



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Notice of a Meeting, to be held in the Council Chamber - Ashford Borough Council on Tuesday, 23rd July, 2019 at 7.00 pm.

The Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are:-

Councillor Ovenden (Chairman)
Councillor Michael (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Burgess, Chilton, Farrell, Forest, Howard-Smith, Iliffe, Krause, Ledger, Link, Mulholland

Agenda

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DS

15 July 2019

Queries concerning this agenda? Please contact Member Services

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Agenda Item 2

Declarations of Interest (see also “Advice to Members” below)

- (a) **Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI)** under the Localism Act 2011, relating to items on this agenda. The nature as well as the existence of any such interest must be declared, and the agenda item(s) to which it relates must be stated.

A Member who declares a DPI in relation to any item will need to leave the meeting for that item (unless a relevant Dispensation has been granted).

- (b) **Other Significant Interests (OSI)** under the Kent Code of Conduct relating to items on this agenda. The nature as well as the existence of any such interest must be declared, and the agenda item(s) to which it relates must be stated.

A Member who declares an OSI in relation to any item will need to leave the meeting before the debate and vote on that item (unless a relevant Dispensation has been granted).

However, prior to leaving, the Member may address the Committee in the same way that a member of the public may do so.

- (c) **Voluntary Announcements of Other Interests** not required to be disclosed under (a) and (b), i.e. announcements made for transparency alone, such as:

- Membership of amenity societies, Town/Community/Parish Councils, residents' groups or other outside bodies that have expressed views or made representations, but the Member was not involved in compiling or making those views/representations, or
- Where a Member knows a person involved, but does not have a close association with that person, or
- Where an item would affect the well-being of a Member, relative, close associate, employer, etc. but not his/her financial position.

[Note: Where an item would be likely to affect the financial position of a Member, relative, close associate, employer, etc.; OR where an item is an application made by a Member, relative, close associate, employer, etc., there is likely to be an OSI or in some cases a DPI. ALSO, holding a committee position/office within an amenity society or other outside body, or having any involvement in compiling/making views/representations by such a body, may give rise to a perception of bias and require the Member to take no part in any motion or vote.]

Advice to Members on Declarations of Interest:

- (a) Government Guidance on DPI is available in DCLG's Guide for Councillors, at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5962/2193362.pdf
- (b) The Kent Code of Conduct was adopted by the Full Council on 19 July 2012, and a copy can be found in the Constitution alongside the Council's Good Practice Protocol for Councillors dealing with Planning Matters. See <https://www.ashford.gov.uk/media/2098/z-word5-democratic-services-constitution-2019-constitution-of-abc-may-2019-part-5.pdf>
- (c) Where a Member declares a committee position or office within, or membership of, an outside body that has expressed views or made representations, this will be taken as a statement that the Member was not involved in compiling or making them and has retained an open mind on the item(s) in question. If this is not the case, the situation must be explained.

If any Member has any doubt about any interest which he/she may have in any item on this agenda, he/she should seek advice from the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer, or from other Solicitors in Legal and Democracy as early as possible, and in advance of the Meeting.

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Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **25th June 2019**.

Present:

Cllr. Ovenden (Chairman);
Cllr. Michael (Vice-Chairman);

Cllrs. Burgess, Forest, Howard-Smith, Iliffe, Krause, Ledger, Mulholland, Ward.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2 (iii) Cllr Ward attended as Substitute Member for Cllr. Chilton.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Chilton, Farrell.

Also Present:

Cllrs. Campkin, Pickering, Wright.

Head of HR & Customer Services, Head of Corporate Policy, ED & Comms, Senior Policy & Scrutiny Officer, Member Services Officer.

53 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of this Committee held on the 26th March 2019 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

54 Annual Sickness Absence Report 2018/2019

The Portfolio Holder for HR & Customer Services introduced the report that provided annual information on sickness absenteeism for 2018/2019. He explained that although there had been an increase in total amount of days lost due to sickness, the picture was not all bad. Short-term sickness had actually decreased, which was a positive indication. Cases of Mental ill health (including stress) had almost halved, and the revised Sickness Policy had been reviewed and a draft was currently with Unison for their remarks.

The report was then opened up to the Committee and the following questions/points were raised:

- A Member asked whether any case of absence could be attributed to a shortage in personnel within the Council. The Head of HR & Customer Services explained that some cases of long-term absence were because of stress/pressure, but more of these were owing to non-work related pressure. Ashford took a robust and consistent approach to mental ill health, resulting in the reduction this year. Management Team were mindful of Officer capacity and had approved additional resources to assist with managing this.
- In response to a question from the Chairman asking for a comparison to National averages and trends, the Head of HR & Customer Services said that she would obtain this information and circulate to the Committee.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

55 Wye3 Masterplan Report

The Chairman confirmed that this item had been deferred, because there was not enough time before the Meeting for Officers to draw up a substantial report. A Task and Finish Group would be set up in order to review the Masterplan report and take statements from the Parish Council, Planning Department and the Developer and then bring back any recommendations to August's Overview & Scrutiny Committee Meeting. The Chairman asked for volunteers and advised that the Senior Policy & Scrutiny Officer would provide Members with provisional dates.

A Member asked if a conflict of interest would arise if he took part in the Task Group, as he sat on the Planning Committee. The Senior Policy & Scrutiny Officer advised that members on Planning may not want to volunteer for the Task Group, as it may result in their having to declare an interest at Planning Committee should it be required to determine any subsequent planning application arising from the area covered by the Wye3 Masterplan.

Resolved:

That Councillors Iliffe, Ledger, Michael, Mulholland and Ovenden would form the Task & Finish Group.

56 Annual Performance Report (including Quarter 4 Performance Report)

The Senior Policy & Scrutiny Officer introduced the report that was presented in a new format. He explained that the information collated came from a variety of sources across the Council, and any questions he was unable to answer at the meeting, he would follow up with Officers and report back to the Committee.

