views – all on our doorstep!



Find out more at [www.cycleashford.org.uk](http://www.cycleashford.org.uk)

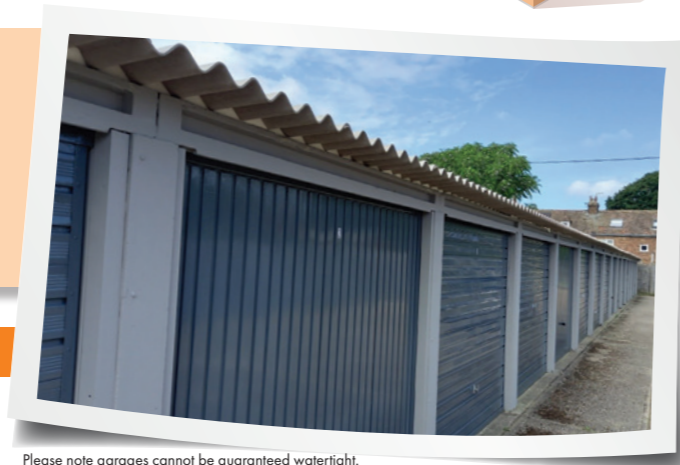


# Need extra storage or somewhere to park?



We have garages available to rent across the borough.

- ✓ From just £13.97 per week
- ✓ Flexible rolling tenancy
- ✓ Perfect for storage or housing a car
- ✓ Garages are currently only being offered to residents of the borough



Please note garages cannot be guaranteed watertight.

Apply via our website: [www.ashford.gov.uk/garages](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/garages)

# Bin it to win it this spring

It's time to get back out in the garden and to think about composting! While composting at home is easy, if you'd prefer, we'll take it away for you. Our fortnightly garden waste service means that you can cut, prune and weed – all without having to visit the Household Waste & Recycling Centre (HWRC)!

To subscribe, please go to: [www.ashford.gov.uk/garden-waste](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/garden-waste)

In light of gardening weather returning, we're often asked about what goes into the garden waste bin and what goes into the kitchen caddy. The simplest way to remember is: if it's been in the kitchen, then it goes in the caddy.

## Garden Waste

### Yes please

- ✓ Grass cutting
- ✓ Hedge trimmings
- ✓ Pruning and small branches
- ✓ Weeds and leaves
- ✓ Dead plants

### No thanks

- ✗ Building rubble
- ✗ Household waste or food waste
- ✗ Paints and liquids
- ✗ Logs and tree stumps
- ✗ Plant pots and polystyrene
- ✗ Turf or soil

## Food Waste

### Yes please

- ✓ Meat, fish and bones (raw or cooked)
- ✓ Leftovers
- ✓ Fruit and veg, peelings included
- ✓ Dairy products (cheese, yoghurt)
- ✓ Bread, pasta, rice and pulses
- ✓ Teabags and coffee grounds
- ✓ Butter, lard and other solid fats
- ✓ Eggshells
- ✓ Out-of-date food (not in packaging!)

### No thanks

- ✗ Plastic bags
- ✗ Liquids or oils
- ✗ Packaging
- ✗ Pet waste or litter



## Cheers, raise a glass to your next adventure!



**SEE** Ashford's lively, modern vibe—just 38 minutes from London on the high-speed train. Visit glorious gardens and historic houses, and enjoy live music and performances from well-known artists. **FIND** the charm of Tenterden, known as The Jewel in The Weald, and our characterful villages. Delve into history with fascinating museum visits or hop aboard the heritage railway for the finest panoramic views! Why not extend your visit with an overnight stay or a short break to fully immerse yourself in all the area has to offer?

**TASTE** award-winning wines, ciders, and local produce—a genuine delight for food enthusiasts. Escape to award-winning vineyards, offering tours, tastings and a warm welcome to visitors eager to experience the art of wine making. **TRY** walking, cycling, or a round of golf—Ashford and Tenterden's stunning countryside presents endless options for outdoor pursuits. Whether you're eager to reconnect with nature or simply relax in serene surroundings, adventure awaits in Kent, the Garden of England.



