



CABINET

**ASHFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

Notice of a Meeting, to be held in the Council Chamber - Ashford Borough Council on Thursday, 14th March, 2019 at 7.00 pm.

The Members of the Cabinet are:-

Cllr Clarkson (Chairman) – Leader of the Council
Cllr Bell (Vice-Chairman) – Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Legal and Democracy
Cllr Mrs Bell – Portfolio Holder for Environment and Land Management
Cllr Bennett – Portfolio Holder for Culture
Cllr Bradford – Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Wellbeing
Cllr Clokie – Portfolio Holder for Planning
Cllr Galpin – Portfolio Holder for Corporate Property
Cllr Pickering – Portfolio Holder for Human Resources and Customer Services
Cllr Shorter – Portfolio Holder for Finance and IT
Cllr White – Portfolio Holder for Housing

NB: Under the Council's Public Participation Scheme, members of the public can submit a petition to the Cabinet if the issue is within its terms of reference or ask a question or speak concerning any item contained on this Agenda (Procedure Rule 9 refers)

Supplementary Agenda

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10. **Ashford Town Centre Framework 2019-2025**

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8 March 2019

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Agenda Item 10

Agenda Item No:



ASHFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report To:	CABINET
Date of Meeting:	14 March 2019
Report Title:	Ashford Town Centre Framework 2019-2025
Report Author & Job Title:	Lorna Ford, Head of Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications
Portfolio Holder Portfolio Holder for:	Cllr. Gerry Clarkson Leader of the Council

Summary:	<p>With the rise of online shopping and changes in how people use their leisure time, high streets across the country are facing challenging times and decline. In recent years Ashford Borough Council has taken bold steps to support its town centre and is now bucking some national trends with regards to footfall. However, as the scale of the challenge grows and as other centres strongly compete to differentiate and diversify their offer, Ashford needs a clear future direction. The proposed Ashford Town Centre Framework aims to do just that.</p> <p>It is important that the ambitions in the framework meet the needs and aspirations of local communities and businesses. To ensure this is the case, extensive consultation was undertaken on the future of the town centre from July to October 2018. This report sets out the findings from this consultation which has helped to shape the framework's ambitions and actions.</p>
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Key Decision:	YES
Significantly Affected Wards:	The most impact will be on those wards within the town centre, however given that Ashford town centre serves the whole borough and is a key economic driver all wards are affected.

The Cabinet is recommended to:-

- I. approve the draft Ashford Town Centre Framework 2019-2025 as set out in appendix A;
- II. approve the use of S106 funds and NNDR retention pool to fund the proposed indicative programme of town centre projects and events as set out in appendix B;
- III. note the findings from the town centre consultation as set out in appendix C; and
- IV. delegate authority to the Leader and the Chief Executive, to agree changes to the programme and move resource between projects as and when required.

Policy Overview:	<p>The Ashford Town Centre Framework sets out a vision and objectives to ensure the success and vibrancy of the town centre for future generations. Responding to the findings from the town centre consultation and the significant challenges facing the High Street, this framework document also sets out an ambitious and exciting programme of projects and activities to be implemented over the next five years.</p> <p>The framework supports the following objectives of the Council's Corporate Plan 2015-2020:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Priority 1 Enterprising Ashford – A vibrant town centre and a supporting business centre. Priority 2 Living Ashford – Create a supply of town centre housing to suit emerging new markets. Priority 3 Active and Creative Ashford – Grow our cultural offer to be a successful and alternative destination. Priority 4 Attractive Ashford – Strengthen tourism and local heritage offer. <p>The Town Centre Framework also supports the following policies from the Borough's Local Plan 2019-2030:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy SP4 – Delivery of Retail and Leisure Needs. Policy SP5 - Ashford Town Centre.
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Financial Implications:	<p>In recognition of the need to increase investment in town centre activities, an increase in the base budget of £130k has been built into the 2019/20 budget. In addition there is a £70k a year contribution from the s106 agreement for the outlet centre extension. Therefore a total of £200k has been identified as an on-going, annual commitment to animating the town centre.</p> <p>In addition, the council has benefited from the National Non-Domestic Rate pool proceeds to the tune of £600k with another £300k expected. From the outset the benefits arising from this pool were identified to be used to help strengthen the town centre economy. This funding provides a huge opportunity to plan for the next three years to deliver a comprehensive programme of projects - both capital and revenue. Also available are various sums from s106 agreements – some which must be spent for specific purposes (e.g. open space improvements) and others which are more general in nature (e.g. promoting the town centre). Over the next three years, taking all these sources of funding into account, there is a significant sum available of almost £1.7m to commit to town centre activities and tackle the scale of the challenge the town centre faces. The proposed list of projects and activities to be funded through this pot are set out in appendix B. It should be noted that full project plans have not yet been prepared for all projects and</p>
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therefore resources may need to be moved between activities when full project costs are fully understood.

Legal Implications	None arising specifically from this report.
Equalities Impact Assessment	See attached (appendix D)
Other Material Implications:	None
Exempt from Publication:	NO
Background Papers:	Town Centre Consultation: Report of Findings The Resident's Survey 2018
Appendices	Appendix A – Draft Town Centre Framework 2019-2025 Appendix B – Indicative programme of town centre projects requiring funding Appendix C – Findings from the Town Centre Consultation Appendix D – Equality Impact Assessment
Contact:	Lorna.ford@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233) 330314

Report Title: **Ashford Town Centre Framework 2019-2025**

Introduction and Background

1. The Ashford Town Centre Place Making Board was set up in 2018 to plan, drive and coordinate future schemes and activities in the town centre. It has been supported by four work-streams responsible for engagement, master-planning, project delivery and the impatience team. The draft Town Centre Framework document, attached at appendix A, brings together the efforts of the four town centre work-streams. Whilst the framework includes projects and activities which already have the agreement of the council, it also proposes new initiatives that aim to animate the town centre and improve the cultural offer of the town. These projects are set out with indicative costings in appendix B to this report.
2. In working towards the renaissance of the town centre, all four work-streams have been guided by the following ten principles which are also embedded in the framework document itself:
 - I. Deliver real, qualitative change at pace – don't wait for the 'perfect' masterplan
 - II. Celebrate and consolidate our 'old town', and excite people in the contrasting character of the emerging new Ashford alongside it
 - III. Recognise the key Council role of 'curating' our town centre – 101+ small initiatives will add up to help drive change and build confidence
 - IV. Be brave and determined to be different – be afraid of being the same!
 - V. Recognise that, first and foremost, people want quality experiences
 - VI. Work hard to understand what different generations and different groups of people want – e.g. millennials; grey pounders; young families
 - VII. Temporary, 'meanwhile uses' and activity in public spaces are key points on the roadmap to more permanent solutions
 - VIII. Capture the imagination of the '5%' of creative innovators in the population and use and grow local talent
 - IX. We can achieve more by working with partners and critical friends to harness their skills and capacity
 - X. First impressions matter – get the welcome to our town centre right

Challenges to Ashford Town Centre and the Future High Streets Fund

3. Section 1.3 of the Ashford Town Centre Framework (attached as Appendix A) sets out the challenges that the town centre is currently facing. These are captured under three main themes that reflect the issues raised through the consultation exercises undertaken over the last 12 months. These three themes are:
 1. Ashford Town Centre is predominantly a functional and convenient centre, it lacks a sense of community, distinctive identity and has a weaker retail and cultural offer.
 2. Ashford Town Centre is going through significant change and growth, and is in transition and at a tipping point with the potential to thrive, but also with clear threats.
 3. The accessibility of Ashford Town Centre is challenging for both pedestrians and vehicles.
4. The scale of the challenge facing all high streets across the country has also been recognised by the government and during 2018 a number of initiatives were announced, these included:
 - cutting business rates by a third for up to 90% of retail properties for two years, to provide upfront support for high streets;
 - consulting on planning reform to make it simpler to create more homes, jobs and choice in town centres, and trialling a register of empty shops;
 - setting up a High Streets Task Force which will support local leadership with expert advice on helping local high streets to adapt and thrive;
 - strengthening community assets, including the restoration of the historic buildings that make our high streets special, supporting community groups to use empty properties and providing business rates relief for public toilets and local newspapers; and
 - supporting the transformation of the high street, by creating a £675 million Future High Streets Fund to help local areas make their high streets and town centres fit for the future.

Ashford Borough Council will be submitting a bid to the Future High Streets Fund. This fund aims to renew and reshape town centres and high streets in a way that improves experience, drives growth and ensures future sustainability. Only one bid can be put forward from the Ashford Borough and the government has made it clear that it will not accept bids covering town centre areas that are not facing significant challenges. Projects will need to be co-funded by the public and private sectors on a project basis, or to deliver a local area's wider strategy for the high street.

The fund will contribute between £5-10 million (no more than £25m) to each successful place. The funding is not available for projects that only make a

difference to appearance, but rather how an area is used to achieve a lasting long-term impact. It is intended that the fund can be used for:

- Physical infrastructure;
- Acquisition and assembly of land including to support new housing, workspaces and public realm;
- Improvements to transport access, traffic flow and circulation in the area;
- Supporting change of use including (where appropriate) housing delivery and densification; and
- Supporting adaptation of the high street in response to changing technology.

5. The deadline for expressions of interest is 22 March 2019. The Ashford Town Centre Framework will provide a useful evidence-base to support this bid.

Vision, objectives and priority outcomes for Ashford town centre

6. The vision and objectives set out in the framework have been informed by the extensive consultation that was undertaken and seek to address the future challenges Ashford town centre faces. The framework is structured around an overall vision for the town centre, supported by ten objectives and three priority outcomes to be achieved by 2025, as shown below:

<i>Vision - Ashford town centre is a place where the community meet, share experiences, shop and pursue their interests –a place where people and businesses flourish.</i>	
OBJECTIVES	PRIORITY OUTCOMES
i. An attractive and clean town centre	Ashford town centre has a sense of community and is a place to be proud of .
ii. A safe town centre	
iii. A welcoming place with a civic heartbeat	
iv. A desirable place to live for new and existing residents	
v. A town centre known for its quality experiences that appeal to residents and visitors alike	Ashford is a destination where people choose to socialise, relax and have fun.
vi. Ashford has a vibrant evening and night time economy with a wide variety of places to meet, eat and drink	
vii. A town centre with quality cultural and entertainment facilities	
viii. Ashford has a thriving town centre known for its mix of independent and high street traders	Ashford town centre is thriving and accessible to all .
ix. Ashford town centre is easy to navigate by all and well connected by public transport	
x. Ashford is known for being a ' smart town ', digitally connecting people to	

<i>information, services, experiences and offers.</i>	
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7. The framework also sets out the actions to be delivered under each of these objectives and measures of success (Key Performance Indicators). The plan will be annually reviewed to ensure the actions are still relevant and a monitoring/impact report will be produced which will be communicated widely to relevant partnerships and reported to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Outcome of Town Centre Consultation

8. The Town Centre Framework has been shaped and informed by the findings from the Town Centre Consultation, which ran from July to October 2018 (full findings are attached at appendix C to this report). The consultation was structured around four open-ended questions as follows:

1. How do we create a buzz about Ashford and make it stand out from the crowd?
2. How do we create a thriving, fun place to go in the daytime and at night?
3. How do we create a place that is welcoming and accessible to all?
4. How can we make Ashford a place we are proud to call home?

The consultation sought responses from residents, local businesses and town centre visitors. Over 1000 comments were received which varied from one word answers through to in-depth responses of several pages regarding a number of issues affecting the town centre. Respondents were able to submit their views in a number of ways including:

- an online consultation tool which encouraged comments and debate
- an online questionnaire promoted widely via social media and on the council's website
- Exhibition materials and paper questionnaires were available at the Gateway and at the council offices and questionnaires were also distributed to businesses across the town centre
- A stakeholder conference involving local businesses, community groups and other partners.

9. Frequently recurring comments related to entertainment and culture, accessibility, safety and general ideas for improvements to the town. Many respondents wanted the council to encourage a variety of entertainment opportunities that are inclusive of all, a mixture of retail so there is something for everyone, as well as making the town more accessible (particularly for those with disabilities or those who use public transport) and feel more safe, especially at night. Other comments included tackling perceptions about aspects of the town, such as vacant retail units, and making the town look more attractive. A summary of the main themes and comments is as follows:

Expanding the offer of the town	Addressing areas for improvement	Creating a community and town to be proud of
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A variety of entertainment, leisure and retail • More events and activities to take part in • The offer of the town should be unique • Supporting local and independent businesses as well as enticing bigger brands • Introduce facilities and events targeted at groups within the borough • Promote events going on in the town 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressing actual crime as well as perceptions of crime • Ensuring disabled access is improved and all new buildings are accessible • Improve public transport to reduce traffic making the town easier to visit • Make parking easier free or cheaper particular for people who just want to pop into town • Ensure safety for pedestrians • Make navigation easier with better signage and lighting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create opportunities to meet and socialise with others • Protect green spaces and care for the environment • Ensure housing is well-placed and affordable • Be inclusive of everyone • Ensure the town centre is the heart of the community • Keep going with current projects • Keep the town clean and looking smart • Celebrate Ashford's heritage.

Implications and Risk Assessment

10. There is a risk around the capacity of the officers to deliver such an ambitious action plan. This has been recognised by the Town Centre Place-making Board and an additional £270,000 is being recommended as part of the town centre fund for additional project management resource over the next three years.
11. There is also the risk that residents' expectations have been raised in relation to all ideas being taken forward. There are some ideas not being recommended at this time, such as an ice rink in the town, or that the market cannot currently support, such as Primark coming to the town. The reasons why these ideas have not been taken forward will need to be communicated alongside the results from the consultation.
12. Another recession or economic downturn could also reduce the council's ability to deliver this ambitious programme. The framework will be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure it is still deliverable and resources are being focussed on the right activities.

Equalities Impact Assessment

13. The Equalities Impact Assessment is attached at appendix D. Overall, the assessment shows that the implementation of the action plan will have positive impacts on groups with protected characteristics as defined in the Equalities Act 2010.

14. The action plan includes the implementation of inclusive community led events, and a programme of commissioned events and activities. The overall aim of these events is to strengthen community cohesion and offer a diverse programme to appeal to all residents living in the borough.
15. The framework also addresses current accessibility issues in the town such as uneven surfaces and cobbles in the lower High Street, which are reported to be difficult to traverse for older people, those with certain disabilities and parents with children in buggies and pushchairs. The resurfacing of these areas would result in a positive impact for these groups.
16. It should be noted that the Equalities Impact Assessment considers the equalities issues for the strategy as a whole. Individual projects within the strategy will be subject to future individual assessments.

Consultation Planned or Undertaken

17. The findings from the town centre consultation undertaken between July and October 2018 are set out in the body of the report (see paragraphs 8 and 9).

Other Options Considered

18. Members could choose not to adopt the Town Centre Framework. This could lead to a disjointed approach and undertaking projects that do not seek to address the significant challenges facing the town centre.

Reasons for Supporting Option Recommended

19. The framework provides a coordinated approach to delivering the desired outcomes for the town centre. It also sets out performance framework for the town centre so that the impact of the interventions made in the town centre can be measured. In addition it provides a framework to commission new activity and projects to ensure future resources are being deployed to best effect.

Next Steps in Process

20. As part of the review of partnerships and the governance of the town centre, further conversations will take place with partners and other stakeholders to understand how they can contribute to the ambitions set out in the plan.
21. The Framework will be graphically designed and communicated to residents via the council's website, social media and *Ashford for You* magazine.

Conclusion

22. There are significant challenges facing Ashford's town centre. The Town Centre Framework brings together the planned and new activity to meet the aspirations of the local community and businesses and ensure our town centre is fit for the future.

Portfolio Holder's Views

23. "The Town Centre Framework aims to provide a clear future direction for the town centre bringing together an inspiring and ambitious programme of events, activities and projects to enliven and enrich Ashford's offer. In developing this plan we have listened carefully to what residents, businesses and partners have said about Ashford town centre. We must continue to work together to tackle the challenges facing our town centre to ensure our town is a place where people and businesses flourish. I therefore recommend that Cabinet approve the Ashford Town Centre Framework."

Cllr Gerry Clarkson, Leader of the Council

Contact and Email

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Ashford
Borough Council

Ashford Town Centre Framework - 2019 to 2025



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Welcome to Ashford's Town Centre Framework.

High streets up and down the country are facing challenging times with the increase in online shopping and the need to offer something beyond just a shopping experience. In recent years Ashford Borough Council has taken bold steps to support its town centre including purchasing Park Mall Shopping Centre and overseeing a programme of investment totalling £520m which is changing the fortunes of the town.

This is having a positive knock on effect, with Ashford College bringing in students into the town, the Commercial Quarter bringing in office workers plus we have the Elwick Place cinema and new Brewery adding to our leisure and night time offer.

Ashford is bucking some national trends with regards to footfall, however, as the scale of the challenge grows and as other centres compete to differentiate and diversify their offer, we need a clear future direction that builds on the sound foundations being laid. The Ashford Town Centre Framework aims to do just that.

2018 saw an extraordinary programme of events in the town, including the Snowdogs art trail, the Fields of Battle Lands of Peace Exhibition and Splashes of Summer family fun activities. These events enlivened and enriched the town's offer and most importantly brought the community together.