The report was then opened up to the Committee and the following questions/points were raised:

- A Member commented that the report contained very useful information and asked if it was intended for external parties. He noted that there was no reference to data relating to rental income from corporate assets. The Senior Policy & Scrutiny Officer explained that data concerning returns on investment had been included in the financial outturn report for 2018/19, which had been presented to the previous Cabinet. Further financial information would be included in the quarterly financial reports that were presented to Cabinet and the Budget Scrutiny Task Group would then have sight of rental income data when reviewing the draft budgets for the coming year. The Head of Corporate Policy, ED & Comms went on to say that, there would be some benefit in including some financial information, in order to provide a more rounded statement.
- In response to a question regarding the position of Credit Unions, The Senior Policy & Scrutiny Officer confirmed that the Council had issued a subordinated loan to Kent Savers of £10,000 in line with the recommendations of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee. This had enabled Kent Savers to expand their loan book and offer further services to residents of the Borough. A staff promotion with the Credit Union had just been launched in the form of a payroll deduction savings and loan scheme. In response to a question regarding the return of the loan, the Senior Policy and Scrutiny Officer advised that the Council had waived interest in issuing the loan and repayment was not expected or sought. As a subordinated debt, the loan would only be repaid to the Council following all other debts in the event of the Credit Union failing.
- A Member asked what measures were in place to ensure that the Corporate Property Company was being properly scrutinised. The Senior Policy & Scrutiny Officer explained that the Property Company was an arm's length entity, with scrutiny of its operations provided by the Trading and Enterprise Board. The Board was a formally constituted Committee of the Cabinet and was chaired by the Shareholder Representative for the Company. The Overview & Scrutiny Committee had reviewed the Company last year and made several recommendations to Cabinet around the governance of the Trading and Enterprise Board and the Property Company, which had since been put into effect. Further to this, feedback would be sought from the Director of Finance and Economy concerning a request from the O&S Budget Scrutiny Task Group to track which assets were decreasing/appreciating in value.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

57 Overview & Scrutiny Annual Report

This was a standing report covering the last 12 months. The Committee were asked to consider items for inclusion on the agenda over the next year.

The Chairman commented that a lot of work had obviously gone into the excellent, comprehensive report.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

58 Future Reviews and Report Tracker and Topic Selection Flowchart

The Senior Policy & Scrutiny Officer drew the Committee's attention to two items on the Tracker for July's Meeting; Ashford For You and Aspire Performance. He invited Members to liaise with the Chairman or himself about potential ideas to be considered for future meetings.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

Agenda Item No:



Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Performance and Development of Aspire Landscape Management

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked:

1. Note the contents of the report
-

Date of O&S meeting: 23 July 2019

Chair of O&S Committee: Cllr Noel Ovenden

Relevant Portfolio(s): Cllr Andrew Buchanan

Summary:

Exempt from Publication: No

Background Papers: Cabinet papers;
Landscape Management: Improving Presentation of the Borough: Creating an In House Service (10 Sept 2015)
Aspire Landscape Management update (Jan 2019)

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james.laidlaw@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233) 330346

Agenda Item No.

Report Title: Aspire Landscape Management

Introduction and Background

1. Aspire Landscape Management became the “in house” grounds maintenance provider in October 2016. This followed a paper to Cabinet in 2015 which included an options appraisal for the future of grounds maintenance, with a view to improving the presentation of the borough, in line with the Corporate Plan Objective 4 – “Attractive Ashford”.

<i>Delivery Service Model</i>	<i>Conclusion of Options Appraisal</i>
Outsourcing to private sector - Tender the service to an external commercial company with the Council continuing to operate as a traditional monitoring client.	Larger scale contractors are competitive, given their economies of scale, and the overall operational risk to the Council is low. However they are less flexible to respond to changing priorities, include profit in all works variations and retain profit for their shareholders. Contractors are increasingly cutting costs and service levels to boost low margins.
Joint venture - pool the service activity with another public sector body with significant grounds maintenance experience and place in a jointly owned commercial company.	Finding a local publically owned and experienced partner is limited. This model does not give the Council overall control, but an economy of scale can be achieved. A contract and specification with a ‘thin’ client would be required alongside governance costs. Limited profit can be achieved given procurement regulations.
In house service – bringing in the service (in house) and fully managing and operating the service.	Enhanced flexibility and regaining of full control. All risk passed to the Council which will require expertise. However, this is an effective model to deliver on the key issue of improving the quality and presentation of the green spaces whilst driving up productivity and controlling cost.
Shared service with other local authorities – a joined up approach with another public sector body where the service model is shared.	Much the same as above but the Council’s influence is reduced as you share control with another partner. Political priorities may change overtime.
Trading Company - create an arms-length but wholly owned company that can trade.	This model does allow cost control and flexibility but delivers limited income return (given procurement regulations) and requires Company administration and governance.

2. The choice for an “in house service” followed 20 years of outsourced services and was driven by the following factors;
 - Improved ability to respond to changing Council priorities
 - Control enables more focus to raise quality
 - Flexible and adaptable, time saving, cost saving and responsive
 - Enhances Council’s reputation and civic pride

- Clear and effective control of expenditure and future costs
 - Adds to Councils skill set, in time enables economy of scale
 - Some income generation
 - Coordination with other Council contracts and services
 - Responsive and cheaper emergency planning
 - Use of local economy
 - Increased and direct accountability for performance and quality
 - Identification and reallocation of resources to land management plan and other projects
3. A report to Cabinet in January 2019, gave an update on the extraordinary amount of development, improvement and expansion of the work of the service in just 2 years. This is appears at Appendix A.
4. All of the factors that influenced the decision to bring the service “in house”, in the form of Aspire, have been proven correct. The service was deliberately branded with municipal entrepreneurialism in mind, to ensure that in the future, the service could have commercial appeal as well as providing an exemplary service to the borough.