[experienceashfordandtenterden.co.uk](http://experienceashfordandtenterden.co.uk)



EXPERIENCE  
Ashford & Tenterden  
See Find Taste Try

# What's On

Fairs, festivals, and family adventures will fill the borough with colour, culture and fun this summer and autumn. From food and wine to steam trains and live music, there's something to enjoy all season long



## 2026 Events in Ashford Town Centre

**SATURDAY 27 JUNE 2026**  
**10AM – 7PM**  
**INCLUDING**  
 Food and Drink Stalls – Live Music – Demos and samples  
 – Street Theatre – Kids Crafts and Activities  
 Visit [www.loveashford.com](http://www.loveashford.com) for more information

**ASHFORD FOOD & DRINK FESTIVAL**

This June, find our Jellycat Amuseables and be in with a chance of winning the collection

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**Saturday 21 November 2026**

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Sponsored by Ashford Designer Outlet

## Wealden Times Midsummer Fair at Hole Park

Thursday 11 – Saturday 13 June 2026

Enjoy three days of shopping from curated home, garden, fashion and wellbeing stalls, alongside great food, live music and workshops. Fair tickets include entry to Hole Park's beautiful summer gardens, plus access to the Coach House Tea Room for light lunches and homemade cakes.

For tickets or exhibitor enquiries, visit [wealdentimes-fair.co.uk](http://wealdentimes-fair.co.uk)



## What's On at Hole Park Gardens

Hole Park has plenty to look forward to this year. From 29 June–2 July, celebrate the beauty of wildflower meadows with guided tours, wildlife talks and hands-on workshops ahead of National Meadows Day. On 26 June, enjoy the impressive Beating Retreat ceremony, a family-friendly evening of music, tradition and pageantry. Later in the year, experience Autumn Gold in September and October, as the gardens glow with rich seasonal colour.

Discover more at [www.holepark.com](http://www.holepark.com)

## An Evening with the Wine Garden of England & Eastwell Manor

Friday 26 June 2026

Enjoy a guided tasting of Kent's finest wines, paired with artisan canapés from Eastwell Manor, in an atmospheric evening at Revelation Ashford. A relaxed over-18s event featuring live jazz and celebrated local vineyards. To book tickets visit [revelationashford.co.uk](http://revelationashford.co.uk) and don't forget to check out our comp on page 22 to win tickets...

## All aboard for summer fun with Kent and East Sussex Railway

Save this summer with Kids Go FREE from 21 July–31 August – up to three under-16s travel free with a paying adult, plus unlimited rides and discounted entry to Bodiam Castle. Plus, TN postcode residents can also enjoy unlimited summer travel with a great-value Season Ticket.

Evenings steam into life with glamorous Cocktail Trains (20 June), clue-packed Murder Mystery nights (26 June, 31 July, 28 August) and much-loved Fish & Chip Specials through the Rother Valley.

Finally, don't miss the Spellbound Express (28–30 October) – a magical steam train adventure for ages 4–12, featuring witches, wizards, potions, a friendly baby dragon and a Junior Spellcaster certificate for every child.

Tickets and prices: [www.kesr.org.uk](http://www.kesr.org.uk)



## Pride Ashford

Saturday 20 June 2026

Pride returns to Ashford, bringing a vibrant, inclusive celebration of the LGBTQIA+ community and its allies. Enjoy a full day of entertainment, including live performances, a colourful Pride march, a Queer Makers Market and a lively after-party. Pride Ashford is free to attend, welcoming everyone to join in celebrating love, equality and community spirit.

For updates, visit [prideashford.com](http://prideashford.com)



# A helping hand

If you are in need of a wellbeing boost, there are a variety of services within the borough that are ready to give you a helping hand. Here are just some of those on offer at little or no cost to you...

## One You Kent

Healthy changes start with little changes. Pop along for free NHS support and advice to improve your health and wellbeing. No appointments are needed. You can get a health MOT and have your blood pressure and weight checked - just drop in and see the team at their new home at Ashford Gateway Plus. They're open Tuesday to Friday, 9.30am to 4.30pm - visit [www.oneyoukent.org.uk](http://www.oneyoukent.org.uk).



### What residents say:

*"We came to Ashford to have our health checks here about a year ago. It was very worthwhile - my wife had high blood pressure picked up. She is now on medication. Recently she was informed she had high cholesterol. We were given a list of foods to avoid from our GP, but we were still confused. It was great to be able to come here and have everything explained to us and pick up some leaflets. Thanks very much."*

*"Thank you for all the support. It's a wonderful feeling that we can just drop in for blood pressure monitoring and always see a friendly face. It's just wonderful that this is so easy to access. And free!"*

## Making Ashford a dementia friendly borough

Dementia touches the lives of many families across Ashford. Whether as a person living with dementia, a carer, a family member, or a friend, so many people in our community are affected. But with understanding, compassion, and practical action, we can make Ashford a place where everyone feels supported, respected, and included.

The Ashford Dementia Forum (ADF) brings together local residents, charities, professionals, community groups, and businesses who all care about making our borough more dementia friendly. It is a welcoming and inclusive space where people come together to share ideas, information, and experiences, with the voices of those living with dementia and their carers at the heart of everything we do.