In developing this plan we have listened carefully to what residents, businesses and partners have said about the existing offer of the town centre and what they want to see in the future. Our vision is that:

*Ashford Town Centre is a place where the community meet, share experiences, shop and pursue their interests – a place **people** and **businesses** flourish. By 2025 our three priority outcomes are that Ashford Town Centre...*

*... has a **sense of community** and is a place to be **proud of**
... is a **destination** where people **choose** to socialise, relax and have fun
... is **thriving** and accessible to **all**.*

Ashford has come a long way but we must not rest on our laurels. We must continue to work together with local businesses, partners and the community to realise this vision and to meet the future needs of our borough.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Future of the High Street

Ashford is one of many high streets throughout the country experiencing considerable change and significant challenges. Consumer spending habits, levels of disposal income and changes in how people use their leisure time have all had an impact but undoubtedly the biggest impact has been the unprecedented growth of online shopping. In 2000 online retailing accounted for less than 1% of total retail sales, by October 2018 almost a fifth of all retail sales took place online.¹ Technological advances, such as the fast growth in personal computer use, smartphone use and improvements to broadband have facilitated this rapid rise in online retailing. It is the speed of these changes that has meant that many town centres and high street are struggling with high vacancy rates and falling footfall. It has been particularly hard for those town centres that heavily rely on traditional retail. Whilst evidence shows that town centres with a wide choice of retail services, residential and office space are more successful at adapting to change.^{2 3}

A strong retail and leisure offer is no longer enough to secure the future prosperity of a town centre. It is also the sense of community, the experiences people have and the social interaction. As Mary Portas put it back in 2011: “The new high street won’t just be about selling goods. The mix will include shops but could also include housing, offices, sports, schools or other social, commercial and cultural enterprises and meeting places. They should become places where we go to engage with other people in our communities, where shopping is just one small part of rich mix of activities”.⁴

1.2 Building on our success

Over a number of years Ashford Borough Council has taken an innovative and proactive approach in tackling the challenges the town centre faces to support the regeneration of the town. The 2015-2020 Corporate Plan set out an ambition of achieving a vibrant town supporting a business centre. To achieve this ambition, the council has actively sought inward investment in new jobs, homes, hotels and leisure attractions in the town centre and, where needed, used council resources to help trigger major new investments. A key priority has been creating new daytime and evening activity in the town centre and kick-starting major new office development. The council’s purchase of a town centre shopping centre has supported the development of independent retailers in the town to make it a lively and attractive shopping destination.

¹ Office for National Statistics (2018), Retail Sales, Great Britain: October 2018

² Public Health England (2018), Healthy High Streets

³ British Property Federation (2016), Town Centre Investment Zones: Getting investment back into the high street

⁴ The Portas independent review (2011): the future of our high streets

Ashford's innovative and proactive approach was recognised by the High Street Minister Jake Berry MP following a visit to Ashford in May 2018.

A summary of some of the key interventions and projects are as follows:

Support for Revelation at St. Mary's

Revelation is Ashford's music and arts venue, delivered by the St Mary's Arts Trust and supported by Ashford Borough Council. Operating since 2011, Revelation Ashford aims to be a beacon for the arts, to which Ashford's growing community can come together and experience high quality performance and exhibitions.

Loveashford

Established in 2014 Loveashford.com has been Ashford's digital high street and was the first website of its kind. Loveashford supports local businesses and business owners by promoting all of the best news, stories, offers and events in Ashford's town centre.

Purchase of Park Mall Shopping Centre

Back in 2015 Ashford Borough Council purchased the then ailing Park Mall shopping centre, where one third of shops lay empty. Today nearly all units are let and it is home to innovative, high-quality independent traders with footfall growing by seven per cent year on year.

Support for Made in Ashford

Operating from Park Mall shopping centre, Made in Ashford is a collaboration of local designer/makers and crafts people helping to support and nurture small creative businesses by giving them an affordable platform on the high street to showcase and sell their products.

Ashford College

Ashford college is a new multi-million pound state-of the-art building located in Ashford town centre. It opened its doors to the first intake of students of over 1000 students and 100 members of staff in September 2017.

St. Mary's Churchyard refreshed

In April 2018, Ashford Borough Council took proactive action to refresh and refurbish St Mary's Churchyard in the town centre and ensure it is a clean, more attractive and a pleasant place for residents to visit.

Splashes of Summer

Under the Loveashford banner, Splashes of Summer was a series of fun family events aimed at animating the town centre throughout July and August 2018. These free events included live music, street entertainment, and games such as over-sized

chess and table tennis. The programme of events proved to be very successful with over 50% of those attending events visiting specifically for this purpose and 67% of these attendees then visiting businesses in the town.

Commercial Quarter

Phase 1 of the Commercial Quarter, Connect38, opened in 2018 providing an 80,000 sq ft office block on Station Road in Ashford. The council's long term aspiration is that the Commercial Quarter will create several thousand jobs, 590,000 sq ft of office space and 150 homes within the town centre.

Elwick Place

In December 2018 Elwick Place officially opened. Funded by Ashford Borough Council, Elwick Place is Ashford's flagship town centre leisure development. The development includes a six-screen Picturehouse cinema, a 58 bedroom Travelodge Hotel and restaurant complex.

Snowdogs arts trail

Snowdogs Discover Ashford was a Wild in Art event delivered by the council and Pilgrims Hospices. The public art trail of 35 Snowdog sculptures, designed by local and regional artists, was placed around the town during September and November 2018. There was a 15% increase in town centre footfall during these months.

Ashford's One You Shop

Working in partnership with Kent Community Health Care Trust, Kent County Council and Ashford Borough Council, the One You shop provides free health care services, support and advice located in the heart of the town. In 2018 the One You Shop was shortlisted for the Royal Society for Public Health's 'Health on the High Street' Award.

Fields of Battle, Lands of Peace 14-18 Exhibition June 2018

Opening on Monday 30th April 2018 at London's Guildhall, the photographic exhibition was a tribute to all those who took part in, or were affected by, the First World War. Sponsored by Ashford Borough Council, the renowned open air photographic exhibition was displayed in the town's memorial gardens as part of its national tour in June 2018. The exhibition was very well received by local residents.

Curious Brewery

The Curious Brewery, from Chapel Down is set to open in spring 2019. This 1.6 acre craft brewery experience will enable it to grow its domestic and international distribution and contribute to the tourism offer of the town and borough. The brewery will be open to the public for guided tours and will feature a shop, restaurant and bar.

Coachworks

Due to open in summer 2019, the council is working with Carl Turner Architects to develop a meanwhile, mixed-use campus at Dover Place, close to the international train station. Coachworks will provide co-working space primarily aimed at start-up companies, flexible indoor/outdoor event space and a food and drink destination showcasing local producers and suppliers.

Town Centre CCTV

In May 2019 public space cameras are to be updated in Ashford. The new cameras will generate high-resolution digital images that will be relayed to the monitoring centre via the Kent Public Service Network (KPSN). The new cameras represent a major investment in the town and will help to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour in the town as well as providing reassurance to town centre residents and visitors.

New Homes Planned for the Town Centre

Increasingly Ashford Town Centre is a place to live which will bring new residents and vibrancy into the town centre. Over 1000 new homes are planned for the town centre including 660 new homes at Riverside Park, 216 new apartments at Victoria Point and 110 apartments in the additional blocks next to the Panorama building.

1.3 Challenges for Ashford Town Centre

- 1. Ashford Town Centre is predominantly a functional and convenient centre, it lacks a sense of community, distinctive identity and has a weaker retail and cultural offer.**

A key challenge for Ashford that has come out of the residents survey and town centre consultation in 2018, is that the offer in Ashford Town Centre needs to be stronger, that Ashford Town Centre lacks an identity, with most residents citing Ashford Designer Outlet and Ashford International Station as the two key unique selling points (USPs) within the area, both of which are not on the High Street or within the traditional heart of the town centre. Ashford has not been exciting enough local residents to come and visit regularly enough, and especially the more affluent residents that can help create vibrancy. Many Ashford residents perceive Ashford town centre as an unsafe place with high crime levels and incidents of anti-social behaviour, which is creating a significant barrier to attracting people to visit.

Resident satisfaction levels are not as high for the town centre as for Ashford as a whole, with only 40% very/fairly satisfied with Ashford as a place to shop and 25% very/fairly satisfied with Ashford as a place to go out. With closures of shops like M&S, Argos, BHS and Clintons, and the opening of Deichmann, Metro Bank, Café Madeline, and Smiggle, Ashford's retail offer is changing. The Town Centre also competes with Canterbury, Maidstone, Folkestone and Tunbridge Wells, as well as with local out-of-town retail and leisure parks like the Designer Outlet, Ashford Retail Park, Warren Retail Park, John Lewis, and the big supermarkets. Ashford is considered a mid-size Convenience and Community Town Centre, the group most at threat from changes to online shopping and out of town retail. Footfall has risen in the town centre in 2018 off the back of a successful programme of events and activities, but is still not back above 2014 levels.

- 2. Ashford Town Centre is going through significant change and growth, and is in transition and at a tipping point with the potential to thrive, but also with clear threats.**

Off the back of the opening of domestic high speed services from Ashford International Station in 2009 on High Speed 1, that reduced journey times to London to 38 minutes, Ashford has attracted approximately £520 m of investment into the town, including new road infrastructure, housing development, a new brewery, a new Aldi, the Connect 38 office building, a new Ashford College town centre campus, the Elwick Place leisure development, and the expansion of the Ashford Designer Outlet. These have been delivered in partnership with private sector developers, but also through the drive and leadership of Ashford Borough Council. Ashford set out its Big 8 projects in 2013, and set up an Ashford Strategic Delivery Board to deliver these, with representation from key public sector organisations. In 2019, many have already completed, and the rest are under construction or progressing. This is creating a positive buzz about the town, but are only the first stages as part of a longer-term strategy to create a thriving town and town centre.

The development and growth in Ashford Town Centre is changing people's habits and creating challenges for tertiary areas such as the Lower High Street, which are becoming less attractive as they become less busy. As the town centre evolves, there is a need to change the use of town centre retail spaces and create new attractive experiences, leisure venues, community space, and living spaces. This will require the redressing of property values with some less commercially viable uses required in the future to stimulate community activity. With over 1000 homes planned or under construction in the town centre, there is the clear challenge of curating the area as a living space for its growing town centre population.

There are lower quality areas of public realm in parts of the town centre such as the Lower High Street and around the Bandstand, which will take significant investment to realise their full potential in the future. With all of the current development and future opportunities, Ashford still has an immature investment market with more challenging development viability, requiring the need for public intervention to ensure the right commercial and community space is created to complete the transformation of the heart of Ashford Town Centre.

3. The accessibility of Ashford Town Centre is challenging for both pedestrians and vehicles.

With the second highest number of comments from the Ashford Town Centre Consultation in 2018, accessibility is a key issue for visitors to the town centre. Limited public transport from the rural areas surrounding Ashford, as well as poor bus interchanges, require improvements to public transport. Ashford also suffers from poor convoluted access to central car parks within the former ring road area. These all make Ashford a less attractive offer to visit, and there are opportunities through improved signage and use of technologies to improve this visitor experience.

With the considerable new construction and development over the last few years on brownfield town centre sites, this is changing the structure of the town and how people move around it. A key challenge is the pedestrian route from Ashford International train station through to the town centre, to attract some of the 3.9 visitors to dwell and spend more time in the town centre.

In Conclusion, Ashford is at a tipping point where the momentum built up over the last few years could create a vibrant town centre with some key further investments that create entertainment and leisure destinations that diversify the offer and reliance on retail. The challenge is establishing the capital investment to take forward the next phases of development in Ashford town centre and to regenerate existing spaces to complement the existing events and promotional activity.

2. Feedback from research and consultation

2.1 2018 Residents' Survey

Research from the 2018 Residents' Survey⁵ provides useful insight into how well regarded the town centre is by local people, what draws different groups to the town centre and how frequently they visit. Overall the survey found middling levels of satisfaction with the town as a place to shop and lower levels of satisfaction with Ashford town centre as a place to visit and as a place to go out. Those living in Ashford town itself generally held the town's offer in higher regard than those living in rural areas.

Residents were asked how satisfied they are with Ashford town centre as a **place to shop** - whilst 40% said that they are very/fairly satisfied, 41% said that they are dissatisfied to some extent. There were lower levels of satisfaction with Ashford town centre as a **place to visit** with 25% being very/fairly satisfied but 50% of residents saying that they are dissatisfied to some extent. There were similar levels of satisfaction with the town as a **place to go out** with 22% of residents being very/fairly satisfied compared with 56% of residents being dissatisfied to some extent.

The residents' survey also asked how frequently residents visit key locations in the town centre. The survey found that over half of residents visit Park Mall shopping centre at least once a month or more often. Those living in Ashford tend to use it the most frequently (a third of Ashford town residents visit once a week or more) this compares with just 8% of rural residents using the town centre as frequently. This is also true of visits to County Square shopping centre where 41% of residents living in Ashford town visit once a week or more, compared with only 9% from rural areas.

When it comes to eating out during the daytime, 11% of Ashford town centre residents eat out at least once a week compared with only 2% of residents from rural areas. The survey also found that only 8% of Ashford town residents and 1% of rural residents eat and socialise in the evenings in the town centre.

2.2 Town Centre Consultation 2018

The Town Centre Framework has been shaped and informed by the findings from the Town Centre Consultation, which ran from July to October 2018. The consultation was structured around four open-ended questions as follows:

How do we create a buzz about Ashford and make it stand out from the crowd?

How do we create a thriving, fun place to go in the daytime and at night?

⁵ Ashford Borough Council's 2018 Residents' Survey - <https://www.ashford.gov.uk/media/6916/residents-survey-2018.pdf>

How do we create a place that is welcoming and accessible to all?

How can we make Ashford a place we are proud to call home?

The consultation sought responses from residents, local businesses and town centre visitors. Over 1500 comments were received which varied from one word answers through to in-depth responses of several pages regarding a number of issues affecting the town centre. Respondents were able to submit their views in a number of ways including:

- an online consultation tool which encouraged comments and debate
- an online questionnaire promoted widely via social media and on the council's website
- Exhibition materials and paper questionnaires were available at the Gateway and at the council offices and questionnaires were also distributed to businesses across the town centre
- A stakeholder conference involving local businesses, community groups and other partners.

Frequently recurring comments related to entertainment and culture, accessibility, safety, and general ideas for improvements to the town. Many respondents wanted the council to encourage a variety of entertainment opportunities that are inclusive of all, a mixture of retail so there is something for everyone, as well as making the town more accessible (particularly for those with disabilities or those who use public transport) and feel more safe, especially at night. Other comments included tackling perceptions about aspects of the town, such as vacant retail units, and making the town look more attractive. A summary of the main themes and comments is set out below:

Expanding the offer of the town	Addressing areas for improvement	Creating a community and town to be proud of
A variety of entertainment, leisure and retail More events and activities to take part in The offer of the town should be unique Supporting local and independent businesses as well as enticing bigger brands Introduce facilities and events targeted at groups within the borough	Addressing actual crime as well as perceptions of crime Ensuring disabled access is improved and all new builds are accessible Improve public transport to reduce traffic making the town easier to visit Make parking easier free or cheaper particular for people who just want to pop into town	Create opportunities to meet and socialise with others Protect green spaces and care for the environment Ensure housing is well-placed and affordable Be inclusive of everyone Ensure the town centre is the heart of the community

Introduce facilities and events targeted at groups within the borough	Ensure safety for pedestrians	Keep going with current projects
Promote events going on in the town	Make navigation easier with better signage and lighting	Keep the town clean and looking smart Celebrate Ashford's heritage.

At a stakeholder conference held on the 2 October 2018, elected Members, residents, businesses and other stakeholders were invited to discuss the future of the Town Centre, including current proposals. A workshop facilitated by Dr Steve Millington from the Institute of Place Management, based at Manchester Metropolitan University, identified some of the key challenges according to delegates. From the analysis of the results of the workshop, it was recommended that Ashford consider:

Restructuring: To restructure governance structures and also physical structuring, requiring co-operation with stakeholders and creating strategic networks and public-private relationships

Rebranding: Focus on the application of branding, marketing communications and public relations techniques to establish a consistent place identity

Reinventing: Encourage diverse leisure/recreational activities to improve perception, and monitor changes in footfall

Repositioning: Consider repositioning itself as more than a retail destination, such as by focusing on becoming a "modern market town".

3. Vision, objectives and priority outcomes for Ashford Town Centre

The vision and objectives set out in the framework have been informed by the extensive consultation that was undertaken. The framework is structured around an overall vision for the town centre, supported by ten objectives and three priority outcomes to be achieved by 2025, as shown below:

VISION - Ashford town centre is a place where the community meet, share experiences, shop and pursue their interests – a place where people and businesses flourish	
OBJECTIVES	PRIORITY OUTCOMES
i. An attractive and clean town centre	Ashford town centre has a sense of community and is a place to be proud of.
ii. A safe town centre	
iii. A welcoming place with a civic heartbeat	
iv. A desirable place to live for new and existing residents	
v. A town centre known for its quality experiences that appeal to residents and visitors alike	Ashford is a destination where people choose to socialise, relax and have fun.
vi. Ashford has a vibrant evening and night time economy with a wide variety of places to meet, eat and drink	
vii. A town centre with quality cultural and entertainment facilities	
viii. Ashford town centre is known for its mix of independent and high street traders and a place where businesses thrive	Ashford town centre is thriving and accessible to all .
ix. Ashford town centre is easy to navigate by all and well connected by public transport	
x. Ashford is known for being a ' smart town ', digitally connecting people to information, services, experiences and offers.	