5. Staff were TUPE'd into the service and those staff have undergone an intensive period of “on boarding” of staff to ensure they understand the values of the service.

Value	How we behave
<p data-bbox="443 241 608 277">Adaptable</p> <p data-bbox="384 322 671 501"><i>Working with our customers collaboratively to achieve the highest levels of service.</i></p>	<ul data-bbox="767 241 1393 658" style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ We work with each other to achieve the best for our customers ✓ We are flexible and versatile in our working method to accommodate our customers wherever possible ✓ We are resilient, planning for the unforeseen ✓ We are multi skilled to maximise service efficiency. ✓ We are approachable
<p data-bbox="491 694 560 730">Safe</p> <p data-bbox="400 775 651 896"><i>Working with the highest regard to health and safety</i></p>	<ul data-bbox="767 694 1393 1021" style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Staff will be full trained to undertake works ✓ We will always report any issues or concerns ✓ We will use the most suitable equipment to complete tasks ✓ Staff will be monitored to ensure they are healthy and safe.
<p data-bbox="427 1057 624 1093">Professional</p> <p data-bbox="400 1137 651 1258"><i>We will provide a dependable high quality service</i></p>	<ul data-bbox="767 1057 1393 1258" style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ We are identifiable and presentable ✓ We communicate with our clients ✓ We are knowledgeable ✓ We will always conduct ourselves with the highest standards of integrity
<p data-bbox="443 1294 608 1330">Innovative</p> <p data-bbox="352 1339 699 1496"><i>We will always seek new ways of working to increase of efficiency and effectiveness</i></p>	<ul data-bbox="767 1294 1393 1541" style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ We will always use our knowledge to deliver practical solutions ✓ We will keep track of developments within our industry ✓ We will be forward looking in terms of technology.
<p data-bbox="411 1576 639 1612">Right first time</p> <p data-bbox="368 1657 683 1778"><i>All works are carried out to specification on time, every time</i></p>	<ul data-bbox="767 1576 1393 1904" style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Works at completed in a timely manner ✓ Staff are aware of roles and standards expected ✓ Using pre-planned maintenance regimes and pro-active approaches our equipment will always be deployable to achieve the highest standards of maintenance
<p data-bbox="400 1939 651 2011">Environmentally aware</p>	<ul data-bbox="767 1939 1393 2011" style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Staff are aware of our impact on the environment

<i>We understand our impact on the environment</i>	✓ We will, enhance the environment whilst minimising negative impacts
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6. There continues to be substantial investment in staff in terms of training and opportunity to diversify their roles, to bring them to the engaged and dynamic service that they are today. The service has incorporated the work of the Town Centre Action Team (TCAT) and have improved on that service by being more pro-active in service delivery, actively engaging with a wide variety of stakeholders across the town.
7. The service has supported events across the Council, for example Snowdogs, Fields of Battle Lands of Peace and Marking the Centenary of World War 1.
8. With a better trained workforce that has pride in their work and understands the important role that borough presentation, and inviting open space, plays in the economic prosperity of the borough, as well as supporting the health and well-being of our residents.
9. Appendix B considers the progress of the service since the Cabinet paper of January 2019, to bring Members up to date.

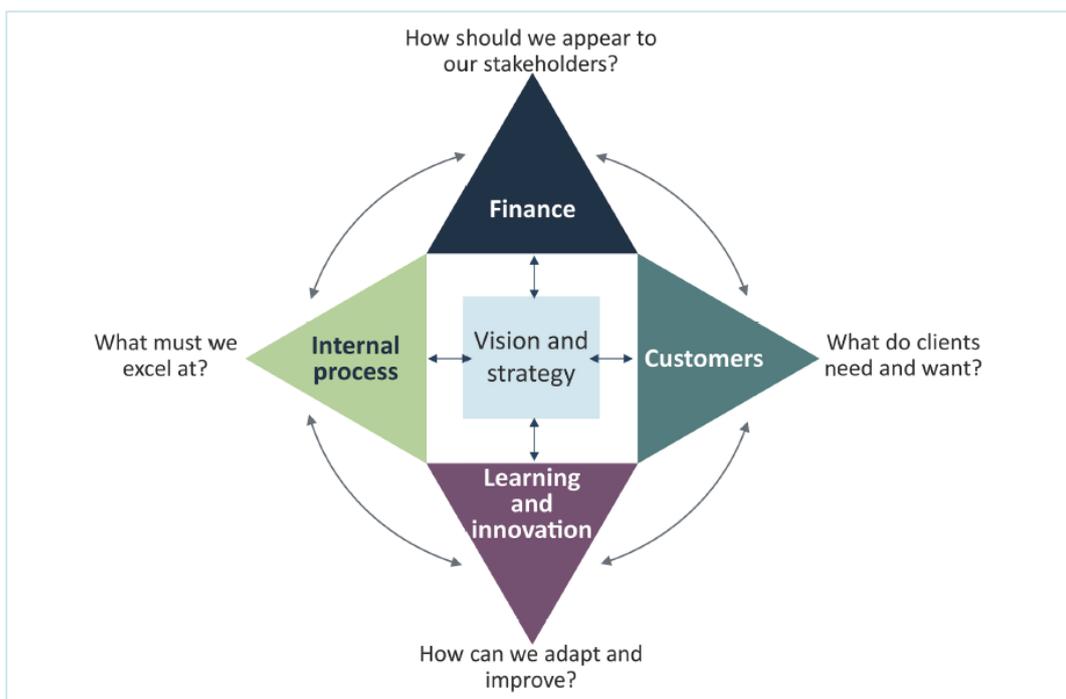
Aspire - the future

10. The service has continually evolved since its inception to not only deal with the demands of a borough that needed considerable investment in its presentation, due to years of “status quo” on contracted services but also to be flexible and take on services that were never originally envisaged to be part of a soft landscaping service. This has been achieved by very careful budget and staffing management, including changing working patterns across the year to better reflect service delivery when needed (staff all moved to a 40 hour week and annualised hours [work longer hours in the Summer than in the Winter]) and a strong sense of purpose and pride in their work.
11. The branding for the service was very deliberate, to ensure that the service could have commercial appeal in the longer term.
12. This service is attuned to the financial challenges local government faces. Whilst Ashford Borough Council is currently in a stable financial position, we are very aware of the comprehensive spending review that we will be facing in the near future, which is likely to put further pressure on funding. We are mindful of the Council’s ambitions in regeneration of the borough and the investment required to set up the grounds maintenance service and the ongoing equipment replacement costs of running such a service.
13. Therefore an appraisal has been undertaken on potential commercial income generating opportunities Aspire could explore.