For someone living with dementia, small changes can make a huge difference. Clear signage, patient and dementia-aware staff in shops and cafés, safe and welcoming social spaces, and opportunities to stay active and connected can all help people continue to live well and with dignity.

### What they do

The forum focuses on turning understanding into action. Their work includes:

- Encouraging dementia friendly environments across Ashford by promoting inclusive and accessible practices
- Sharing activities, events, and opportunities that help people with dementia and their carers stay connected and supported
- Providing information and signposting so families can find the right help at the right time
- Listening to and amplifying the voices of people with lived experience of dementia
- Planning practical initiatives, including dementia awareness training and community projects

One of the current key priorities is working directly with local businesses. Over the coming months, ADF members will be reaching out to shops, cafés, services, and organisations across Ashford to share practical guidance on how they can become dementia friendly. Businesses can also sign up online and make a pledge by completing a short form. [www.kentdaa.org/contact-8](http://www.kentdaa.org/contact-8).

## Get involved

The Ashford Dementia Forum meets regularly within the borough. Venues vary to keep meetings accessible, and everyone is welcome, whether you're a professional, a carer, someone living with dementia, or simply someone who wants to make a difference. For more information, contact [dementialead@ageukhla.org.uk](mailto:dementialead@ageukhla.org.uk).



## TCS Tenterden Counselling Service.

### Tenterden Counselling Service

According to the NHS, one in five adults are suffering or unable to function productively, as a result of common mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, trauma, loss, family, relationship or identity issues.

Tenterden Counselling Service (TCS) is a little-known 40 year-old charity. It helps with these common mental health problems by providing high-quality counselling to local people in need, when they need it, for as long as they need it, regardless of their ability to pay.

Although based in Tenterden, TCS has a much wider catchment area. The service is for anyone "within reach of Tenterden" and offers online counselling for those who can't travel.

TCS understands very well the stigma and shame that can come with mental health struggles, and how hard it can be to take the first step in seeking help. The charity makes it easy to book an assessment or just have a chat with a mental health specialist. After a thorough assessment, TCS either recommends a more appropriate service or, more often, offers a place in its unique counselling service – unique in that it is genuinely affordable and open-ended, with no long wait to start counselling.

TCS is funded solely by grants and donations and currently has 50 clients who attend counselling every week.

Local people can visit [www.tenterdencounselling.org.uk](http://www.tenterdencounselling.org.uk), call 07769 683 347 or use this QR code to refer themselves to TCS.



## Ashford Active Retirement Association

The Ashford Active Retirement Association (AARA) is a community group for retired or semi-retired people over 50 that aims to combat loneliness, by providing a welcoming space for residents to make friends.

The AARA is part of the Kent Active Retirement Association (Kent ARA), which was recently awarded with The King's Award for Voluntary Service by HM King Charles III. The group was formed in 1984 by Gladys Forsythe, who remained a member of AARA until this January when she passed away at the young age of 103.

Kent ARA has 76 clubs throughout Kent and has over 8,500 members, all run by volunteers. Two of those clubs are within the borough - the AARA based at the Swan Centre in South Willesborough, which has 130 members and the Ashford South Active Retirement Association (ASARA) operates from the Simon Stock Hall in South Ashford, and has 179 members.

Both clubs are operated by voluntary committees who organise activities for members such as day trips, holidays, games afternoons, short mat bowls, ten-pin bowling, country walks, lunch clubs and coffee mornings.