3.1 Priority outcome 1 - Ashford town centre has a sense of community and is a place to be proud of

Objective	Timescale S/M/L ⁶	Actions	Lead organisation(s)	Measures of success
An attractive and clean town centre.	S	Undertake environmental and safety improvements on the route between the station and outlet centre including CCTV and lighting upgrades and repairs and repainting footbridge.	Network Rail, ABC, McArthur Glen, KCC	Maintain levels of street cleanliness in the town centre.
	S, M & L	Undertake street tree planting project.	ABC, KCC	Reduction in airborne pollutant concentrations in town centre
	M	Support retailers to improve shop front design through grant scheme	ABC working with local retailers	
	S	Improve the appearance of the High Street through small environmental improvements including relocation of three BT telephone boxes and minor repairs to existing red paving and gullies.	ABC, BT, KCC	Increase in the % of town centre residents saying that they have pride in the local area.
A safe town centre.	S &M	Deliver the Community Safety Partnership rolling action plan to help tackle crime and anti-social behaviour in the town centre.	Community Safety Partnership	Reduction in the level of Anti-Social Behaviour and crime in Victoria ward.

⁶ * S = short-term within 1 year, M = medium-term 2-3 years, L= long-term 3 years+

Objective	Timescale S/M/L ⁶	Actions	Lead organisation(s)	Measures of success
A welcoming place with a civic heartbeat.	S	Deliver Phase 1 of the Coachworks providing new space for community events and community meeting space.	Carl Turner Architects working with ABC	<p>Increase in the % of residents saying that they feel part of the community.</p> <p>Increase in the % of town centre residents saying that they have pride in the local area.</p>
	S	Introduce small grant funding to deliver a range of community events in the town centre.	ABC	<p>Value of grant funding approved and delivered</p> <p>No. of events delivered, attendance, attendance by target groups, social media reach</p>
	S	Commission 'Made in Ashford' to deliver creative community workshops and events.	ABC working with Made in Ashford	<p>No. of workshops delivered, attendance, attendance by target low engagement groups (to be defined), social media reach</p>

Objective	Timescale S/M/L ⁶	Actions	Lead organisation(s)	Measures of success
A desirable place to live for new and existing residents	S, M & L	Delivery of new quality homes in the town centre by 2025	Various development partners and ABC	<p>Increase in the % of town centre residents saying that their local area is a good place to live.</p> <p>Breakdown of type and tenure of new homes in the town centre.</p> <p>Number of new homes delivered in the town centre.</p>
	S	Review existing partnership arrangements in the town centre to increase the involvement of the local community and communities of interest.	ABC working with local community groups.	<p>Increase in the % of town centre residents saying that they have pride in the local area.</p> <p>Increase in the % of town centre residents saying that they can influence local decision making</p>

3.2 Priority Outcome 2 - Ashford is a **destination** where people **choose** to socialise, relax and have fun.

Objective	Timescale S/M/L	Actions	Lead organisation(s)	Measures of success
A town centre known for its quality experiences that appeal to residents and visitors alike	S	Commission a programme of town centre events to animate the town centre throughout the year. Determine potential new arrangements to manage the enhanced town centre cultural offer.	ABC	Increase in town centre footfall, spend and dwell time in the daytime, evening and at night.
	S	Improve marketing and branding of town centre events programme to increase reach and impact	ABC working with Ashford Business Forum	Increase in satisfaction with the town centre as a place to go out/visit/shop
	M	Explore the feasibility, design and delivery of new play space in one or more town centre locations	ABC	
Ashford has a vibrant evening and night time economy with a wide variety of places to meet, eat and drink	M	Commission a quality, high profile annual event with a particular focus on driving the night time economy.	ABC	Increase in participation in cultural activities from specific groups/communities where there is low engagement (to be defined)
	L	Explore Purple Flag accreditation to support a thriving evening and night time economy	ABC working with the Community safety Partnership and Business Forum	
	S	Deliver the Phase 1 of the Coachworks to become a new destination for performance, exhibition space and food and drink events selling locally sourced and made products.	Carl Turner Architects working with ABC	Increase in visitor numbers at events
A town centre with quality cultural and entertainment facilities	M	Develop Ashford's 'old town' through the Mecca/ Vicarage Lane site to enhance Ashford's heritage by revealing St Mary's Church and retaining the lower high street frontage	ABC working with a development partner	Increase in usage of the town centre from the following ACORN groups:

Objective	Timescale S/M/L	Actions	Lead organisation(s)	Measures of success
	S	Market test options for the 'upstairs space' in the former Mecca building to create a new indoor performance/creative space in the town centre	ABC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comfortable communities • Rising prosperity • Affluent achievers <p>Increase in visitor number as measured through the Visitor Information Centre</p>
	M	Deliver a new outdoor performance area/square at the Mecca/Vicarage Lane site	ABC working with a development partners	
	L	Explore the potential to establish and deliver a new Arts, Entertainment, and Conference venue to include theatre and related facilities.	ABC	
	M	Determine potential new arrangements to manage the enhanced town centre cultural offer.	ABC	

3.3 Priority Outcome 3 - Ashford town centre is **thriving** and accessible to **all**.

Objective	Timescale S/M/L	Actions	Lead organisation(s)	Measures of success
<i>Ashford town centre is known for its mix of independent and high street traders and a place where businesses thrive</i>	S	Encourage and support temporary 'meanwhile uses' in key town centre locations and empty units to stimulate and widen Ashford's permanent offer.	ABC	Reduce vacancy rates of units in the town centre
	M	Review existing partnership arrangements with retail/ business stakeholders in the town centre	ABC	
	S	Deliver phase 1 of the Coachworks to create 3,000 sq ft of flexible office accommodation/meeting space for hire.	Carl Turner Architects working with ABC	Increase the number of new businesses locating in the town centre
	L	Deliver Phase 2 of the Coachworks (Corn Mill) to deliver creative studios for local artists, designers and makers.	ABC	Increase the number of cultural and creative businesses locating in the town centre
	M	Develop a business support programme for independent retailers to help them evolve their offer in a continually challenging and changing retail and entertainment environment.	ABC	Increase in business survival rates
	S-M	Continue to support 'Made in Ashford', a pop up shop selling high quality handmade local products in Park Mall.	ABC working with Made in Ashford	Vacancy rates in Park Mall

Objective	Timescale S/M/L	Actions	Lead organisation(s)	Measures of success
	S-M	Ensure Park Mall continues to provide a diverse offer of independent retailers	ABC working with Made in Ashford	
	M	Review the way forward for future market provision in the town centre.	ABC	
<i>Ashford town centre is easy to navigate by all and well connected by public transport</i>	M	Resurface pedestrian and cycling routes in the underpass to the outlet centre.	ABC, KCC, Sustrans	Increase in no. of cycling trips through town
	M	Improve road surface in the Lower High street	ABC, KCC	Increase in town centre footfall Increase in the % of town centre residents saying that they have pride in the local area.
	M	Deliver Mecca/vicarage Lane project to create a new pedestrian route to the town centre.	ABC	Increase in town centre footfall Increase in the % of town centre residents saying that they have pride in the local area.
	M	Deliver a new quality, accessible multi-storey car park at Station Road.	ABC	Increase quality and capacity of town centre parking

Objective	Timescale S/M/L	Actions	Lead organisation(s)	Measures of success
	M	Work up designs and detailed costings for the identified key cycleway and pedestrian 'missing links' to better connect the town centre and support the delivery of priority projects.	ABC, KCC, Sustrans	<p>Increase in no. of cycling trips through town</p> <p>Increase in the % of town centre residents saying that they have pride in the local area.</p>
	S	Review town centre signage including car parking, 'entry signs' and way finding to improve navigation to /around the town.	ABC, KCC	Increase occupancy rates and capacity of town centre parking
	M	Plan and deliver an attractive route from the station and International Quarter to the High Street through a series of great spaces.	ABC, KCC	<p>Increase in town centre footfall</p> <p>Increase in the % of town centre residents saying that they have pride in the local area.</p>

Objective	Timescale S/M/L	Actions	Lead organisation(s)	Measures of success
	M	Work with partners to deliver improvements to community/ public transport provision to serve the town's urban and rural hinterland.	ABC, KCC, Stagecoach	Increase bus patronage, maintenance of service frequency and routes
<i>Ashford is known for being a 'smart town', digitally connecting people to information, services, experiences and offers.</i>	M	Building on Love Ashford, take forward the 'smart town' concept to digitally connect people to information, services, experiences and offers.	ABC	Increase reach through social media Increase in the % of town centre residents saying that they have pride in the local area.
	M	Explore extending public Wi-Fi provision in the town centre (e.g. using new lighting and street furniture) and supporting the development of 5G technology.	ABC	

4. Delivery, measuring impact and review

4.1 Our guiding principles

In working towards the renaissance of the town centre, the following principles have guided Ashford Borough Council to ensure delivery. These principles will be taken forward into the partnerships supporting the delivery of the Ashford Town Centre Framework. Together we will:

1. Deliver real, qualitative change at pace – don't wait for the 'perfect' masterplan
2. Celebrate and consolidate our 'old town', and excite people in the contrasting character of the emerging new Ashford alongside it
3. Recognise the key Council role of 'curating' our town centre – 101+ small initiatives will add up to help drive change and build confidence
4. Be brave and determined to be different – be afraid of being the same!
5. Recognise that, first and foremost, people want quality experiences
6. Work hard to understand what different generations and different groups of people want – e.g. millennials; grey pounders; young families
7. Enable temporary, 'meanwhile uses' and activity in public spaces are key points on the roadmap to more permanent solutions
8. Capture the imagination of the '5%' of creative innovators in the population and use and grow local talent
9. Achieve more by working with partners and critical friends to harness their skills and capacity
10. Get the welcome to our town centre right - first impressions matter

4.2 Working with our partners and the local community

The diagram below sets out the roles of the key partnerships and the council in the delivery, oversight and review of the framework.

	Ashford Strategic Delivery Board	Town Centre Place Making Board	Ashford Town Centre Business Forum
Purpose	The Ashford Strategic Delivery Board is a collaborative board which works together to negotiate practical and pragmatic solutions to problems of delivery and to promote these solutions within the member organisations.	The Ashford Town Centre Place Making Board provides strategic and operational direction for the regeneration of Ashford town centre.	The Ashford Town Centre Business Forum is an advisory group dealing with operational matters impacting on the town centre.
Membership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ABC • KCC • Highways England • Arts Council • Ashford College • Homes England • Damian Green MP 	ABC Member Board Supported by four workstreams: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public and professional engagement • Project Delivery • Master-planning • Impatience team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Town centre businesses • County Square shopping centre • Park Mall shopping centre • Community organisations • ABC
Focus	The Big 8	ASHFORD TOWN CENTRE FRAMEWORK	Economic Development
Framework role	Oversight of potential future 'Big 8' framework projects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mecca/Vicarage Lane • New multi-storey car parks • Accessible Ashford • Town centre placemaking • Arts, Entertainment and Conference venue • Commercial Quarter 	Identification of town centre regeneration projects across work streams, co-ordination and prioritisation of capital works and service provision.	Review to be undertaken of how businesses and local communities are involved in the management of the town centre in the future. At the moment the forum is largely consultative.
Town Centre Framework monitoring arrangements	Quarterly updates to Board on progress of Big 8 projects	Board meetings to update on workstream progress and oversee review of the framework. Annual report to Overview and Scrutiny	Regular liaison and consultation with forum membership

4.3 Annual impact report

The Ashford Town Centre Framework will be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that the action plan is being effectively delivered and the focus of the framework is still relevant and achievable. The review will be informed by feedback from partners and the community. An annual impact report will be produced showing progress against the delivery of the action plan and performance against the measures of success. This update will be reported to the council's Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

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TOWN CENTRE FRAMEWORK PROJECTS												
	Lead	Total 3 year project cost	S'106 '000	Other external '000	Possible supporting contributions							
						ABC Contribution	2019/20 '000	2020/21 '000	2021/22 '000	Beyond '000	Notes/ revenue implications	
Town Centre animation and events												
1	Small grant funding to community/ special interest groups to deliver a range of community events in the town centre	CF	30		in kind support		10	10	10	10	Continuing budget provision likely to be needed.	
2	Town centre events programme through the year - outsourced to specialist providers	LF	210	210	sponsors						Contracted out with two year review. Continuing budget provision likely to be needed but hopefully with trader contributions.	
3	Commission a quality, high profile event with a particular focus on driving the night time economy.	CF/ LF	280		key sponsor		30	150	100	150	Match funded by £70k per annum outlet s106 contribution. Continuing budget provision likely to be needed but may be scope to reduce ABC contribution over time.	
4	Revelation St Mary - three year grant support to help develop local audiences, programme of shows and skill development	CF	90				30	30	30			
5	Ashford and The Railways' Theatre - proposal explores the rich heritage of the railways in the borough and create with the community a new piece of theatre		60				36	24				
6	Additional marketing budget to promote the above and possible street banners	LF/ CF	60				20	20	20	20	Continuing budget provision likely to be needed but may be scope to reduce ABC contribution over time.	
			730	210	0		126	234	160			
Interim, 'meanwhile use' proposals												
7	Encourage and support temporary 'meanwhile uses' in key town centre locations and empty units to stimulate and widen Ashford's offer.	PM	60		various - in kind		40	20			Support in areas such as Elwick Place, Park Mall and elsewhere - as centre becomes more robust hopefully a declining pressure.	
8	Continue to support 'Made in Ashford' a pop up shop selling high quality, handmade goods made by local producers.	LF	60				20	20	20		Support for growing the independent network in Ashford and generating further uptake of retail space with spin-offs.	
			120	0	0		60	40	20			
Environmental works - stations to outlet route												
9	Package of works including landscaping, signnage, litter bins, cycle racks etc	TB/ PM	165	165	McArthur Glen						Works funded by planning agreement with McArthur Glen and carried out by them.	
10	Works to underpass, including lighting improvements, surface cleaning and painting, artwork etc	TB/ PM	31		Network Rail						Works funded and carried out by Network Rail.	
11	Upgrade to underpass including lighting & CCTV	TB/ PM	22				12	10	0	tbc	On-going maintenance obligation.	
12	Repairs and repainting footbridge	TB/ PM	90		90 Unknown						Currently there are problems establishing ownership and responsibility for repair costs.	
13	Other minor works including lining, treatment of area under flyover and pedestrian/ cycle counters	TB/ PM	20		5 Network Rail/ McArthur Gle		10	5				
14	Project management costs for all the above projects - out-sourced	TB/ PM	35		McArthur Glen?		15	15	5		There is no PM capacity internally to co-ordinate these works.	
			363	165	126		37	30	5			
Other environmental improvement works												
15	Improve the road surface to Lower High Street	SD/ PM	350		KCC			50			Potential contribution to KCC total scheme costs of c £350k	
16	Grant scheme to support retailers improving shop front design	TN/ LF	45					20	25		Dependant on take-up there may be a case to continue funding post 2021	
17	Removal/ relocation of three BT telephone boxes & minor repairs to existing red paving and gulleys	PM	30		BT		10	20			May be problems securing BT agreement.	
18	Street tree - feasibility and planting project (e.g. Station Road)	TB/ TN	40	30	KCC		5		5	tbc	Maintenance obligations will arise on Council land and negotiation needed with KCC on highway land	
			465	30	300		15	90	30			
New facilities - preparatory work/ investigation												
19	Explore potential to establish and deliver a new cultural quarter to include theatre and related facilities	TN/ CF	50		KCC; Arts Council		30	20			Initial costs of project scoping; masterplanning assessment; feasibility and options testing for the future of this area.	
20	Market testing options for Mecca 'space upstairs' and design testing	CF	15				15			tbc	Soft market testing by consultants BOP and initial design/ options testing - delivery costs to be identified. May be continuing revenue support costs for operation of venue.	
21	Review the way forward for market provision in the town centre and produce a specific, costed proposal	LF	15				15			tbc	Costs of review only - delivery costs to be identified. Depending on option chosen may be continuing revenue support costs.	
22	Explore Purple Flag accreditation to support a thriving evening and night time economy	LF	5						5		Funding unclear at this stage - may be additional costs once criteria for accreditation are established.	
			85	0	0		60	20	5			
New facilities and capital projects - delivery												
23	Feasibility, design and delivery of new play space in one or more town centre locations	CF	150					150		tbc	A maintenance/ inspection obligation will arise with revenue cost.	
			150	0	0		0	150	0			
Working with partners												
24	Deliver the Community Safety Partnership rolling action plan to help tackle crime and anti-social behaviour in the town centre	SD	29		Income from the crime reduction partnership and also possible member grant contributions		18	6	5	5	Year 1 would cover the deployable town centre camera and crime reduction partnership start up costs. The taxi rank improvements are scheduled for Y2 but would be undertaken having regard to other town centre development that might influence taxi rank location. The community safety app is also scheduled for y2 but no direct costs assigned as in-house development anticipated.	
			29	0	0		18	6	5			
Getting around more easily												
25	Working up designs and detailed costings for the identified key cycleway and pedestrian 'missing links' and improvements to serve the town centre and delivery of priority projects	CF	195		SUSTRANS and KCC		35	80	80	80	Assumes continued capital investment in schemes in 2022/23	
26	Review current town centre and car park signage and 'entry signs' to help users and especially visitors and implement improvements	SD/ PM	72	15			46	11			Year 1 would cover directions signs to car parks, 'Welcome to Ashford' signs at 7 key routes into the town centre, additional finger post signage and tourism sign for Coachwork. Y2 could cover the car park information boards.	
			327	15	0		120	98	94		Indicative allocations at present for 3 additional parishes in 19/20 and thereafter 2 each year for the following two years. Beyond this dependant on success and takeup. On-going options and allocation to be reviewed in light of project evaluation including feedback from communities. Note the projects aim to be self-financing and responsibility transfers to parish councils after a set period. This cost profile is based on recovering 50% of costs from the parishes and requires income to be wired to next financial year or full amount required. The Rural Community Transport Scheme is cover by a PID. Approval is required for upscaling beyond 19/20.	
27	Rural Community Transport Scheme - work with partners to deliver improvements to community transport to serve the town's rural hinterland communities.	SD	45		Parish Councils but 50% risk covered by borough council		24	7	14	14		
28	Plan and deliver an attractive route from the station and International Quarter to the High Street through a series of great spaces	TN	15		Developers		15				Indicative sum for outline design work/ design code and materials palette for developers to work to.	
			327	15	0		120	98	94			
Getting connected												
29	Building on the 'Love Ashford' brand, take forward the 'smart town' concept to digitally connect people to information, experiences, services and offers in the town.	LF	60	15	Commercial partners		10	30	5		Further work is required to scope this project and hence the costs at this stage are indicative only. High Streets Funding bid to CLG to support innovative 'digital town' concept.	
30	Explore extending public Wi-Fi provision in the town centre (e.g. using new lighting and street furniture) and supporting the development of 5G technology.	LF	20				20	0	0	tbc	On-going costs may arise - yet to be determined. Also part of the CLG funding bid - see above.	
			80	15	0		30	30	5			
Capacity to deliver												
31	Project management capacity to deliver the programme - in-house and out-sourced.	PM	270				90	90	90		This extra project management capacity is needed to for the organisation to have a reasonable prospect of delivering this priority package of town centre work.	
			270	0	0		90	90	90			
Project costs												
			2,619	435	426		556	788	414			
2019/20					556							
2020/21					788							
2021/22					414							
Total 3 year programme - ABC costs					1,758							
Base budget + outlet contribution @ £200k p.a.												
					600							
NNDR pilot proceeds					900							
other (S106) funding with ABC Contribution					150							
Total 3 year programme - ABC Funding					1,650							