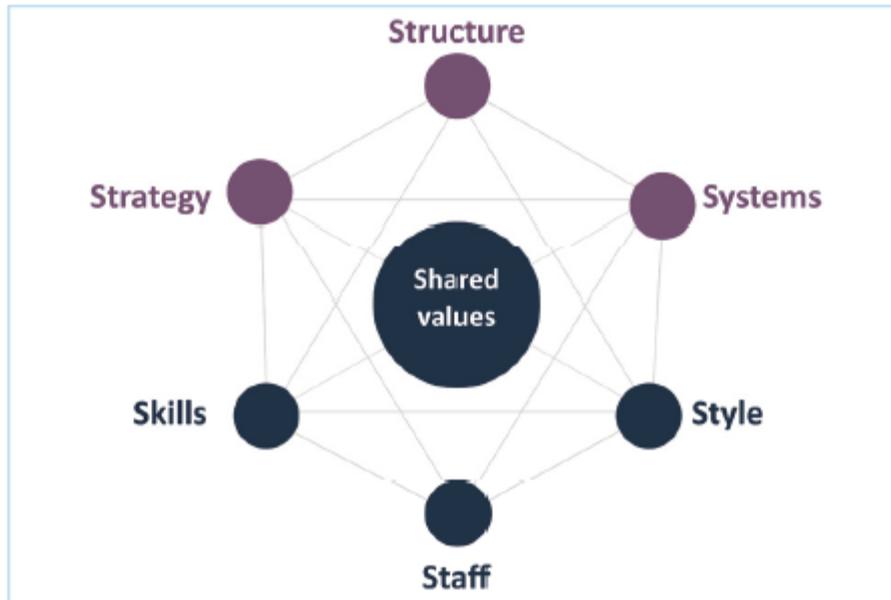
14. There are no “blue ocean” activities for Aspire as there are many companies and individuals already involved in grounds maintenance work. We have carefully considered the strategic space in which we operate and the boundaries, as well as opportunities which govern any commercial offer.



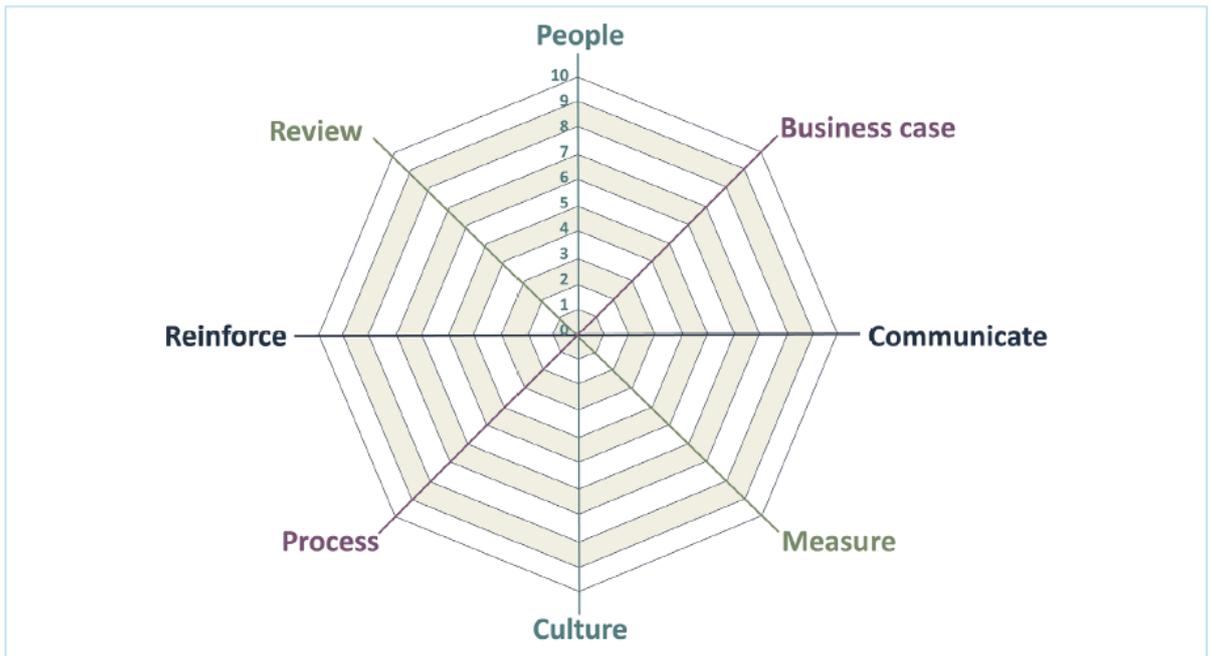
15. We have considered what could make our commercial offer distinctly different and where our niche in the market might be. We are not in a situation where our organisation seeks to be cheapest. Our workforce are paid at least the Ashford living wage and as such that must be accounted for when quoting for work. We are providing, and will continue to provide, a quality service that is reliable and adds value to the clients we work with. We will not be competing in markets where our self-employed, sole trader residents are likely to be.



16. We have considered; what our core values are, what our strategy needs to be to maintain borough service provision as well as consider moderate income generation, we have developed our structure to ensure it is robust and developed our systems to ensure excellence for the borough as well as having commercial appeal (CHAS and ISO accreditations).