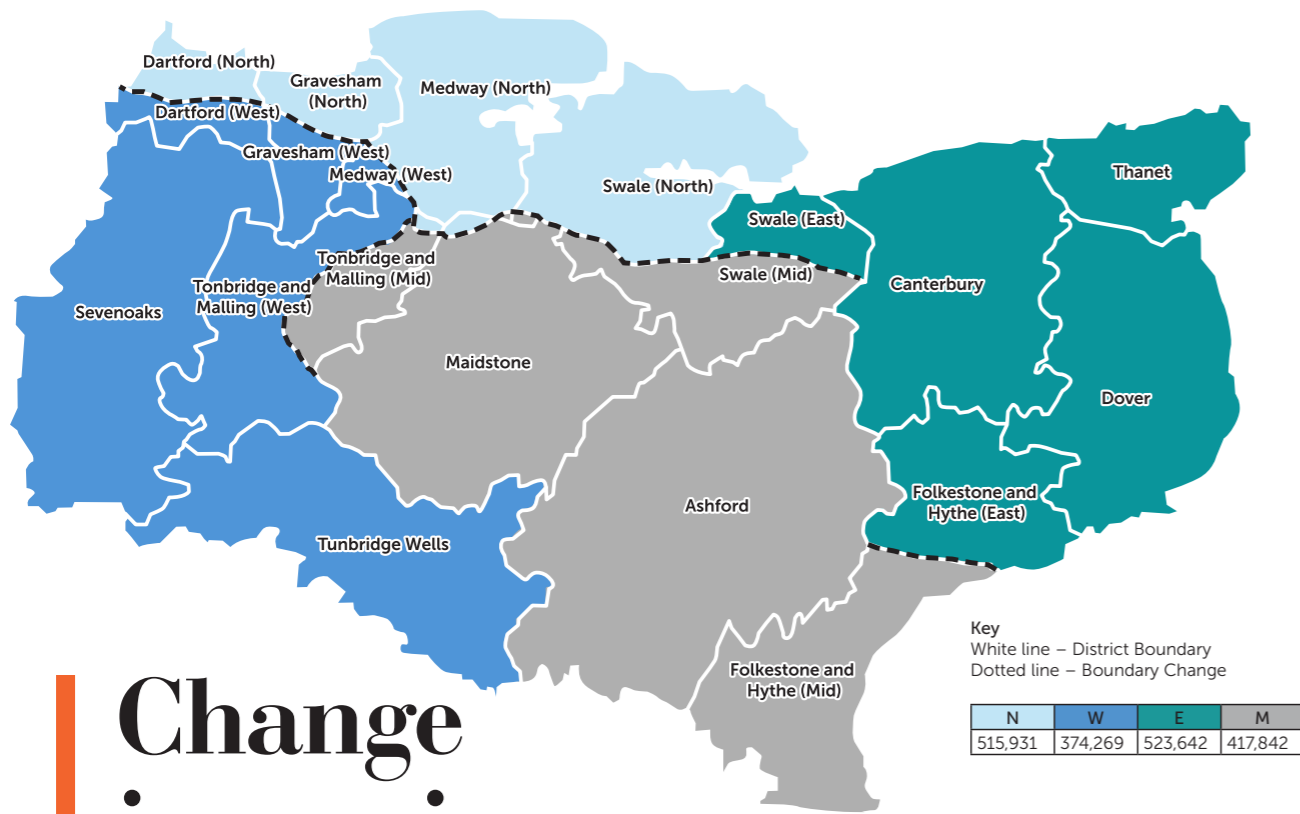
### How to join

Age is just a number, and both associations would love to see new faces. The AARA currently meets on the third Tuesday of each month from 2-4pm at the Swan Centre, with monthly games afternoons on the first Tuesday. For more information on becoming a member, contact [kentarasecretary@outlook.com](mailto:kentarasecretary@outlook.com).



Gladys Forsythe with Joan Rhodes  
KentARA Vice President





# Change is coming

Government to decide future shape of local government in Kent and Medway

Earlier this year, the Government launched a consultation on the future number of councils in Kent and Medway and the areas they should cover. This is the biggest shake-up of local government in 50 years, known as local government reorganisation (LGR).

## Councils in Kent

Under the current system, Kent County Council (KCC) delivers some services such as education, social services and roads, and district or borough councils (like Ashford) deliver others like emptying your bins and providing housing services. Under the proposed system, a much smaller number of unitary councils would deliver all council services in one area. Medway Council already operates this way.

## Options drawn up

Councils drew up a series of options for the number of unitaries and what areas they should cover. In Ashford, councillors feel the 4D model is the best option.

This includes some minor boundary changes which reflect the established communities of Kent - strengthening local identity, supporting travel-to-work patterns, and balancing urban and rural needs within a four-unitary model.

## What happens next?

The consultation closed at the end of March. Civil servants and ministers are currently considering everyone's responses alongside the evidence that has been presented to them.

A decision on which option ministers have chosen is likely to be announced in the summer.

## LGR timeline



To find out more visit [www.ashford.gov.uk/lgr](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/lgr)

# Should Ashford have its own Town Council?

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) means that in a few years' time, Ashford Borough Council will no longer exist. Services will move to a new, larger unitary council.

We have been asking whether residents support a town council for Ashford to ensure there are locally elected councillors focused on the town after LGR.

## Community Governance Review (CGR) Update

CGR is a legal process carried out by a council to assess whether new arrangements are necessary for parish or town councils in its area.

Currently, the main built-up area of Ashford does not have a town or parish council. We have been looking at whether this should change, as when the new unitary council comes in 2028, parish, community and town councils will have an important role in local government.