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The Future of Ashford

A report of findings from the Town
Centre Consultation



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Executive Summary, background and methodology



1.0 Executive Summary

From July to October 2018, Ashford Borough Council ran a consultation which sought the views of local people, businesses and visitors on how to improve Ashford town centre to ensure it is fit for the future. The consultation asked 4 open-ended questions:

- How do we create a buzz about Ashford and make it stand out from the crowd?
- How do we create a thriving, fun place to go in the daytime and at night?
- How do we create a place that is welcoming and accessible to all?
- How can we make Ashford a place we are proud to call home?

In response to these questions, respondents focused on topics such as the offer of the town (including entertainment, leisure and retail), potential areas for improvements (for example accessibility) and creating a community and town centre to be proud of.

1523 comments were left via the various response routes provided - online and paper questionnaires and an online consultation tool. Respondents were residents, visitors, workers, students and business representatives. Comments received were grouped into themes (e.g. entertainment and leisure, business, accessibility etc.) and the number of comments related to a particular theme were counted to show the prevalence of the theme.

The most predominant theme was entertainment, leisure and culture. Accessibility, creating experiences, general improvement, business, perceptions about the town and targeting certain groups were also major themes. These topics are explored in detail in this report.

Below are some of the frequently occurring ideas that were commented in response to the questions asked in the consultation:

1.1 How do we create a buzz about Ashford and make it stand out from the crowd?

- Bring in something unique, and celebrate our unique points too
- Be different from other towns in Kent
- Create reasons for residents and visitors to come to the town
- A variety of entertainment, leisure and cultural facilities to be enjoyed by all, as well as an increased number of entertainment facilities and events
- Ensure everyone can be involved in new events, including children, families and older people
- Encourage independent shops to open in the town, as well as bigger name brands
- Greater promotion what is going on in Ashford

1.2 How do we create a thriving, fun place to go in the daytime and at night?

- Ensure a variety of entertainment, particularly at night
- Increase the number of events going on, round the clock
- Remove barriers for having fun – tackle perceptions of crime and create a safer environment

1.3 How do we create a place that is welcoming and accessible to all?

- Accessibility is a barrier – it needs improvement!
- Free or cheaper parking should be enforced so that people can come for events and entertainment
- Improve public transport – bring back old routes and run services later
- Ensure there is access for disabled residents and visitors, particularly regarding provision in shops, car parks, and the cobbles in the lower high street
- Ensure safety for pedestrians – make the town more pedestrian friendly!
- Make navigation easier, make sure the signage is clearer

1.4 How can we make Ashford a place we are proud to call home?

- The council has the right idea with some of the projects – particularly the Snowdogs and Coachworks projects
- Promote community – create opportunities to meet and socialise with others
- Celebrate our heritage as a market and railway town and promote the history of Ashford
- Keep the town centre clean and the buildings looking smart
- Put the needs of locals first; but still try to bring in visitors
- Be more green – protect green spaces from too much housing development and install more planters

2.0 Background

Town centres all across the country are undergoing change, following prominent changes to population and consumption, convenience and the internet. Many town centres primarily focus on retail, but now face unique challenges that accompany this offer.

Ashford town centre is also changing rapidly, with many large-scale projects such as Elwick Place (cinema and restaurant complex), the Designer Outlet expansion and a new Commercial Quarter (brand new business spaces) all either planned in the coming years or already underway, which will provide local residents and visitors with an expanded offer.

A major consultation regarding the future of Ashford Town ran from July to October 2018. While mainly local residents responded, there were also responses from students, people who work in Ashford, visitors and local businesses. The results show the priorities, ideas and concerns of local people and visitors.

3.0 Methodology

The Town Centre consultation ran from July to October 2018. The consultation utilised a number of different consultation techniques, including face-to-face contact, and online systems. The consultation sought responses in order to answer four main questions about Ashford Town Centre:

1. How do we create a buzz about Ashford? How do we make it stand out from the crowd?
2. How do we sustain a thriving, fun destination in the daytime and night?
3. How do we create a place that is welcoming and accessible to all?
4. How can we make Ashford a place we are proud to call home?

The consultation also aimed to increase awareness of the council's current projects, and projects that are planned. Feedback on the projects and ideas for future projects was encouraged.

3.1 Questionnaire

One of the main ways of getting involved was by completing a questionnaire. The questions were open-ended, so respondents could write their views fully. The questionnaire also asked for additional information about the respondent, including whether they were answering as an individual or business, their age and postcode, and whether they were a resident/worker/visitor of Ashford Town. This allowed the analysis to be broken down into groups, e.g. what do certain age groups want, which ward responded most frequently, etc. The questionnaire was available to respondents online via web-link and a physical copy of the same questionnaire was available at face-to-face sessions, and also available in the council reception area and at the Gateway. See appendix 1 for a copy of the questionnaire

3.2 Online Consultation Tool

An online consultation tool was used alongside the questionnaire. This tool operated in a similar way to a forum, where respondents were presented with information and could leave comments and discuss topics with other respondents. Respondents could click through pages that have maps of the town centre (see diagram 1) and interactive buttons that detail the project that is happening or set to happen in the location they have clicked on (see appendix 2 for town centre maps in more detail).

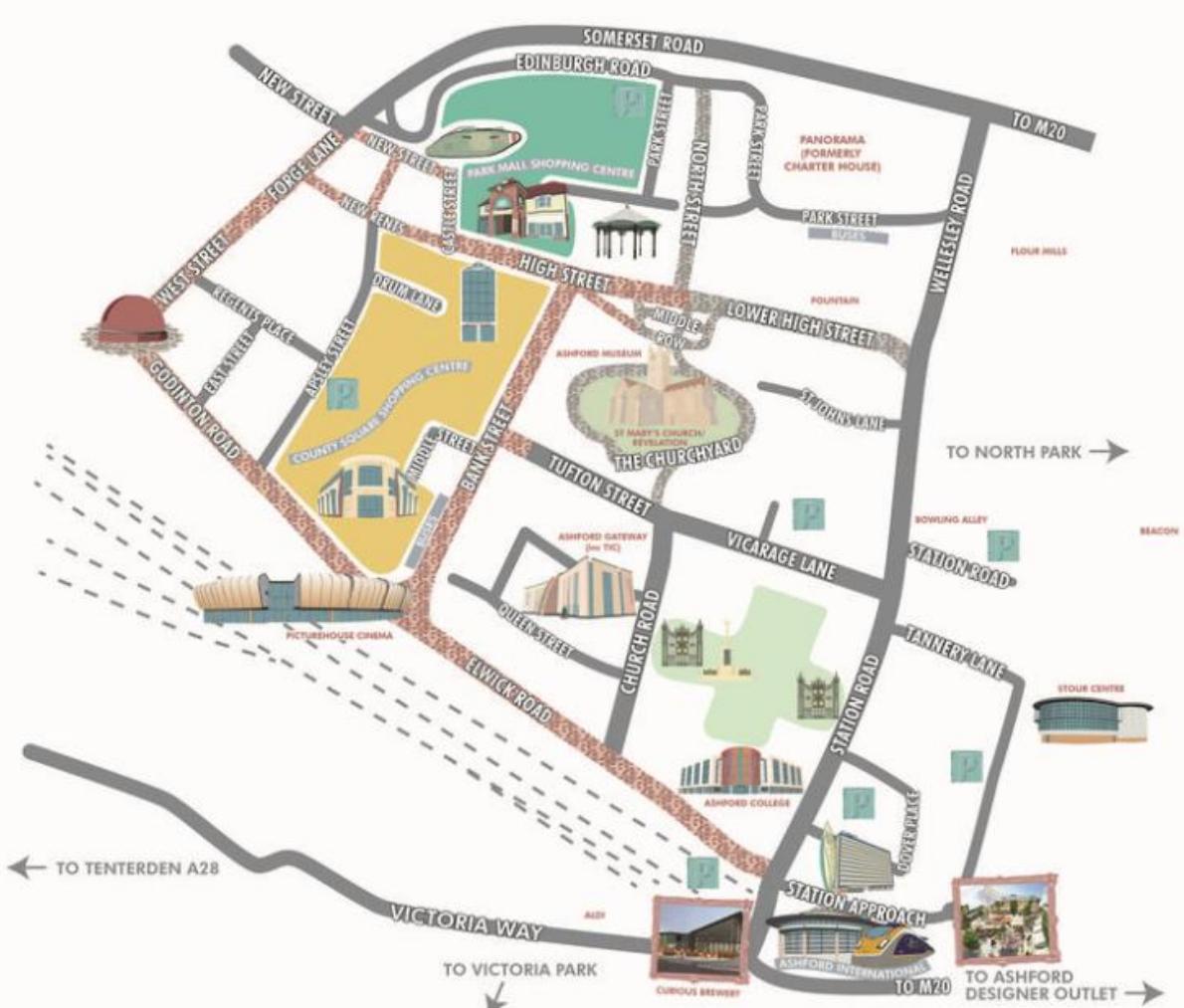


Diagram 1: The Stickyworld Map, showing notable roads and council projects. Participants could place virtual post-it-notes onto the image to comment on a particular project.

3.3 Face to Face

Face-to-face consultation was used on 3 separate occasions:

- Over a two day period on the weekend of Create Festival, during which a booth was set up on the festival grounds;
- Over a two day period in County Square shopping centre, and;
- At the Ashford College Fresher's Fayre, to gain opinions from younger age groups

3 boards were set up detailing current and future projects as well as potential ideas for projects, along with banners with the 4 key questions from the questionnaire written on them. Respondents had the opportunity to talk through the boards with staff and ask questions. Respondents were encouraged to describe their views on projects and ideas for future projects on a post-it note and stick it to the relevant boards. Alternatively, staff asked permission to transcribe their views following discussions and post on the boards on their behalf.

The notes from the face-to-face consultations were then posted by council staff to Stickyworld usernames 'Create Visitor' and 'Visitors from County Square,' in order to keep track of where the comments came from.



Image 1 (Above): A board set up during face-to-face consulting with respondents. Comments were written on post-it notes.

Image 2 (Above): Respondents at the face-to-face consultation could also complete paper questionnaires in order to leave feedback.

3.4 Respondents

Over 1500 comments were made in total but due to the mixed methodology used, it is impossible to know exactly how many people took part in the consultation. 258 individuals and 3 business representatives submitted responses to the online survey. However, the comments on the online consultation tool were submitted anonymously so multiple comments cannot be traced to a single individual. For face-to-face consultation, the number of people council representatives engaged with was not counted.

Respondents were asked for their age and postcode, though not all gave these details. Of the 258 who gave their age most were from the aged group 35-44, with 25% of respondents being from this age group. The percentage respondents for the rest of the age groups are:

- Under 18s – 8% of respondents
 - Aged 18-25 – 8% of respondents
 - Aged 26-34 – 19% of respondents
 - Aged 35-44 – 25% of respondents
 - Aged 45-54 – 17% of respondents
 - Aged 55-64 – 11% of respondents
 - Aged 65+ - 9% of respondents
 - No age given – 4% of respondents

Age did not significantly affect the subjects discussed by respondents, however, older respondents are more concerned about accessibility than about entertainment and leisure, which was valued by younger age groups.

There was a far greater proportion of respondents from wards closer to the town than rural wards. Of respondents who gave their postcode, 80 were from the Ashford Hinterlands, 57 from Central Ashford areas and 42 from Rural Ashford areas.

4.0 Analysis

The comments were analysed using a combination of thematic analysis and content analysis. Comments were given an initial read-through to establish the 16 over-arching themes (see table 1 in section 5.0). Once the themes of each comment were established they were given a second read through to establish the content. For example, if a comment that fell under the theme “Entertainment and Leisure” mentions a “Theatre”, theatre is counted as the content of that comment. The number of mentions of each content topic were counted to assess their frequency. A large number of comments on a particular topic was considered to indicate importance of the topic to respondents.

Key Themes



5.0 Results

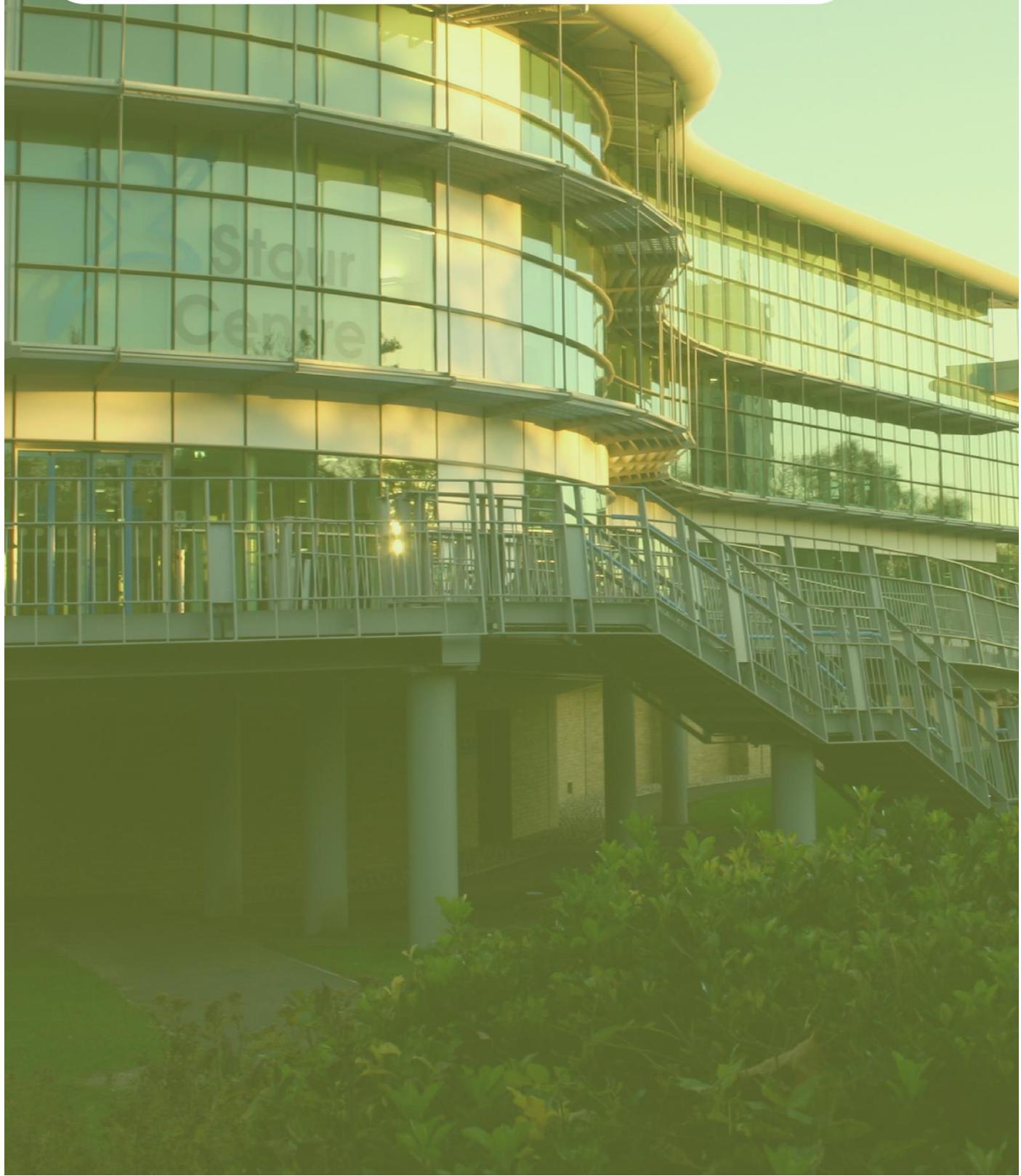
5.1 Key Themes

Theme	Total no. of mentions
Entertainment, Leisure and Culture	912
Accessibility	472
Perceptions about Ashford town	336
General Improvements	309
Business and Retail	276
Target Groups	264
Experiences	178
Comparisons to Neighbours	155
Heritage	134
Unique Selling Point	94
Housing	89
Satisfaction	86
Community and Socialising	84
Environmental Issues	82
Communication with the Council	56

Table 1: The main themes of resident responses to the consultation.