17. Through the outstanding work of the service to date, an excellent reputation already precedes the Aspire name and, as explained in the January 2019 Cabinet paper, the move to local parishes wishing to take on their own grounds maintenance (before Aspire began) has, in many cases, reversed and allowed the team to provide that service and generate a modest income.
18. Various modelling has allowed us to consider where we are now and what various business horizons for the service may include. However, we must be very mindful that any extension of commercial income generating activity must be very measured and organic. This should ensure that excellent presentation of the borough can be maintained and does not suffer at the expense of income generation, as well as being able to maintain a council service model without the need, currently, to move into a Local Authority Trading Company (LATC) model. We will continue to keep this position under review, using all the elements of the model below.



Conclusion

19. Aspire Landscape Management has exceeded all expectations for an “in house” grounds maintenance service. The service continues to go from strength to strength and is working on modest commercial income generation, to support the delivery of the core service to the borough.

Contact and Email

20. Mrs Tracey Butler, Head of Environment and Land Management.
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 James Laidlaw, Grounds Maintenance Operations Manager.
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Agenda Item 8



Agenda Item No: 8

Report To: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 10 January 2019

Report Title: Aspire two years on

Report Author & Job Title: Tracey Butler and James Laidlaw
Head of Environment and Land Management and
Aspire Operations Manager

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Mrs Clair Bell
Portfolio Holder for: Environment and Land Management

Summary: This is a report on the progress of Cabinet's decision to bring "in-house" the grounds maintenance service in the form of Aspire Landscape Management. This report reflects the progress of the service since its inception in October 2016 and the future anticipated direction of the service.

Key Decision: No

Significantly Affected Wards: all

Recommendations: **The Cabinet is recommended to;**
I. Note the report and support the direction of travel for the service.

Contact: tracey.butler@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233) 330875

Report Title: **Aspire two years on**

Introduction and background

1. Aspire Landscape Management became the in-house grounds maintenance service provider in October 2016. This decision reflected a bold and decisive move on the part of Cabinet in September 2015, to ensure improved borough presentation, in support of Corporate Priority 4, Attractive Ashford.
2. At the time this decision was taken, this was not the “norm” for local authorities and took the leadership of the authority to realise a vision of what the presentation of the borough could be, at a time when it needed radical and substantial improvement.
3. The priority areas for the service were set by Cabinet as:
 - Deliver on the agreed improvement plan for the Gateways to Ashford including the town’s arrival points (around Jct 9, Drivers roundabout and Jct 10) and key gateway roundabouts (Mace Lane, Orchard Heights, Malcolm Sargent, Newtown Road, Godinton Road, Park Farm, Tithe Barn Lane, Brookfield Road and Spearpoint).
 - Implement the proposals for floral bedding over the next five years, taking into account future developments when prioritising areas in the Memorial Gardens and the High Street.
 - Develop long-term management plans for Victoria Park and the Memorial Gardens and successfully implement agreed management plan recommendations.
 - Revise maintenance regimes to reflect the standards required and maximise the opportunity for operational efficiency.
 - Consult on suggested Parish “clusters” to operate the Village Caretaker scheme, target an additional scheme where appropriate.
 - Provide an accurate tree database including undertaking a detailed tree survey and mapping exercise. (This was envisaged to be outside of the “in- house” service remit and would be a service that was further procured).
 - Undertake a mapping exercise of all ditches and culverts, open water and SUDS to identify all such features, developing a schedule of routine maintenance requirements to minimise flood risks.
 - Continue to develop the partnerships between the Council and conservation organisations.

4. All of the above were envisaged to be one-off improvement works that would then become part of a maintenance regime going forwards. These works were in addition to those outlined as “core work” for the service, which included the following.

Public Parks, Open Spaces, Housing Land, Cemeteries and General Amenity Areas including, but not limited to:

- Two prestige parks (Victoria Park and Memorial Gardens)
- 2,000,000m² of grass maintenance
- 180,000m² of shrub beds, rose beds and herbaceous beds
- Several community woodland, wildlife and conservation areas
- One country park (in development)
- Ashford Green Corridor (3 limbs)
- 21km of hedges
- 1,000m² of annual flower beds
- 87 town centre floral planters
- Nine football pitches.
- Over 1,000 trees
- Approximately 120 burials per annum in four cemeteries (and maintenance of landscaping in 11 closed burial grounds)
- Park gate unlocking and locking
- 40 playgrounds
- Numerous ditches, ponds, river frontages, SUDS and other drainage facilities.

Proposal/current position

5. From the priority areas set, all of the gateway roundabouts listed above (point 3) will have been renovated / upgraded by the turn of the financial year (2018 /19), with the exception of the Brookfield Road roundabout (as this is subject to securing the A28 widening works associated with Chilmington development). However, in addition to these works, we have a further works programme underway in association with KCC to address more roundabouts.
6. The Malcolm Sargeant roundabout mentioned above (point 3) will become the Flanders roundabout, when the priority at this roundabout is re-designated and safety “drive-on maintenance” features are added. In addition, the “Over the Top” display from the Memorial Gardens will move to this new permanent home, to make up a larger permanent installation commemorating World War One and Flanders.
7. Further additional roundabout work to be undertaken includes safety drive-on features and re-engineering of Orchard Heights (already upgraded but being further improved), New Street/ Chart Road, Forestall Meadow and Charing Hill. (see site information on Appendix 1)
8. The floral bedding plans are implemented and reviewed yearly now as part of the Aspire core work.
9. The Memorial Gardens has a management plan and this year saw extensive installation work in commemoration of the centennial anniversary of the end of

World War One. The plan for the gardens in 2019 includes the installation of a carpet badge of the Ashford Coat of Arms and more extensive flower displays “at height” (tiered fountains of flowers) in the gardens to add shape and interest. This prestige park will continue to be improved along the theme of “civic pride”.