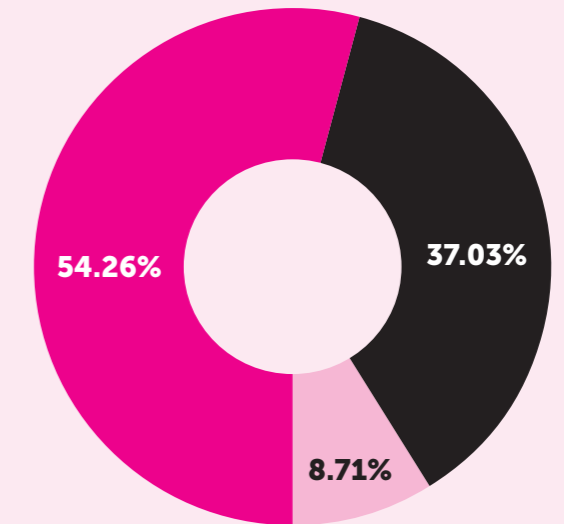
Last year, we asked people living in the review area what they thought about creating a town council for Ashford. Most people who responded said they supported the idea.

## Phase 1 response

Based on that feedback, we put together new proposals and wrote to everyone in the affected area again.

This set out options for what the new council could be called, how many councillors it might have, and how the area could be divided into wards. We also explained that for those living in the area, a precept (a local tax levied by town and parish councils) would be introduced to cover the costs of running a town council.

Since the consultation ended, we have been analysing the results which will inform what we do next. A final decision is expected to be made at a meeting of Full Council in July.



## Response rate:

54.26% of respondents feel that Ashford should have a town council while 37.03% think it should not, and 8.71% were not sure.

A total of 505 responses were received, representing approximately 1.68% of the electorate (29,991).

## CGR Timeline 2nd Phase Consultation



## Find out more

You can read more about town councils and this review on our website, including answers to frequently asked questions.

To find out more visit [www.ashford.gov.uk/cgr](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/cgr)

# WIN

## an unforgettable evening of wine, food & live jazz!



One lucky reader can win four tickets to An Evening with Wine Garden of England, returning as part of the Ashford Food & Drink Festival — and it promises to be a real treat for the senses.

Taking place at Revelation Ashford on Friday 26 June, 7.15–10pm, this sparkling evening serves up outstanding English wines from leading Kent and Sussex vineyards, perfectly paired with elegant artisan canapés from Eastwell Manor and smooth live jazz throughout the night.

Hosted by wine expert Jo Ginn, with vineyard teams on hand to share their stories (and bottles available to buy), it's a chance to sip, savour and soak up a truly great atmosphere.

Don't miss your chance to toast the very best of local food and drink — this is one prize worth raising a glass to.



# NATIONAL RIVERS CONSORTIUM



## WIN a Family Ticket to Port Lympne Safari Park!



Fancy an unforgettable free family day out? We're giving one lucky winner the chance to enjoy a family ticket for up to five people to the incredible Port Lympne Safari Park!

Your prize includes a journey through the park's famous safari, where you'll come face-to-face with some of the world's most iconic animals. Spot giraffes, rhinos, zebras, gorillas, big cats and many more as you explore this stunning 600-acre reserve. It's the perfect way to spend time together—fresh air, amazing wildlife, and a truly memorable family adventure.

For more about the park, visit: [www.portlympne.com](http://www.portlympne.com)

T&Cs apply.  
One family ticket for up to five people.  
Safari experience included.



To enter your name in our prize draw either:

- \* **Email** the editorial team at [competition@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:competition@ashford.gov.uk) – put **PORT LYMPNE** or **WINE GARDEN OF ENGLAND** in the subject heading and include your full name, postal address and email. Please include a contact phone number.
- \* **Send a postcard or sealed envelope** with your name, address, email and contact phone number to: *Ashford For You* magazine, Communications, Ashford Borough Council, International House, Dover Place, Ashford TN23 1HU. Write **Port Lympne** or **Wine Garden of England** competition on the card. We will contact the winner to request consent to provide your contact details to enable you to claim your prize.

**Terms & conditions:** 1. The competition is open to UK residents aged 18 years or older except employees of the Promoter, their families, agents or any third party associated with the competition. 2. The closing date of the competition is **23.59 on Sunday 31 May 2026**. Entries received after this time will not be included. The prizes are non-transferable and non-refundable. There are no cash alternatives. 3. By accepting the prize you also agree to be bound by standard terms and conditions specified by the prize providers. Only one entry per person. Editor's decision is final.

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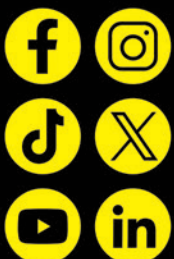
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