The most frequently occurring theme in the consultation was entertainment, leisure and culture, with 912 of all comments (25%) mentioning an activity or facility which falls into this category. The least frequently occurring theme was communication with the council, mentioned in 56 comments (2% of the total comments). Full analysis tables with each theme explored can be found in Appendix 3.

What the town has to offer



5.2 What the town has to offer



One of the most frequently occurring themes in the consultation was regarding entertainment, leisure and the cultural offer of Ashford town. Further, respondents discussed the retail offer of the town, which contributes to the town centre's offer. Such facilities are suggested as they could potentially increase footfall of not only local people but also visitors from further afield.

Throughout the consultation, respondents emphasised the offer of the town should not only be different, it should have variety. Some respondents stated a greater range of things to do, including: shopping, leisure, entertainment and cultural activities would improve the offer of the town (30 comments). Respondents perceived the offer to be solely focused on retail and pubs (11 comments). Further, quality of activities and facilities were also important to respondents (20 comments). Respondents stated that any new facilities should be high quality, even if it means that they are more "expensive" for the council to implement. However, quantity of activities was also valued by respondents (19 comments), as some feel there is currently not enough to do during the day and particularly at night.

5.2.1 Retail

Respondents discussed the current retail offer of the town and how well it suits their shopping needs. 48 comments left by respondents indicate a dissatisfaction with the current shopping offer; many of the comments stated the offer is "cheap" or that there are too many shops offering the same thing; for example; hairdressers and barbers, cafés, vaping/e-cigarette shops and pound shops. Various suggestions were made to improve the retail offer, most frequently mentioned (46 comments) was the introduction of independent shops, however 23 comments indicated a desire for more "big-name" brands such as Zara and Dorothy Perkins, but particularly Primark (29 comments). Suggestions of brands were often accompanied by comments indicating that respondents don't want to have to travel to competitor towns (for example, Whitefriars in Canterbury, and Fremlins Walk in Maidstone) in order to access these brands. In contrast,

independent shops were desired for their unique offer. Respondents suggested that a different offer to some of the aforementioned locations is desirable for a unique town identity, as well as to support local businesses and to draw in visitors.

However, some respondents stated that the retail offer of the town was not the only aspect that requires improvement, but also the shops themselves. 23 comments suggested there are a number of vacant shops on the high street. The perceived number of vacancies is thought to be due to "expensive" rents, which in turn leads to shops closing (23 comments), and some respondents believe the rates should be lowered to prevent this. A few respondents also stated that more needs to be done to make these empty units look 'attractive' (10 comments). Suggestions were been made as to what can be put in the units, including a children's play centre and indoor markets.

For the full analysis table on Business and Retail, please go to Appendix 3.

5.2.2 Entertainment and Leisure

Aside from suggestions about improving the retail offer of the town; 912 comments within the consultation mentioned improving the entertainment, leisure and retail offer of the town, in order to diversify the experiences had by visitors.

Some respondents made general comments about wanting more entertainment in the town (44 comments). These respondents were keen to suggest why more entertainment would improve the appeal of the town centre. This includes bringing in tourists and visitors who will spend money in Ashford, as well as having a positive impact on residents as it would provide reasons to come to the town centre, instead of travelling to other towns for entertainment.

Of all the entertainment facilities mentioned, a theatre was the most frequent, commented a total of 159 times. This was by far the most popular suggestion across all consultation platforms, as respondents feel it would vastly improve the entertainment offer in the town, particularly at night. Alternative live entertainment options were also explored by those involved in the consultation. Live music and performances, such as comedy performances, were a favourable option (66 comments), for similar reasons that respondents gave for introducing a theatre to the entertainment offer of Ashford. Street performances and entertainers were also favoured (17 comments). Respondents often suggested these performances occur at the bandstand, as it is a central outdoor performance space.

Ideas for use of the Mecca Bingo hall:	No. of mentions
Theatre	28
Flexible space	5
For retail	1
Art centre	3
For heritage	1
"Entertainment Venue"	6
Indoor market	1
Homeless Shelter	2
Open to have a look around	1
Ice rink	1
Total	49

Table 1: The table shows the various suggestions for the currently vacant Mecca Bingo Hall/Odeon Cinema site. Some respondents gave several ideas for use of the Mecca site.

Many respondents explain that they believe the Mecca Bingo/Former Odeon site is suitable for a theatre and was one of the most common suggestions for the use of the building. An alternative site that respondents identified as being potentially suitable is the Flour Mills site. 41 respondents suggested that the bingo hall should be kept (in contrast to 2 comments stating it should be demolished) and there were a number of ideas of what it could be used for as set out below. It should be noted that some people gave more than one idea.

As well as general comments about bringing more entertainment to be enjoyed by residents and tourists, respondents were keen to have most events and activities occur in and around the town centre (58 comments). "Events and activities" often included festivals, fairs and carnivals. Some respondents also wanted to see more community events, either run by the community or for them, to create socialising opportunities.

Respondents suggested that the council should introduce and support more festivals and fairs (22 comments). Food and drinks festivals were the most common suggestion, such as a gin/prosecco festival and cultural food fair. A railway festival was also mentioned in order to celebrate some of Ashford's heritage, along with film, comedy and gaming festivals, and craft fairs.

Most of the "entertainment" comments referred to daytime entertainment, but there were 11 comments regarding more entertainment at night. Some respondents feel there is a limited night-time offer (19 comments), or say they avoid the town centre at night due to perceptions that safe to go into town at night, and that more police and security enforcement is required during this time (6 comments). A few respondents also noted the closure of past night clubs has resulted in the loss of some socialising opportunities for adults.

There were 71 comments relating to restaurants in the town centre. Respondents mentioned named brands such as Nandos and Prezzo, but were also favourable of smaller businesses and a few were open to the idea of 'pop-up' places to eat (9 comments).

As well as more restaurants to improve the nightlife, there was a large demand for more:

- Bars (52 comments);
- Clubs (17 comments);
- Pubs (13 comments)

Whilst there were 21 comments supporting more cafés in the town centre, there were many comments indicating the already extensive café offer in the town. As a result, some respondents were opposed to more cafes opening in town.

One of the most commonly requested facility was an ice rink – mentioned a total of 31 times. There was a strong view that an ice rink would appeal to families and young children more so than any other specific groups. Respondents also stated that an ice rink would serve as a destination attraction.

There were a number of comments about improved facilities for young children, such as: A fairly common idea was to have softplays or more play areas in the town, with 19 comments relating to these facilities. Comments regarding bringing softplays to the town, or investing in more parks were almost always accompanied by comments identifying children and families as the target users of these facilities. Some other facilities suggested for children were:

- Softplays (19 comments) – this was the most popular suggestion for children's facilities
- Splashparks (13 comments) – this was commented mainly during July and August;
- A waterpark (6 comments) – respondents regard this as a potentially unique facility to Ashford

- An outdoor pool (1 comments)

Facilities and Activities Suggested	No. of mentions	Quotes from respondents:
Theatre	159	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Add a theatre and give Ashford the much needed culture and creative space that many people have been wanting for over 20 years.” Resident, aged 30, from Aylesford Green “Theatre/conference hall is a must - there is nowhere in central Ashford to hear visiting speakers in public...Do not get stuck on "Marlowe" size theatres and associated costs, but think about "Gulbenkian" sized facilities which are more appropriate/flexible.” Resident, aged 61, from Kennington
Restaurants	71	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Make sure that entertainment and food outlets are of high standard well maintained and variety, look at start-ups such as pop up restaurants that provide value for money and can be accessed by everyone. Don't just add the boring not good value for money national food chains.” Resident, aged 59 “Get some decent restaurants in the high street that offer a variety of eating cultures ... get micro-breweries to open in the empty units” Resident, aged 37, from Park Farm North
Live music and performances	66	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “At night a place that stages live music especially as the Create festival is always well received” Resident, aged 39, from Washford “By providing a range of entertainment choices...music and the arts are important too” Resident, aged 46
Events/activities	58	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Introduce new, inclusive events such as LGBT events/pride, a 'Notting hill' Style carnival, country/folk festival. Winter events could include indoor crafts/sewing, poetry& creative writing etc. - a focus should be on creativity and fun.” Resident, aged 32, Washford
Bars	52	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Ashford needs more bars and restaurants to make people want to stay for a night out instead of travelling to other towns.” Resident, aged 33
Entertainment	44	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “By providing a range of entertainment choices” Resident, aged 46
Art (galleries, museums, exhibitions, investment)	39	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “There could be day and evening - art /poetry/theatre classes in the building - children's holiday groups, disabled art groups. The old bingo hall could be made into artist studios to rent (affordable) and a gallery.” Resident, aged 60, from Wye “Create a platform for young and upcoming artists. Art and culture are extremely important in creating experiences.” Resident, aged 40, from Beaver
Ice Rink	31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “...an ice skating rink would be brilliant the closest one to Ashford is Gillingham so think how many people from the

		surrounding areas would come to visit the rink.” – Resident, aged 30
Activities/spaces for young people	31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Re-launch the library with new activities for young people. Ask young people what they want to see rather than guess!” Resident, aged 38
Community hub/flexible space	28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “A multi-use theatre would be amazing, it doesn't have to be fixed as just a theatre, but it could be a multi-purpose entertainment or indoor market venue. If a small town like Cheriton can do it, why not Ashford?” Resident, aged 44, from Stour “Having a flexible space for music events, theatre, comedians, boxing events, darts events, ballroom dancing” Works in Ashford

Table 2: This table shows the top 10 most requested entertainment, leisure and cultural facilities suggested by respondents. The full table can be found in appendix 3.

Despite more comments relating to wanting more entertainment and leisure facilities and retail, some respondents were pleased with the progress that's currently being made. 38 respondents report they are satisfied with current projects such as Elwick Place and Curious Brewery and particularly the Snowdog art trail. Some respondents encourage the council to continue with its current workstreams due to satisfaction with the current progress (22 comments).

Suggestions of entertainment and leisure were often accompanied by stating that specific groups in the borough should be targeted. Some respondents feel as though there is not enough provision for their group, or that their group is not included in events. The main groups suggested were children (44 comments) and families (34 comments). Respondents who suggested including more facilities for children were often of age groups that could have young children. A few respondents also believe that school-age respondents should be included more in the council's development of projects and events (10 comments).

Respondents indicated they want more provision for:

- “Young people” (22 comments);
- Teenagers (14 comments);
- Adults (10 comments);
- Everyone (10 comments);
- Older people (5 comments)

5.2.3 Creating a Unique Offer

Respondents mainly drew comparisons to the offer available in other towns, usually as they want to see similar facilities become available in Ashford. It is perhaps unsurprising that Ashford is most commonly compared against one of its closest neighbours, Canterbury (43 comments). Other nearby locations, such as Maidstone (23 comments), Folkestone (21 comments) are also compared. The respondents who mentioned these locations perceived them to have a more varied leisure, entertainment and retail offer than Ashford.

There was a prominent theme that additional effort is required to attract visitors; they need a reason to come to Ashford as opposed to travelling elsewhere (24 comments). As a result, respondents discussed introducing a different entertainment and leisure offer to other towns, and

in particular to have a ‘unique selling point’ (USP). Some respondents suggested that Ashford already has a USP; the two main suggestions were:

- The Designer Outlet Centre (10 comments) for its shopping offer, or;
- The International railway station (4 comments) due to the travel links into London

However, respondents identified a potential challenge; both these facilities don’t necessarily entice people into the very centre of the town, as they are located nearer the outskirts. Respondents stated that there must be a reason for visitors and tourists to want to come to the centre of the town, as at the moment they are mainly attracted to the Outlet but not into town (11 comments). It was suggested that greater accessibility from the Outlet by bus or on foot (3 comments) would encourage more people into the town centre.

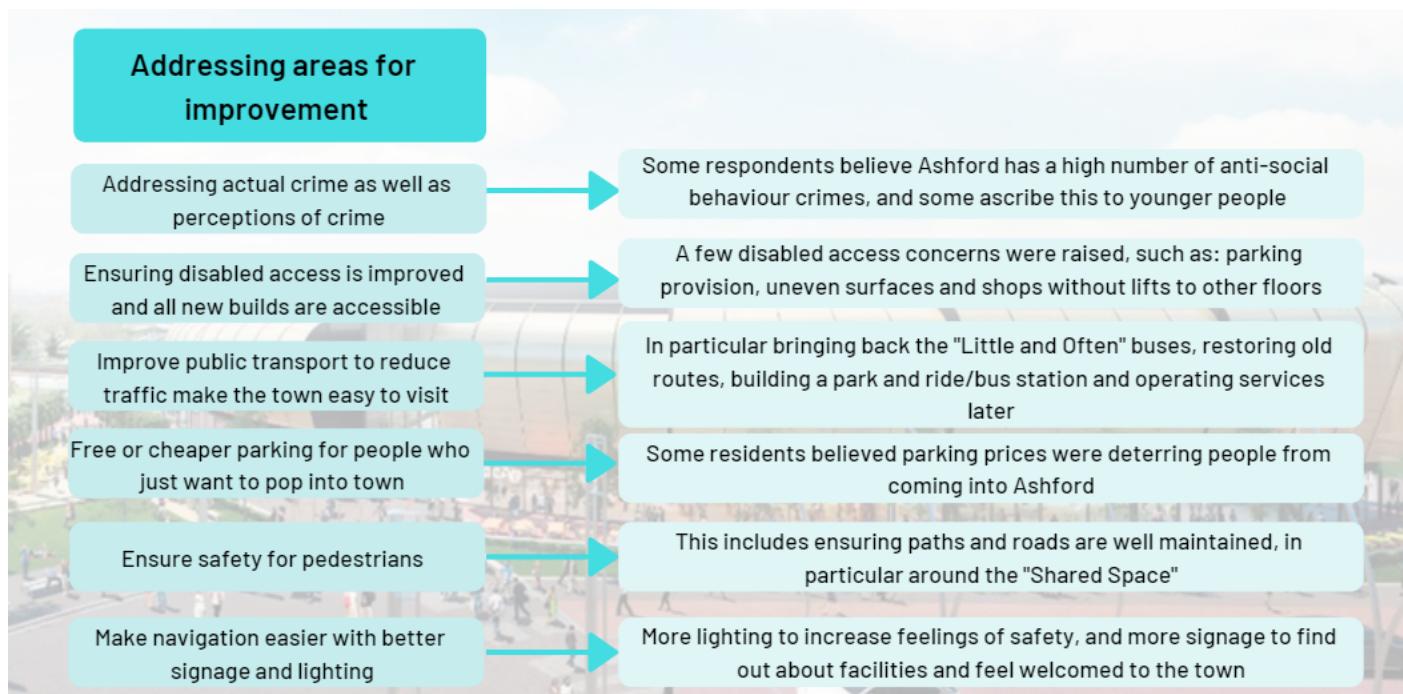
Some respondents felt that Ashford does not have a USP at the moment (3 comments). The desire to have a USP was prominent, as respondents stated they want more ‘unique’ places to go to and activities to do that aren’t available anywhere else, as well as ‘more to do’ in general (19 comments). This was suggested to entice not only locals to visit, but also tourists. There were suggestions about what this USP might be, including:

- An ice rink (with 4 respondents mentioning that the closest rink is in Gillingham);
- A water park, and;
- A theme park

Potential areas for improvement



5.3 Potential areas for improvement



During the consultation, respondents identified potential areas for improvement. These ranged, simple changes to the appearance of the town centre to much larger projects involving refurbishment of buildings. One of the biggest barriers identified by respondents was accessibility to the town. A variety of accessibility challenges were identified, including congestion, roadworks, parking and disabled access.