10. Aspire continues to support the Heritage Lottery Funding bid for Victoria Park and will be integral to the forward works in the park if the bid succeeds. The team will be involved in extensive clearance works and tree removal and installation programmes over the 2019 / 20 and 2020 / 21 winter works period.
11. Maintenance regimes across the borough have been revised and refined for maximum operational efficiency and maximum improvement in the presentation of the borough.
12. Parish work and devolution has taken an unexpected turn. At the time an “in-house” grounds maintenance service was first proposed, the devolution agenda was very much at the forefront of people’s minds. Parishes were “clustering” together to find efficiencies, cost savings or to procure work together. The quality of grounds maintenance across the borough at the time was such that the clusters were keen to see improvements in their areas and did not feel that would necessarily be delivered through the borough contractor.
13. However, in the time Aspire has been operating, the reverse of the above has become true in many cases. The service has had numerous enquiries from parishes wishing to contract their grounds work back to Aspire, based on quality work and continually improving outcomes. Therefore, Aspire has tendered for work and work has been awarded to the service from numerous parishes, including High Halden, Challock, Westwell, Singleton and Great Chart and Little Chart. Tenterden town council has chosen to retain the grounds maintenance service for their area and have been supported with advice and training from Aspire to get the service “up and running”.
14. Aspire Landscape Management has created its own in-house arboriculture service. Existing staff have had the opportunity for career development and have become trained and experienced arboricultural officers. This service was originally envisaged to sit outside the new “in-house” service but we have been able to offer capable staff with the right attitude and aptitude for that progression. This also now means that surveying of the entire borough’s tree stock is underway (and will continue over a number of years) and the same annual tree maintenance budget now extends to approximately two and a half times the work provided by the same budget to an external contractor. Only in some emergency or extremely complex cases, where several trained officers are required for one tree, is work put out to external contractors.
15. Priority ditches and culverts have been inspected and upgraded (work organised and procured by the Culture service) and are now on maintenance with Aspire.
16. Partnerships between the council and conservation organisations (such as Kent Wildlife Trust and Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership) continue to be fostered through the Land Management Advisory Group.

17. All the core work listed above is also on routine maintenance regimes with Aspire and there are 61 play areas now being regularly surveyed for health and safety as well as maintenance issues and dealt with accordingly (21 more than originally intended).
18. The memorial headstone safety inspection programme has been undertaken by qualified memorial masons over a period of 18 months, for every headstone in both our open and closed cemeteries. Now, grounds staff at Aspire have now been trained in memorial headstone inspections and this risk assessment-led work has become part of the team's routine "over-winter works" to check memorial headstones in all four open and 11 closed cemeteries in the borough. It was originally envisaged that this rolling programme of safety inspections would be provided through an external contractor and at a cost to the borough. However, with keen and flexible staff willing to learn new skills, we have been able to provide this programmed work through the service, in its over- winter works programme.
19. Our Environmental Contracts and Enforcement Manager in the Street Scene team has carried out a procurement exercise this year for new street litter bins. It was anticipated that the revisions of the "binrastructure" and replacement / improvement programme would need to also be provided by external contract. However, Aspire has trained staff on the repair and maintenance of moveable assets in parks and open spaces (bins and benches) and has incorporated all this as part of a rolling-forward programme of works.
20. The service now supports civic events such as the "Mayor-making" evening and the civic service, as well as Remembrance Day event support and facilitation.
21. The work of the TCAT team has been incorporated into the service. This has offered the opportunity for considerable cross-training in the service and seen a benefit in terms of resilience and flexibility.
22. There have been considerable achievements for the Aspire landscape management service in the past 2 years, well "over and above" than expected when the service was first brought in-house. At the end of Year 1, we had a first birthday celebration at the depot and produced an "achievements" document (see Appendix 2). This year we have repeated the "achievements" exercise (see Appendix 3). This is important to help celebrate with the staff their extraordinary work and share with them just how much their contribution has improved the appearance of the borough, is appreciated and what a great job they have done and continue to do.
23. One of the most extraordinary results for the team in the last year of operation was the achievement of ISO 14001, 9001 and 45001. Not only is it unusual for one ISO to be applied for and achieved by a council service but to achieve three standards simultaneously is quite remarkable and an achievement of which we are all very proud.
24. The service has been well received by our residents and we have received a considerable number of "thank you" letters and complimentary emails directly

to the service and through third parties, in appreciation of the transformation of the landscape maintenance of the borough.

Next steps in process

25. In the coming year's service plan for Environment and Land Management, there will be the first stage of an improvement plan for our allotment sites to make them more accessible and work with the Allotment Society to drive further structural improvements.
26. 2019 is the "Year of the Environment". Aspire will have a number of projects in the year that support this including a planted replica of the Willesborough windmill (as one of the original "green" energy generators and to celebrate 150 years of the windmill). However, the service will "kick off" the year with tree planting as part of a larger programme in North park / Civic park.
27. Aspire will support Culture in a review of playgrounds which will examine the use of "hub" play areas and an improvement plan from that.
28. Aspire will be integral in the works programme for the Victoria Park HLF bid.
29. Repton Park (including Linear Park), sections of Bridgefields and Park Farm, housing land alleyways, landscaping and soft landscaping maintenance "on programme" for car parks will all be areas of work that Aspire will pick up in the next 12 – 24 months. This represents considerable additional work for Aspire but comes, in the most part, with S106 funding to be able to take on more staff and provide specialist equipment to support maintenance on these areas.
30. We will also be supporting Chilmington work and Discovery Park planning with maintenance in mind.
31. Aspire will, where resources allow, support the Town Centre Place Making Board work. The team will also be supporting this service's "Year of the Environment" communications plan, including a competition for local schools to improve their own landscape grounds, with practical tips from the team.
32. We continue to invest in the training and development opportunities for our staff. We will shortly be offering a small group of staff some specialist horticultural training, to improve the breadth of their knowledge and allow them to cascade that learning to the wider service.