5.3.1 Accessibility

Accessibility to the town was commonly mentioned in the consultation, with some respondents stating they are dissatisfied with the current levels of accessibility to the town (28 comments). Respondents had different views on what constituted "accessibility" with some feeling as though it is more associated with getting into and about the town, whereas others focused more on disabled access.

Parking was the most frequently occurring accessibility concern among respondents. Respondents felt that multiple parking-related factors prevent those travelling by car from accessing the town centre easily, particularly due to the price. The most frequent comments discussed parking prices. Respondents wanted free parking (40 comments) or cheaper pricing (29 comments) implemented, as the parking is too "expensive" (12 comments).

Some respondents suggest less extreme measures than making all parking free, such as introducing limited time free parking (12 comments). There was also an association between limited time free parking and wanting to be in town a short amount of time, thus avoiding "expensive" charges.

Parking quantity was mentioned on a few occasions (15 comments). Any comments about parking quantity seemed to be involved in another theme regarding overall provision for a perceived growing population in Ashford. A few respondents stated that due to an increase in the number of residents (4 comments) in the borough, local infrastructure (schools, roads, hospitals) cannot accommodate this increase (10 comments), and parking was sometimes counted under this infrastructure. However, some felt extra parking provision should not be prioritised over improvement of other infrastructure, in particular disabled parking provision (6 comments).

Aside from parking, respondents said they have experienced accessibility difficulties when using bus services around the borough. Some respondents were dissatisfied with public transport due to changes to bus routes and times, and the abolishment of the ‘Little and Often’ buses.

Respondents stated they want bus services ‘improved,’ particularly with regards to the restoration of old routes (11 comments) and the ‘Little and Often’ buses being brought back (7 comments). 33 comments were left to request improvements to public transport as a whole.

The bus services were suggested to be hindering connectivity between villages and the town centre, because of the difficulty in accessing public transport as a result of changes to times, routes and schemes. A few respondents perceived Ashford as being “too spread out (11 comments),” meaning public transport is essential for rural communities. As a result, some respondents particularly those further from the town who cannot drive, may find it challenging to come into town.

Ensuring access for the disabled was prioritised by some respondents (26 comments). For example, several respondents mentioned that the cobbles on the lower high street are an issue for anyone with physical disabilities or children in pushchairs as these are painful to traverse (7 comments). Similarly, wheelchair-users face difficultly in some shops due to the lack of suitable facilities to help them get onto different floors. A suggested solution to this was to have more ramps, or ramps in the place of stairs for all buildings.

A number of comments about accessibility mentioned the roadworks (2 comments) and the number of traffic lights, stating that they need to be changed or taken away entirely (8 comments). Respondents feel that accessibility to the town requires improvement, with particular regards to congestion and traffic, suggesting it is a major barrier to accessing the town (21 comments), whether it’s for visitors, shoppers or people going to work.

Accessibility Issues raised	No. of mentions	Quotes from Respondents:
Free parking	40	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Free parking in the afternoons & at weekends to encourage people to come into town plus promotions from town centre businesses” Resident, aged 48, Downs West• “Free parking. Somewhere you can park free, near town for an hour, so you can pop in if you need to return something or only. Need to pop to one place. Parking fees are extortionate” Resident, aged 38
Improve public transport	33	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Improve bus services from villages, or have a special bus once a week for people to visit the town at a sensible time. Much like the free buses that supermarkets provide but this would be a paid for.” Works in Ashford, aged 65
Cheaper parking	29	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Make car parking cheaper to encourage more people into town” Resident, Weald East
Dissatisfaction with Accessibility	28	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “...Car parking can be an accessibility issue for everyone. Those from outside the area still say they don’t come to Ashford because they can’t find their way to a car park. Needs to be looked at holistically. Signage needs to be bolder.” Resident, aged 75, Godinton

Ensure accessible to disabled	26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Ensure there are things for all and paths accessible for all. Not just wheelchairs but others with disabilities such as autism or mental health issues.”
Traffic is a problem/barrier	21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “By not building villages tacked onto the outskirts, condemning future generations to a life of gridlocked roads, over-stretched GP surgeries and ER waiting times measured in days, not hours” Resident, aged 45, Saxon Shore
More parking	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “We do NOT need more housing with inadequate parking provision” Resident, Stour
Improve accessibility	14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Stop doing roadworks! The place is far from accessible when it takes an hour to get from one side to the other.” Resident, aged 28
Dissatisfaction with parking price	14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “At the moment the parking is extortionate and I avoid coming into the town” Resident, aged 48
Improve cycle routes	13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Improve pedestrian and cycling facilities along main accesses.” Works in Ashford, aged 26 “More cycle-paths that actually go in and around the town centre - the current ones are great (a big thumbs up), but they all bypass the town.” Resident, aged 32, Great Chart with Singleton North
Pedestrianise the town	13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Safer walk-ways for pedestrians, walking routes that are attractive so to encourage fewer car users” Resident, aged 42, Aylesford Green “There should be a car-free zone, where people can walk freely.” Resident, aged 40, Beaver

Table 4: The top accessibility topics discussed by respondents, with example quotes. The full table of issues raised can be found in Appendix 3.

5.3.2 General Improvements

General improvements were also suggested by many respondents, with 309 comments, however a large portion (75 comments) related to cleanliness of the town centre. Some respondents were dissatisfied with the current cleanliness of the town centre (10 comments), and a few were satisfied (3 comments), but most comments encouraged upkeep of current cleanliness.

A more simple improvement was the introduction of more seating. 9 comments suggested more seating and benches in the town, and 13 comments suggested outdoor seating at cafés and restaurants. These respondents felt that outdoor seating will appear more social and “European” and improve the general “feel” of the high street.

Another suggestion for simple improvements was to have more lighting (14 comments) and improved signage (7 comments) in the town. Lighting was suggested more for safety reasons due to a perceived high volume of crime, but also for decoration. Respondents sometimes stated that

the signage in and around Ashford is insufficient, and is required to help visitors navigate their way here, and to help with navigation whilst actually in the town.

Issues raised/suggestions	No. of mentions	Quotes from Respondents
Cleanliness	75	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Well managed cleaning service keeping areas clean and tidy" Resident, aged 59 • "Keep the streets clean and tidy!" Resident, aged 43, Downs North
Mecca bingo (retain and use it)	41	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Keeping the Mecca Bingo building and using it for community events, or to hire out (at a reasonable fee), would encourage locals to come into the town centre day and night." Resident, aged 55, Victoria
Better lighting	14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Improve the lighting in Bank Street, it is the main route to the centre of town" Resident, aged 59, Beaver • "Introduce better lighting at night and security patrols to make all ages feel safer" Resident, age 61, from Saxon Shore
Outdoor seating at cafes and restaurants	13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "...pavement cafe seating to create a Parisian feel." Resident, aged 50, Park Farm
Concerns about council services	13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Spend council tax payers money wisely (not on fancy street lights or cobbled/block paves streets that then get ripped to pieces by contractors and pasted back together with tarmac)" Residents, aged 75, Godinton
Refurbish buildings	11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The houses near the old college need to be refurbished, they are part of history of Ashford as is the market, the original was great" Resident, aged 61
Decorate/maintain shop fronts	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Try to make disused shop fronts appealing. Colourful and not just boarded up" Resident, aged 67, Bockhanger
Improved/clearer signage	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "A large and ornate 'welcome to Ashford' sign at several points on the way into town" Resident, aged 40 • "Accessible - make shops disabled-friendly, have signs in multiple languages" Resident, aged 42, Norman
More benches and seating	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "More benches and seating in nice outdoors spaces" Works in Ashford • "I have elderly friends and relatives who often find the benches they used to sit and rest on are occupied, so maybe more outdoor seating is required." Resident, aged 45

Table 4: The table shows the top 10 general improvements suggested by respondents of the survey, along with example quotes from respondents. The full table of issues raised can be found in appendix 3.

5.3.3 Perceptions of crime and anti-social behaviour

Further to the general improvements suggested by respondents, more complicated topics arose in the consultation, particularly to do with crime and safety. One of the most common responses throughout the consultation was regarding levels of crime and anti-social behaviour.

Some respondents stated they feel Ashford is not safe (14 comments). Crimes that respondents listed more commonly fall under anti-social behaviour crimes, such as vandalism and theft (16 comments). Respondents often reported that they do not feel safe in the town, and attribute this feeling of low safety to a number of different factors, most notably the perceived low enforcement from police officers and PCSOs, as well as poor lighting in locations such as Victoria Park and various car parks, and a perceived lack of security cameras.

A few respondents also perceived younger groups to be responsible for crime, in particular attributing ASB crimes to young adults and teenagers. These respondents stated that younger people have not got enough to do in the town. Respondents were favourable of schemes like Sk8side as they feel this gives this age group an opportunity to socialise and reduces potential criminal activity.

As a result of these factors, more enforcement – most commonly suggested in the form of policing – was suggested (43 comments), and more safety (39 comments) was requested by some.

Issues raised	No. of mentions	Quotes from Respondents
More enforcement/security/policing needed (general)	43	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Ensuring everyone feels safe, police or PCSO presence” Resident, aged 32, Stanhope
More safety needed	39	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Work with the police to reduce the town centre's un-savoury atmosphere at night - most perceived rather than real - of drunks, druggies and violence.” Resident, aged 67, Stour
ASB is a problem in Ashford	16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Ensure there is adequate policing to discourage anti-social behaviour and make the place feel safe for all” Works in Ashford, age 65
“Ashford is not safe”	14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Have police to patrol Ashford at night. Making it feel safer for people.” Resident, aged 70
Council should help the homeless more	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “...provide all homeless people with shelter not just in the winter” Resident, aged 51, Godinton “Clean up the streets and help the homeless more than is done now.” Resident, aged 62
Ashford has a problem with drunks/street drinking	11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Crack down on antisocial behaviour, such a littering , drug taking and excessive drinking” Resident, aged 61, Highfield
Concern about the number of homeless	11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “...try and assist with homeless people. I have noticed Ashford have a lot more homeless people now I live and work in the town centre” Resident, aged 22, Godinton

Table 5: The top issues raised related to perceptions of crime, with example quotes from respondents. The full table of issues raised can be found in appendix 3.

Creating a community and a town to be proud of



5.4 Creating a community and a town to be proud of



5.4.1 Creating a Community

An important aspect of living in Ashford according to some respondents was the sense of community. A number of respondents stated they wanted to have more opportunities to socialise (21 comments), perhaps by having dedicated spaces such as shops, cafes and community centres, and that the council should encourage socialising (17 comments). Also important was the introduction of more “community” events and projects, such as those like Create festival (12 comments). Respondents stated that these events promote a greater sense of belonging, as well as providing opportunities to socialise.

One common suggestion was a community hub or flexible, multi-use space (28 comments), where residents and visitors could gather and engage in a variety of activities. These comments suggested that having a community hub in town would provide more socialising opportunities. The Mecca Bingo site was mentioned as a potential location for the hub (5 comments).

Vitally, community events and spaces to socialise must also be inclusive of all people (31 comments). As well as this, it was often commented that they would like to see certain groups included in events more than they are currently, including:

- “Young” people (3 comments);
- “Old people” (1 comment)
- People with disabilities (5 comments);
- Members of the LGBT+ community (2 comments), and;
- Pet owners (2 comments)

However, in order for these community events and spaces to be utilised effectively by the public, information regarding them must be communicated clearly, and the council plays a vital role in this. Mostly, respondents would like more promotion of events and facilities (23 comments). 11 comments indicated that some respondents also want to see more engagement from the council

with residents and various groups within the borough. Some respondents also want to see a greater use of social media for both advertising and engagement (11 comments).

A few respondents stated that they wanted communities to be connected together. There was a perception that development occurs away from the town centre, and that the rest of the borough's residential areas are spread out, thus partially contributing to a lower sense of community. These respondents suggested that by connecting the communities together through events and projects, it will create a "stronger, single community."

5.4.2 Civic Pride

Pride in the local area was also mentioned in the consultation; some respondents said they are already proud of Ashford town centre (6 comments). A notable area of satisfaction was with environmental elements of the town and surrounding area, including green spaces (8 comments) and the planters/flowerbeds in the town centre (9 comments). A few respondents want to see more green spaces (11 comments), planters and flowerbeds (12 comments), and trees planted (7 comments). These respondents stated that green areas create a relaxing and pleasant atmosphere and commented that they are satisfied with current provision as well.

A few respondents also wanted to protect the environment; 4 comments related to decreasing pollution (particularly on the ring-road) and 6 comments state that the council should not build new developments (e.g. houses) on green spaces.

In relation to housing there was some opposition; most were opposed to more being built (23 comments) whereas some were keen to have more housing (12 comments), particularly if it is affordable (5 comments). Further to the opposition for building houses on green spaces (6 comments), some respondents were also opposed to housing development in the town centre (6 comments), due to constraints such as spaces to build, as well as the belief that town centres should be a community space rather than for accommodation.

Respondents also identified potential barriers to civic pride. A few respondents indicated that they believe Ashford has a negative reputation (6 comments), due to a number of factors such as the current look of town centre buildings, and perceived levels of crime. Another barrier was perceptions about the quality of builds around Ashford. 19 comments related to buildings and developments looking "dirty" or "neglected," with some respondents urging the council to do something to refurbish these builds (11 comments). Similarly, respondents suggested shop fronts be "decorated" and "maintained" in order to improve their appearance, particularly vacant units (10 comments).

Further barriers to pride included concern for the welfare of others; some respondents are concerned about the number of homeless people in the town centre (11 comments), which results in lower pride in the town as well as partially contributing to feelings of low safety. 12 comments related to respondents wanting the council to help the homeless more than is currently done, such as by providing shelter.

Potential Barriers to Civic Pride	No. of Mentions
Perceived level of crime	30
Housing and over-development	27
Appearance of the town centre	19
Homelessness	11
Destruction of green space	6

Negative reputation	6
Lack of heritage/lack of celebrating heritage	5
Lack of Culture	2

Table 6: Examples of identified barriers to pride in the town, with the number of mentions and example quotes from respondents.

Additionally, a potential barrier to pride is culture. A small number of respondents perceived there to be a lack of culture in the town (2 comments), and suggest ways of introducing more culture into the town, resulting in increased pride in the local area. One idea for cultural activities is to encourage art - 39 comments were left regarding 'arts' or galleries being brought to the town. The comments also clarified what kinds of art they would like to see. This includes art galleries, art installations and spaces for art enthusiasts. There were also comments on promoting locally produced art as opposed to well-known or commissioned artists. Further, respondents suggested encouraging children and young people to be involved in art, as it is believed this will grant some 'ownership' of the town, and will also contribute to the town's identity and local pride.

Celebrating the heritage of Ashford is also mentioned in the consultation. There were comments stating that Ashford's history should be promoted (5 comments), while a few respondents felt that heritage has been lost (5 comments). Respondents had various ideas about what constitutes the heritage of the town, including the markets and the train station. One respondent commented they would like the Mecca Building preserved for heritage purposes. There was a contrast between respondents who wanted to bring in new developments and a modern 'feel' and keeping older buildings and preserving heritage.

Changes to markets were also a common suggestion. Some residents believed Ashford's heritage is as a market town (10 comments) and wanted to see markets brought back to the town (12 comments). A few residents were dissatisfied with the current market (6 comments), but want to see it improved, perhaps through an indoor market (7 comments).

Museums were also a popular suggestion, with 11 comments referring to a desire for more museums in Ashford as well as refurbishing (1 comment), celebrating (1 comment), and expanding (1 comment) the current Ashford Museum.

Conclusion and additional supporting evidence



6.0 Additional supporting evidence

6.1 Residents' Survey

Through March and April 2018, Ashford Borough Council conducted the Residents' Survey 2018. The survey assessed the opinions and priorities of residents on topics such as council services, priorities for the future and the town centre.

Research from the 2018 Residents' Survey provides useful insight into how well regarded the town centre is by local people, what draws different groups to the town centre and how frequently they visit. Overall the survey found middling levels of satisfaction with the town as a place to shop and lower levels of satisfaction with Ashford town centre as a place to visit and as a place to go out. Those living in Ashford town itself generally held the town's offer in higher regard than those living in rural areas.

Residents were asked how satisfied they are with Ashford town centre as a **place to shop** - whilst 40% said that they are very/fairly satisfied, 41% said that they are dissatisfied to some extent. There were lower levels of satisfaction with Ashford town centre as a **place to visit** with 25% being very/fairly satisfied but 50% of residents saying that they are dissatisfied to some extent. There were similar levels of satisfaction with the town as a **place to go out** with 22% of residents being very/fairly satisfied compared with 56% of residents being dissatisfied to some extent.

The residents' survey also asked how frequently residents visit key locations in the town centre. The survey found that over half of residents visit Park Mall shopping centre at least once a month or more often. Those living in Ashford tend to use it the most frequently (a third of Ashford town residents visit once a week or more) this compares with just 8% of rural residents using the town centre as frequently. This is also true of visits to County Square shopping centre where 41% of residents living in Ashford town visit once a week or more, compared with only 9% from rural areas.

When it comes to eating out during the daytime, 11% of Ashford town centre residents eat out at least once a week compared with only 2% of residents from rural areas. The survey also found that only 8% of Ashford town residents and 1% of rural residents eat and socialise in the evenings in the town centre.

The full results of the Residents' Survey can be found here:

<https://ashford.gov.uk/transparency/the-transparency-code/residents-survey-2018/>

6.2 Town Centre Conference

The council hosted a conference on 2 October 2018 as part of the Town Centre Consultation workstream, during which Dr Steve Millington of the Institute of Place Management ran a workshop in which attendees could take part in identifying some of the potential barriers to progress of the town. Many groups identified some similar things to those identified in the consultation. The main barriers identified were *Networks and Partnerships*, which includes relations with the county authority and with the public, *Place Marketing*, related to Ashford's branding, reputation, and how the brand is communicated, *Crime and Safety*, related to issues around perceptions of the aforementioned and finally, *Entertainment and Leisure*, centred on the constraints of the current leisure and entertainment offer.

From the analysis of the results of the workshop, it was recommended that Ashford:

- *Restructuring*: To restructure governance structures and also physical structuring, requiring co-operation with stakeholders and creating strategic networks and public-private relationships
- *Rebranding*: Focus on the application of branding, marketing communications and public relations techniques to establish a consistent place identity
- *Reinventing*: Encourage diverse leisure/recreational activities to improve perception, and monitor changes in footfall
- *Repositioning*: Consider repositioning itself as more than a retail destination, such as by focusing on becoming a “modern market town”.

To read Dr Steve Millington’s research into placemaking, please follow this link:

<http://placemanagement.org/research-projects/>

7.0 Conclusions



The consultation provided residents, visitors and businesses with an opportunity to have their say about how to improve the offer and feel of the town centre, as well as voice their concerns about issues affecting the town. The suggestions made by respondents can be condensed into 3 main headings, as seen in the diagram above. The findings from this consultation will be used to inform future policy and the Town Centre Framework which will set out the future ambitions for Ashford Town Centre.

Appendix



8.0 Appendix

8.1 Appendix 1 – Questionnaire (paper copy)

Q1. How do we create a buzz about Ashford, how we make it stand out from the crowd?

Q2. How do we sustain a thriving, fun, destination in the daytime and at night?

Q3. How do we create a place that is welcoming and accessible to all?

Q4. How can we make Ashford a place we are proud to call home?

Q5. Which one of the following best describes you: Please tick one of the following.

- I am a resident (please provide postcode)..... Age.....
 - I am visiting Ashford (please provide postcode)..... Age.....
 - I study in Ashford Age
 - I work in Ashford Age
 - I am responding on behalf of an organisation/business
- Name of organisation/business

Please tell us your ideas at: www.ashford.gov.uk/towncentre

Or return to the Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, TN23 1PL

Thank you for taking part.

All information that you give us will be treated in the strictest confidence and will be stored securely by Ashford Borough Council (ABC). The information you will provide will only be used for analysis purposes to help us understand the views of people by different locations and demographic groups. ABC is the data controller for the information you provide in this form. Your information will be used to improve the services offered by ABC and for other research purposes, relying upon the public interest legal basis. ABC's Data Protection Officer can be contacted at FOI@ashford.gov.uk should you have any questions about how your data is handled.

Ashford is changing



High streets up and down the country are facing challenging times with the increase in online shopping and the need to offer something beyond just a shopping experience. Here in Ashford we know residents want more from their town centre and the good news is there are many changes taking place or in the pipeline.

Our ambition is to build on Ashford's heritage as a market town, one that makes the most of its unique location, international connections and strong community spirit – a modern market town.

**But it's not just about pretty words
and grand visions – it's about action.**

**We'd like YOUR ideas and views on how we improve
Ashford town centre. Please fill in the form overleaf.**

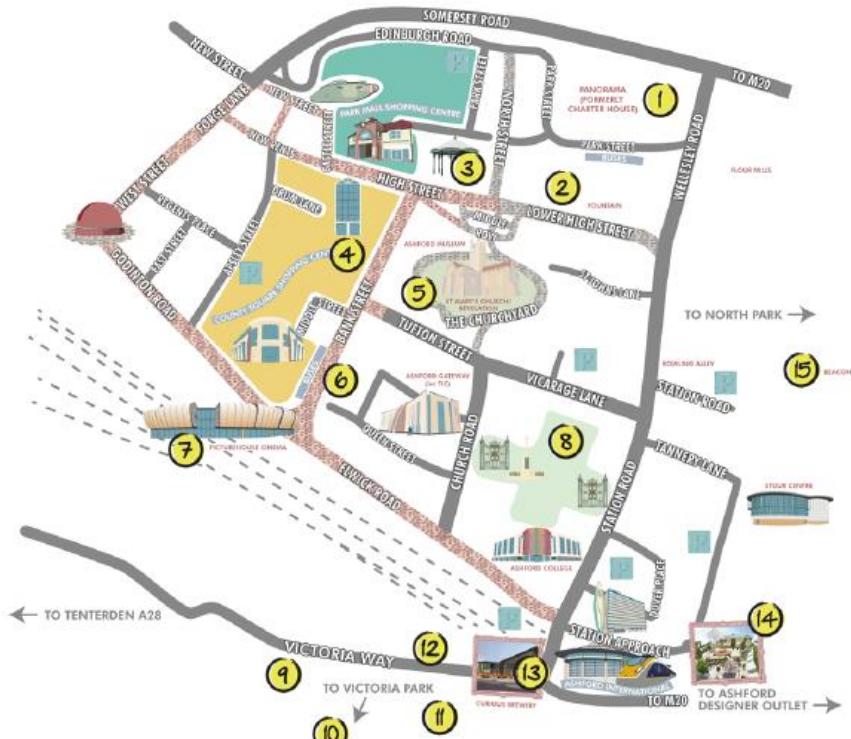
Or tell us your ideas at: www.ashford.gov.uk/towncentre



8.2 Appendix 2 – Town Centre Maps

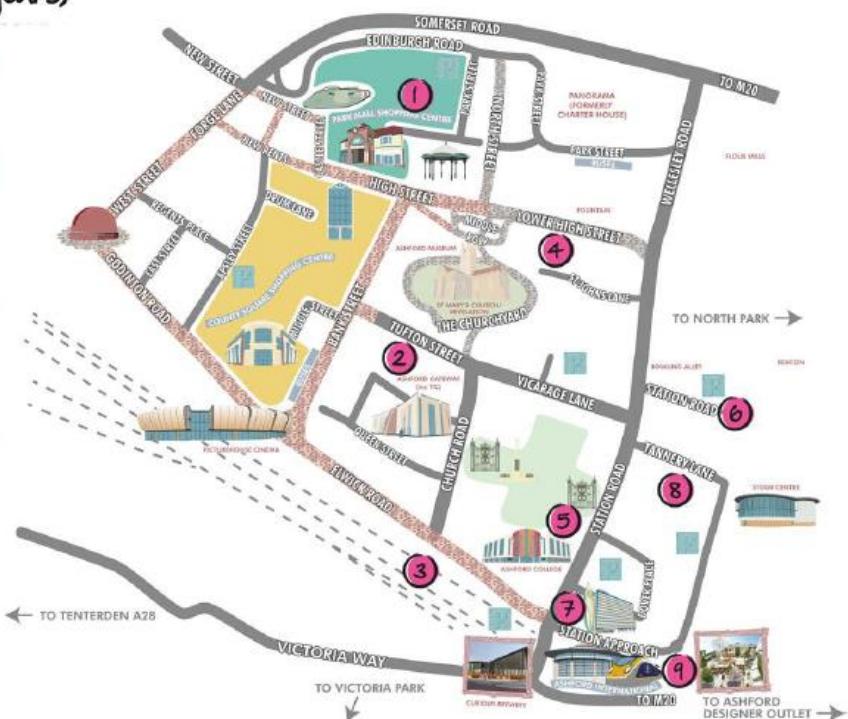
What's happening now (this year)

- 1 Next to Panorama Two additional blocks of apartments - construction underway
- 2 Market (weekly) & Farmers Market (monthly)
- 3 Programme of music on the Bandstand
- 4 Christmas Creative Fair Day 17th November 2018
- 5 Programme of shows and productions at Ravelston St. Mary's
- 6 Snowdrops Discover Ashford Autumn 2018
- 7 Picturehouse Cinema 900 seats & screen cinema 7 restaurants / cafes 58 bed Travelodge hotel 280 new parking spaces Queen Victoria Statue Opening 2018
- 8 Fields of Battle Lands of Peace Exhibition throughout June in the Memorial Gardens
- 9 Riverside Park 660 homes - construction underway
- 10 Create Festival 21st July 2018 - Victoria Park HLF Bill
- 11 Victoria Point 216 apartments 120 bed hotel 3 retail units
- 12 Aldi Food Store Opening 2018
- 13 Curious Brewery Brewery and pub/restaurant Opening 2018
- 14 Designer Outlet Expansion Additional 100,000 sq ft 38 new leisure brands 6 restaurants Opening 2019
- 15 Civic Beacon Lighting of the new civic beacon and poppy tribute in North Park



What's coming soon (within the next 3 years)

- 1 Park Mall Ongoing refurbishment and management
- 2 Police Station being retrained and refurbished
- 3 Elwick Place phase 2 Residential development of up to 200 homes
- 4 Former Mecca building Vicarage Lane car park We are currently looking at future options for this site
- 5 Ashford College phase 1a 2,500m² sustainable technology block, providing engineering, motor vehicle and plumbing and electrical courses
- 6 Station Road multi-storey car park We are currently considering the viability of building and operating a multi-storey car park on this site
- 7 The Coachworks A mixed-use business/retail space that could include a new social and cultural meeting place with a performance area, bars and restaurants
- 8 Former Kent Wool Growers site A mixed-use site including new homes, public realm, riverside walkway and to bring Mill House (a Grade II listed building) back into use
- 9 Pedestrian under path between the station and Designer Outlet



What we would like to see in the future



Here's a few ideas to get you started but we really would like to hear your ideas.

Redevelopment of Park Mall shopping centre

Public art piece that becomes a national attraction

Children's play space (indoor soft play area)

Pedestrianisation of the lower high street

New public realm scheme in the upper high street

Refurbishment or redevelopment of the Stour Centre (dry side)

Digital town/Smart City – access info and services via an app

Next phase of the Commercial Quarter office development

Cycling and walking routes which start and finish in the town centre

Redevelopment of the station forecourt

Lighting to animate buildings and spaces at night

Bring a little bit of Disneyland Paris to the station/town

Outdoor flexible performance space

Open up the green spaces and animate them

Ashford College – phase 2 (higher education provision)

Venue to host international events and conferences

Tell us your ideas for the future



8.3 Appendix 3 – Full analysis tables

Entertainment

Entertainment, Leisure and Culture issues raised	No. of mentions
Theatre	159
Restaurants	71
Live music and performances	66
Events/activities	58
Bars	52
Entertainment	44
Art (galleries, museums, exhibitions, investment)	39
Ice Rink	31
Activities/spaces for young people	31
Community hub/flexible space	28
Festivals/fairs	22
Cafes	21
Sports (table tennis, fitness groups etc)	20
Softplay/children's indoor play areas	19
Dissatisfaction with nightlife offer	19
Street performances (e.g. at the Bandstand)	17
Clubs	17
Culture	14
Pubs	13
Splash park	13
Dissatisfaction with current projects	13
Entertainment (night)	11
Comedy	11
Christmas	11
Dissatisfaction with leisure offer	10
Pop-up stands	9
Leisure	7
Water park	6
Cultural hub	5
Science (e.g. museums)	5
Outdoor cinema	5
Snow centre	5
Aquarium	4
Hire bike	4
New bingo hall/more bingo	4
Ballroom	4
Drones	4
Carnival	3
Play parks	2
Casino	2
Artificial beach	2
Theme events	2
Pantomime	2

Revelation	2
No culture	2
Dissatisfaction with Revelation as a theatre	2
Parks (general)	1
Outdoor pool	1
Lightshows	1
Star gazing	1
Cinema	1
Club (16+)	1
Crazy golf	1
Food court	1
Adult activities (e.g. parks designed for adults)	1
Bowling	1
Cinema	1
Laser tag	1
Go karting	1
Boxing events	1
Conventions	1
Darts comps	1
More Snowdogs	1
Another swimming centre	1
Outdoor exercise machines	1
Roller rink	1
Theme park	1

Accessibility

Accessibility issues mentioned	No. of mentions
Free parking	40
Improve public transport	33
Cheaper parking	29
Ensure accessible to disabled	26
Traffic is a problem/barrier	21
More parking	15
Improve accessibility	14
Improve cycle routes	13
Pedestrianise the town	13
Limited time free parking	12
Parking is too expensive	12
Less traffic	11
More bus routes	11
Park and ride (disfavour for)	11
Dissatisfaction with shared space	11
Favour of international rail links	10
Improve roads	9
Easier accessibility needed	9
Better parking	9
Utilise the train station	8

Improve/change the traffic lights	8
Better paths	8
More buses	8
Little and often buses	7
Cobblestones and LHS paving	7
Accessible to all	6
Connect outlet to the town	6
Bus station	6
More disabled spaces	6
Accessibility is good already	6
Accessibility is a barrier	5
Park and ride (favour for)	5
Public transport to operate later	5
Parking is a barrier	4
Improve transport links	4
Keep the roads open	4
Cheaper public transport	4
Walking routes	4
Underground parking	3
Less parking	3
Tram system	3
Parent-child parking	3
Monorail	2
Ensure accessibility for pushchairs	2
More on street parking	2
Extend/improve shared space	2
Ensure safety for pedestrians	2
Wider paths	2
Link the station to town better	2
Cycle storage	2
Too many roadworks	2
Cheaper parking elsewhere	2
No pedestrianisation	1
Parking space size	1
Build a real ring road	1
Car parks open later	1
Ensure accessibility for older people	1
Easier to park	1
Bigger taxi rank	1
Don't build in the ring road	1
Parking charges enforced for too long	1
Get rid of NCP	1
Railway halt	1
Parking shouldn't be allowed outside Royal mail	1
East hill pavement	1
Crossing at Stour centre	1
No left turn on LHS	1

Parking policy should change	1
Too many taxi spaces	1
More cycle routes	1
Improve access to parks	1
Cable car	1

Perceptions about Ashford Town

Perceptions about Ashford Town	No. of mentions
More enforcement/security/policing needed (general)	43
More safety	39
High volume of vacant shops	23
Rents are too high/should be lowered	22
ASB is a problem in Ashford	16
Dissatisfaction with ASB and safety	15
Ashford is not safe	14
Council should help the homeless more	12
The town/villages are too spread out	11
Ashford has a problem with drunks/street drinking	11
Homeless problem	11
Decrease crime	11
CCTV	10
Limited resources/infrastructure	10
Young people cause ASB	7
More enforcement/security/policing needed (at night)	6
Council doesn't listen	6
Council wastes money	6
Ashford has a reputation	6
"The town is intimidating"	5
Council is about making money (and that's bad)	5
Ashford has problems with drugs	4
Increasing population	4
Development is not in, but away from, the town	4
Ashford is too big/busy already	3
Council doesn't care	3
Problems with vandalism	2
Shops are moving/are located out of town	2
High ASB is just perceived	2
Council doesn't act	2
Make men wear shirts in the summer	2
Housing increasing	2
Out of town developments undermine town centre	2
Lower business start-up costs	2
Increased population means more ASB!	1
Fine businesses linked to ASB	1
High street needs to shrink	1
Too noisy	1
Crowd funded police	1

Truancy officer	1
Large companies don't care	1
Council doesn't support local business	1
Residential areas should be spacious	1
Youth dominate the town centre	1
Council has no plan	1
Council suppresses culture	1
Ashford is a "clone town"	1

General Improvements

General Improvements	No. of mentions
Cleanliness and general maintenance	75
Mecca bingo (use it)	28
Refurbish buildings	19
Better lighting	14
Outdoor seating at cafes and restaurants	13
Concerns about council services	13
Decorate/maintain shop fronts	11
Refurbish buildings	10
Improved/clearer signage	9
More benches and seating	9
Clear/improved/signage	7
More lighting	6
Booklets/information points/leaflets	6
More signage	5
Quarters	5
Public toilets	5
Dissatisfaction with certain locations	5
Build a University	4
Keep shops open later	4
More bins	4
Build bigger/taller buildings	3
"Modernisation"	3
CCTV	3
Employment	3
More infrastructure (hospitals etc)	3
Clean up grafitti	3
Build studios	2
Town maps	2
General TLC/upgrade	2
Invest in town	2
Mecca bingo (demolish it)	2
Lycee Francais School	2
Charity events/volunteer events	2
Hire consultants	1
Bring services (Uber, Deliveroo, Amazon etc.)	1
Fibre optic service	1

"Reinvigorate"	1
Convert buildings	1
Covered walkways	1
Public Wifi	1
Move facilities (e.g. care homes)	1
Smoking areas	1
Revamp North Park	1
Digital/maps	1
Clean river	1
Schools	1
New builds should be good quality	1
Demolish builds (e.g. Park Mall)	1
No modernisation!	1
The dome	1
Improve railings	1
Showcase the Tank	1
Improve post office	1
No Smoking enforced	1
Rename North Park	1
"Little town"	1
Relocate TIC	1
Extend opening hours of TIC	1
Digital hub	1

Business and Retail

Business and Retail topics	No. of mentions
Dissatisfaction with current offer	48
Independent shops	46
Primark	29
Quality shops	25
Big name brands	23
More shops	20
Variety shops/leisure	19
Local business	14
Reduce rent	11
Attract business	8
Tidy fronts	5
Walk-in health service	5
Shops open later/on Sundays	3
Good brands	2
Outlet	2
Companies involved in events	2
More business	2
Control which shops are allowed to open	2
More funding	1
Modern shops	1
More leisure	1

Connect shops	1
New shopping centre	1
Up to business where they open	1
No independent shops!	1
Bring back past business	1
Business Hub	1
No more shops!	1

Experiences

Types of experience suggested	No. of mentions
Variety	30
Different/unique	27
Quality/better experiences	20
More to do/quantity	19
Welcoming	15
Interesting, fun and quirky	14
Create a positive atmosphere	13
Identity	9
Better appearances/more attractive	8
Stimulating and lively	6
Exciting	4
No appeal, negative atmosphere	4
Busy	3
Relaxing	2
Characterful	2
Cultural experiences	1
Modern and vibrant	1

Target Groups

Groups mentioned	No. of mentions
More for children	44
More for families	34
Inclusive of all	31
More for "young"	22
Bring in tourists	17
More for teens	14
More for adults	10
More for all	10
Involve kids in projects	10
Inclusive of families	8
Focus on locals	7
"enough for families already"	6
Bring in more families	6
More for old	5
Inclusive of the disabled	5
More for tourists	4

More for both young and old	4
More for the disabled	3
Inclusive of young	3
"There's nothing for older people!"	3
More for creative people	2
Inclusive of pet owners	2
Focus on families	2
Inclusive of old	1
Good for young and old	1
Bring in more children	1
Focus on specific ages	1
Nothing for teens	1
"Create a focus group"	1
Appeal to wealthy people	1
"Younger people should be on the town council"	1
Young entrepreneurs	1
Bring in students	1
More for women	1
Can't be everything to everyone	1

Comparisons to Neighbouring Towns

Towns or locations compared to	No. of mentions
Canterbury	43
Maidstone	23
Folkestone	21
Faversham	5
Tenterden	5
London	5
Gillingham	4
Europe	4
Rye	3
Bluewater	3
"other towns	3
Yorkshire	2
Stratford (London)	2
Dorset	2
Broadstairs	2
Hythe	2
Bury St Edmunds	1
Belgium	1
Bromley	1
Louth	1
Hull	1
Liverpool	1
Spain	1
Chatham	1
Margate	1

Dover	1
Rochester	1
Herne bay	1
Tonbridge Wells	1
Oxford	1
Cambridge	1
Deal	1
Sandwich	1
Westward cross	1
Brighton	1
Totnes	1
Lewes	1
Stroud	1
West Malling	1
Tonbridge	1
Milan	1
Grantham	1

Heritage

Heritage issues raised	No. of mentions
Bring market back	12
New/more markets	12
More museums	11
Heritage is market town	10
Better market	8
Heritage is railway town	7
Indoor market	7
Market is low quality	6
Focus on history	6
Heritage is lost!	5
Promote history	5
Dissatisfaction with the current market (general comments)	5
Refurbish old builds	4
Railway museum	4
Dissatisfaction with tearing down old buildings	4
People don't know about heritage	3
Model railway	2
Invest in markets	2
Develop rail works	2
Contrast modern with old (CHECK)	2
Educate about heritage	1
Air museum	1
Festivals for heritage	1
No museums in ashford	1
Refurbish museums	1
Celebrate museums	1
More heritage	1

Promote markets	1
Famous Ashfordians	1
Permanent market	1
Market like before	1
Bigger market	1
Bigger museum	1
Evening market	1
French Brocante	1
Invest in museum	1
Market could be a USP	1

Unique Selling Point

Unique Selling Point	No. of mentions
Be different/unique	26
Create reasons to entice visitors	23
No one is attracted to the town	11
Designer Outlet is a USP	10
Designer centre takes custom away	7
Promote railway	3
Favour for the Outlet	3
Connect the town and Outlet	3
There is no USP	3
Disfavour for Outlet	2
Improved facilities offer as a USP	1
Music venues as a USP	1
Favour for railway	1

Housing

Housing issues raised	No. of mentions
Dissatisfaction with current level of housing	27
Less housing/no more housing	23
More housing	12
No housing on green spaces	6
No housing in the town centre	6
Cheap housing	5
"There's too much housing"	3
No housing without new infrastructure	3
Limit height of builds	2
"More housing means more crime"	1
No flats	1

Areas of Satisfaction

Areas of satisfaction	No. of mentions
Current Projects/Developments (Snowdogs, Elwick Place)	38

"Carry on with what you are doing"	22
Current facilities (e.g. library, memorial gardens)	6
Accessibility	6
Pride in the town	6
Environment (e.g. town planters, green space)	5
Cleanliness	3

Community and Socialising

Community and Socialising suggestions and issues	No. of mentions
More opportunities to socialise	21
Encourage community	17
Inclusive	14
More community events/projects	12
Connect communities	4
Pride	3
Sense of belonging	3
Feeling of ownership	2
Community art	2
Togetherness	2
No community	1
No current social opportunities	1
Happy residents	1
Look after the community (e.g. by discouraging litter)	1

Environmental Issues

Environmental issues raised	No. of mentions
More planters/flowerbeds	12
More green spaces	11
Satisfaction with planters/flowerbeds	9
Satisfied with green spaces	8
More trees	7
Create a green/eco-friendly town	5
More maintenance (e.g. trim trees/pathways)	5
Decrease pollution	4
Use the river more	4
Dissatisfaction with building on green space	4
Value the environment	4
Utilise solar panels/wind power	2
Protect environment	2
Get rid of planters/flowerbeds	1
Parks	1
Satisfaction with Aspire	1
Freecycle point	1
Conservation Advisory Committee	1

Communication with the Council

Communication Issues	No. of mentions
Advertise events/facilities more	23
Engage more with residents/various groups	11
Use of social media	11
Dissatisfaction with current advertisements	5
Revamping communication	2
Council should do more	2
Satisfaction with Love Ashford	1
No more apps!	1

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Equality Impact Assessment

1. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is a document that summarises how the council has had due regard to the public sector equality duty (Equality Act 2010) in its decision-making. Although there is no legal duty to produce an EIA, the Council must have **due regard** to the equality duty and an EIA is recognised as the best method of fulfilling that duty. It can assist the Council in making a judgment as to whether a policy or other decision will have unintended negative consequences for certain people and help maximise the positive impacts of policy change. An EIA can lead to one of four consequences:
 - (a) No major change – the policy or other decision is robust with no potential for discrimination or adverse impact. Opportunities to promote equality have been taken;
 - (b) Adjust the policy or decision to remove barriers or better promote equality as identified in the EIA;
 - (c) Continue the policy – if the EIA identifies potential for adverse impact, set out compelling justification for continuing;
 - (d) Stop and remove the policy where actual or potential unlawful discrimination is identified.

Public sector equality duty

2. The Equality Act 2010 places a duty on the council, when exercising public functions, to have due regard to the need to:
 - (a) Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
 - (b) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - (c) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it (ie tackling prejudice and promoting understanding between people from different groups).
3. These are known as the three aims of the general equality duty.

Protected characteristics

4. The Equality Act 2010 sets out nine protected characteristics for the purpose of the equality duty:
 - Age
 - Disability
 - Gender reassignment
 - Marriage and civil partnership*
 - Pregnancy and maternity
 - Race
 - Religion or belief
 - Sex
 - Sexual orientation

*For marriage and civil partnership, only the first aim of the duty applies in relation to employment.

Due regard

5. Having ‘due regard’ is about using good equality information and analysis at the right time as part of decision-making procedures.
6. To ‘have due regard’ means that in making decisions and in its other day-to-day activities the council must consciously consider the need to do the things set out in the general equality duty: eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations. This can involve:
 - removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.
 - taking steps to meet the needs of people with certain protected characteristics when these are different from the needs of other people.
 - encouraging people with certain protected characteristics to participate in public life or in other activities where it is disproportionately low.
7. How much regard is ‘due’ will depend on the circumstances. The greater the potential impact, the higher the regard required by the duty. Examples of functions and decisions likely to engage the duty include: policy decisions, budget decisions, public appointments, service provision, statutory discretion, decisions on individuals, employing staff and procurement of goods and services.
8. In terms of timing:
 - Having ‘due regard’ should be considered at the inception of any decision or proposed policy or service development or change.
 - Due regard should be considered throughout development of a decision. Notes shall be taken and kept on file as to how due regard has been had to the equality duty in research, meetings, project teams, consultations etc.
 - The completion of the EIA is a way of effectively summarising this and it should inform final decision-making.

Armed Forces Community

9. As part of the council’s commitment to the Armed Forces Community made through the signing of the Armed Forces Covenant the council’s Cabinet agreed in November 2017 that potential impacts on the Armed Forces Community should be considered as part of the Equality Impact Assessment process.
10. Accordingly, due regard should also be had throughout the decision making process to potential impacts on the groups covered by the Armed Forces Covenant:
 - Current serving members of the Armed Forces (both Regular and Reserve)
 - Former serving members of the Armed Forces (both Regular and Reserve)
 - The families of current and former Armed Forces personnel.

Case law principles

11. A number of principles have been established by the courts in relation to the equality duty and due regard:
 - Decision-makers in public authorities must be aware of their duty to have ‘due regard’ to the equality duty and so EIA’s must be attached to any relevant committee reports.
 - Due regard is fulfilled before and at the time a particular policy is under consideration as well as at the time a decision is taken. Due regard involves a conscious approach and state of mind.

- A public authority cannot satisfy the duty by justifying a decision after it has been taken.
- The duty must be exercised in substance, with rigour and with an open mind in such a way that it influences the final decision.
- The duty is a non-delegable one. The duty will always remain the responsibility of the public authority.
- The duty is a continuing one so that it needs to be considered not only when a policy, for example, is being developed and agreed but also when it is implemented.
- It is good practice for those exercising public functions to keep an accurate record showing that they have actually considered the general duty and pondered relevant questions. Proper record keeping encourages transparency and will discipline those carrying out the relevant function to undertake the duty conscientiously.
- A public authority will need to consider whether it has sufficient information to assess the effects of the policy, or the way a function is being carried out, on the aims set out in the general equality duty.
- A public authority cannot avoid complying with the duty by claiming that it does not have enough resources to do so.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission has produced helpful guidance on “Meeting the Equality Duty in Policy and Decision-Making” (October 2014). It is available on the following link and report authors should read and follow this when developing or reporting on proposals for policy or service development or change and other decisions likely to engage the equality duty. [Equality Duty in decision-making](#)

Lead officer:	Lorna Ford
Decision maker:	CABINET
Decision: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy, project, service, contract • Review, change, new, stop 	To note the findings of the town centre consultation To approve the framework for Ashford town centre.
Date of decision: The date when the final decision is made. The EIA must be complete before this point and inform the final decision.	14 March 2019
Summary of the proposed decision: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aims and objectives • Key actions • Expected outcomes • Who will be affected and how? • How many people will be affected? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To adopt a framework for Ashford town centre that sets out a vision and objectives to ensure the future vitality and prosperity of the town. This includes an action plan that sets out a programme of projects to be delivered in the short, medium and long term and aims to tackle some of the challenges to the town centre identified in the framework. • Key actions are set out in the action plan. • Expected outcomes are an increased footfall in the town, improved perceptions of Ashford and the local area and improved resident satisfaction and pride in Ashford town

	<p>centre, as well as increased feelings of ownership and influence over what happens to the town centre.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The framework aims to improve the offer of Ashford town centre and improve the experiences of those who live, work and visit Ashford.
Information and research: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outline the information and research that has informed the decision. Include sources and key findings. 	<p>The 2018 Residents' Survey has provided valuable insight into who is and who is not using Ashford Town Centre and why and how satisfied different groups are with their town centre.</p>
Consultation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What specific consultation has occurred on this decision? What were the results of the consultation? Did the consultation analysis reveal any difference in views across the protected characteristics? What conclusions can be drawn from the analysis on how the decision will affect people with different protected characteristics? 	<p>Extensive consultation on the future of Ashford Town Centre was undertaken between July to October 2018.</p> <p>There were a number of comments made that revealed specific issues relating to some protected characteristics including the LGBT community, people with mental and physical disabilities. The consultation highlighted difficulties experienced by those with disabilities accessing certain shops, public transport and the accessibility of the town centre in general. There were also comments about encouraging more inclusive festivals and events such as a LGBT "pride" festival.</p> <p>Respondents frequently mentioned promoting a more inclusive Ashford community. The proposed decision should impact positively on most protected characteristic groups, in particular age and disability groups, by providing more provision and easier access for these groups and an increased feeling of inclusivity. The proposed decision also aims to increase the involvement of groups with protected characteristics, and foster good relations between all sections of the community.</p> <p>The action plan includes the implementation of inclusive community led events, and a programme of commissioned events and activities. The overall aim of these events is to strengthen community cohesion and offer a diverse programme to appeal to all residents living in the borough.</p> <p>The framework also addresses current accessibility issues in the town such as uneven surfaces and cobbles in the lower High Street, which are reported to be difficult to traverse for older people, those with certain disabilities and parents with children in buggies and pushchairs. The resurfacing of these areas would result in a positive impact for these groups.</p>

Assess the relevance of the decision to people with different protected characteristics and assess the impact of the decision on people with different protected characteristics.

When assessing relevance and impact, make it clear who the assessment applies to within the protected characteristic category. For example, a decision may have high relevance for young people but low relevance for older people; it may have a positive impact on women but a neutral impact on men.

Protected characteristic	Relevance to Decision High/Medium/Low/None	Impact of Decision Positive (Major/Minor) Negative (Major/Minor) Neutral
<u>AGE</u> Elderly	MEDIUM	POSITIVE (Minor)
Middle age	MEDIUM	POSITIVE (Minor)
Young adult	MEDIUM	POSITIVE (Minor)
Children	MEDIUM	POSITIVE (Minor)
<u>DISABILITY</u> Physical	HIGH	POSTIVE (Minor)
Mental	MEDIUM	POSITVE (Minor)
Sensory	MEDIUM	POSITIVE (Minor)
<u>GENDER RE-ASSIGNMENT</u>	LOW	NEUTRAL
<u>MARRIAGE/CIVIL PARTNERSHIP</u>	NONE	NEUTRAL
<u>PREGNANCY/MATERNITY</u>	MEDIUM	POSITIVE (Minor)
<u>RACE</u>	MEDIUM	POSITVE (Minor)
<u>RELIGION OR BELIEF</u>	MEDIUM	POSITVE (Minor)
<u>SEX</u> Men	NONE	NEUTRAL
Women	NONE	NEUTRAL
<u>SEXUAL ORIENTATION</u>	MEDIUM	POSITIVE (Minor)
<u>ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY</u> Regular/Reserve personnel	LOW	POSITIVE (Minor)
Former service personnel	LOW	POSITIVE (Minor)
Service families	LOW	POSITIVE (Minor)

Mitigating negative impact: Where any negative impact has been identified, outline the measures taken to mitigate against it.	This programme ties together several existing projects which may have established negative impacts on certain protected characteristic groups. Impact assessments and negative impact mitigation have been completed for these existing projects. Individual projects within this programme will be subject to future EIAs.
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Is the decision relevant to the aims of the equality duty?

Guidance on the aims can be found in the EHRC's [Essential Guide](#), alongside fuller [PSED Technical Guidance](#).

Aim	Yes / No / N/A
1) Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation	N/A
2) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it	YES
3) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it	YES

Conclusion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider how due regard has been had to the equality duty, from start to finish. There should be no unlawful discrimination arising from the decision (see guidance above). Advise on whether the proposal meets the aims of the equality duty or whether adjustments have been made or need to be made or whether any residual impacts are justified. How will monitoring of the policy, procedure or decision and its implementation be undertaken and reported? 	<p>This decision gives consideration to the requirements outlined in the Equality Act 2010, in that the action plan in part aims to promote inclusivity through events and projects and encourage community cohesion.</p> <p>As far as officers are aware, there is no unlawful discrimination arising from the decision.</p> <p>The town centre framework aims to have a positive impact on all protected groups without discrimination.</p> <p>As the action plan is a programme of projects, schemes and activities, further individual EIAs will be conducted for projects within the framework that have not yet started.</p>
EIA completion date:	05.03.19

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