Conclusion

33. Improvement in landscape management is the job of Aspire Landscape Management. We will continue to work in partnership with stakeholders and third party organisations (such as the Kent Wildlife Trust, Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership and the Environment Agency) through the Land Management Advisory Group. We will continue to engage with and encourage all land owners to improve stewardship of their own assets, as well as striving for excellence in the management and maintenance of our own.

34. The decision to bring the grounds maintenance service in-house for the borough has been and continues to be a successful one. From a service that carried out basic landscape tasks we have developed an arboricultural team, including staff with specialist areas of knowledge, which supports a very wide range of service areas and services. The savings to the council this service now provides are considerable and far in excess of what was originally envisaged, alongside extensive improvement in the presentation of the borough. The team are flexible, engaged and take a genuine pride in their work. We will continue to actively seek opportunities for the team to improve the presentation of the borough and strive for ever-greater excellence.

Portfolio Holder's views

35. Our bold decision to bring the grounds maintenance service in-house has paid dividends. The team continue to strive for excellence and are a credit to the council and the residents of the borough we serve.

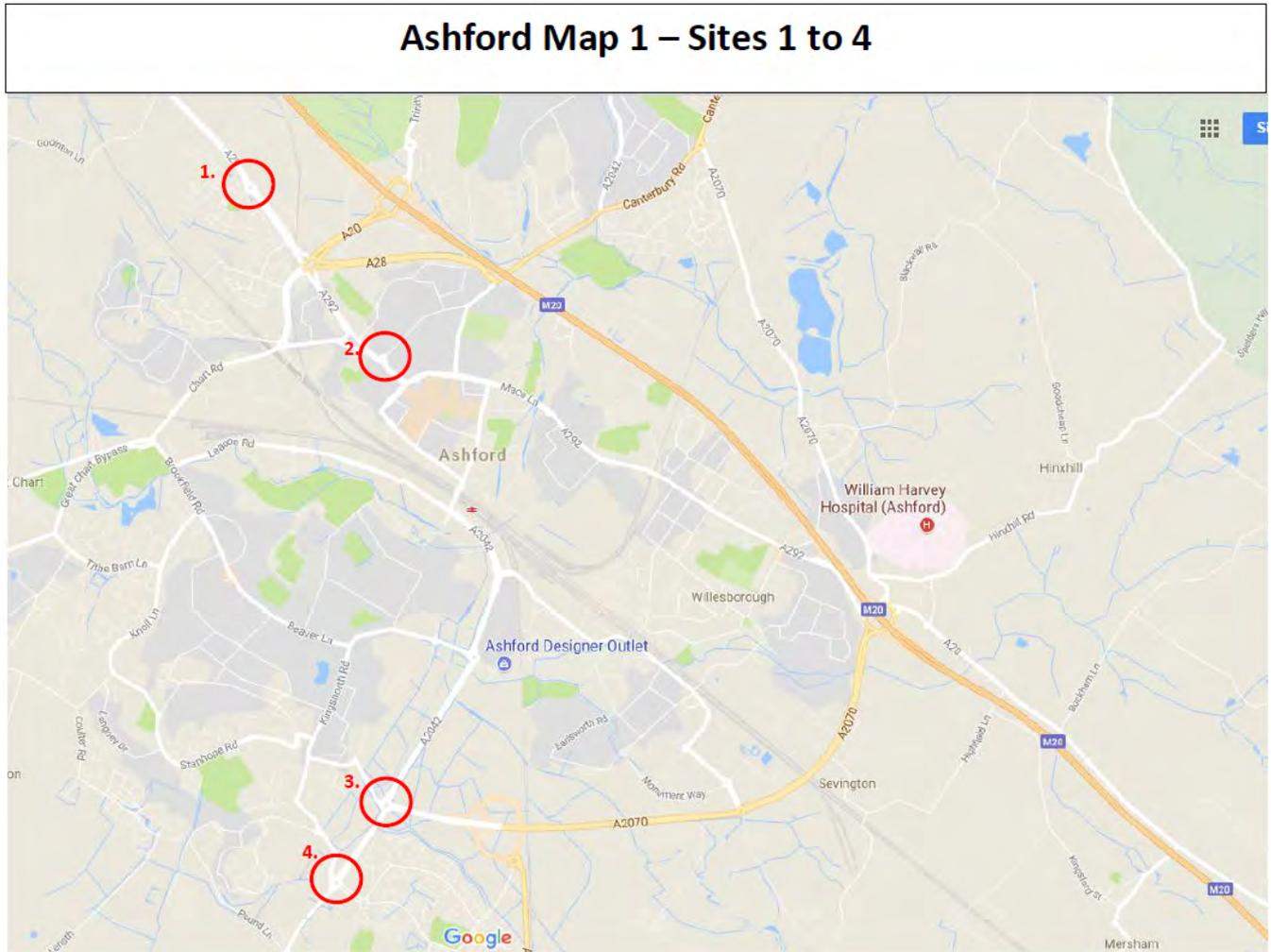
Contact and email

36. Mrs Tracey Butler (tracey.butler@ashford.gov.uk)
Head of Environment and Land Management

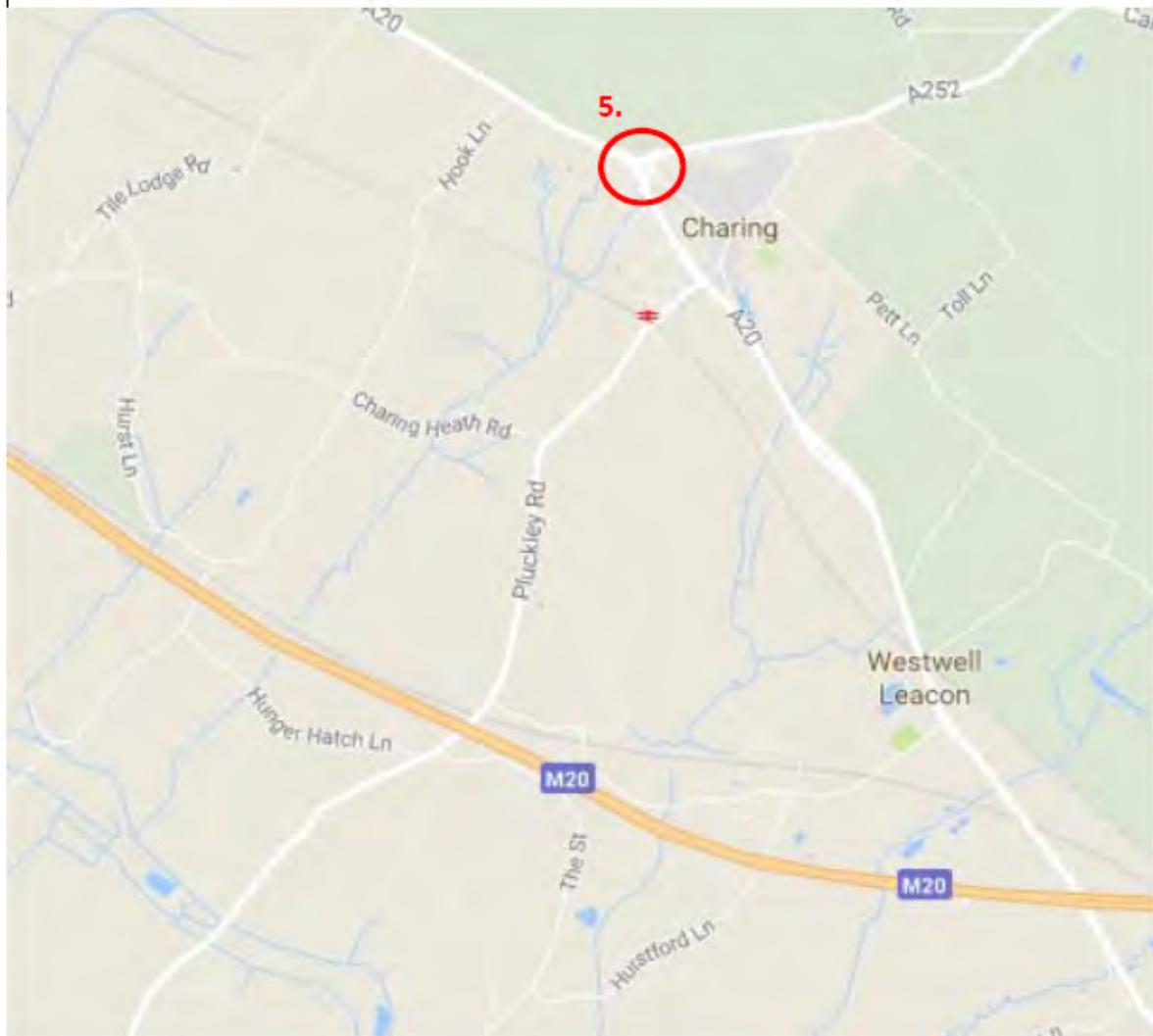
James Laidlaw (james.laidlaw@ashford.gov.uk)
Aspire Operations Manager

Appendix 1

Roundabout information

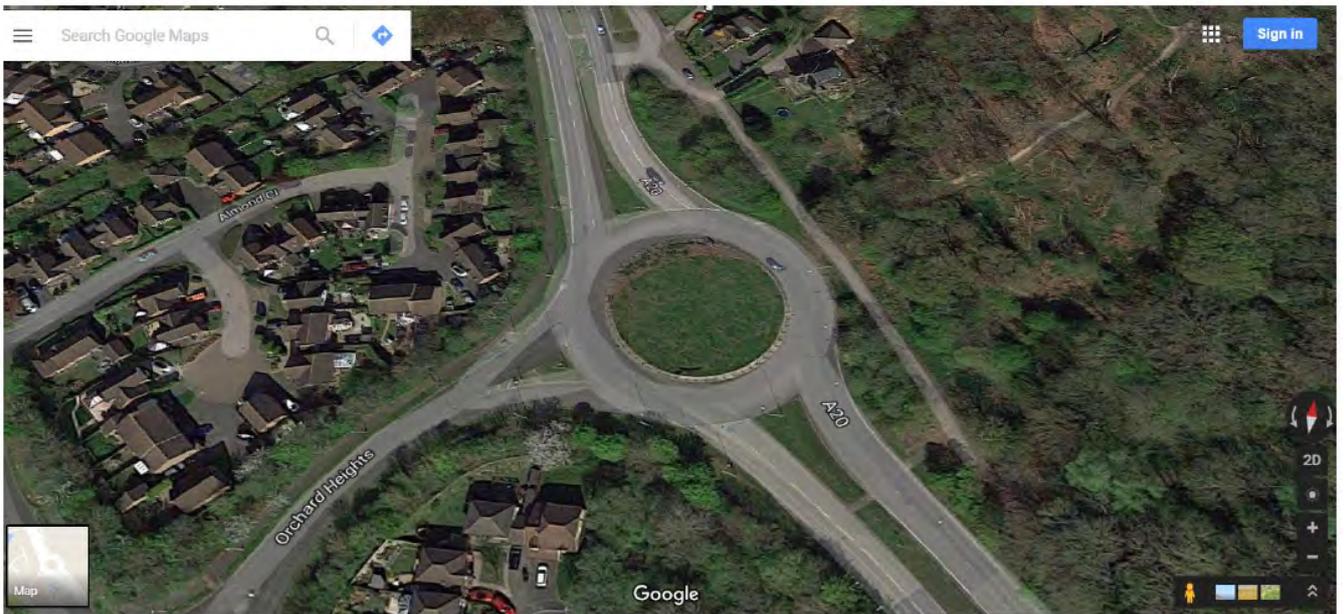


Ashford Map 2 – Site 5





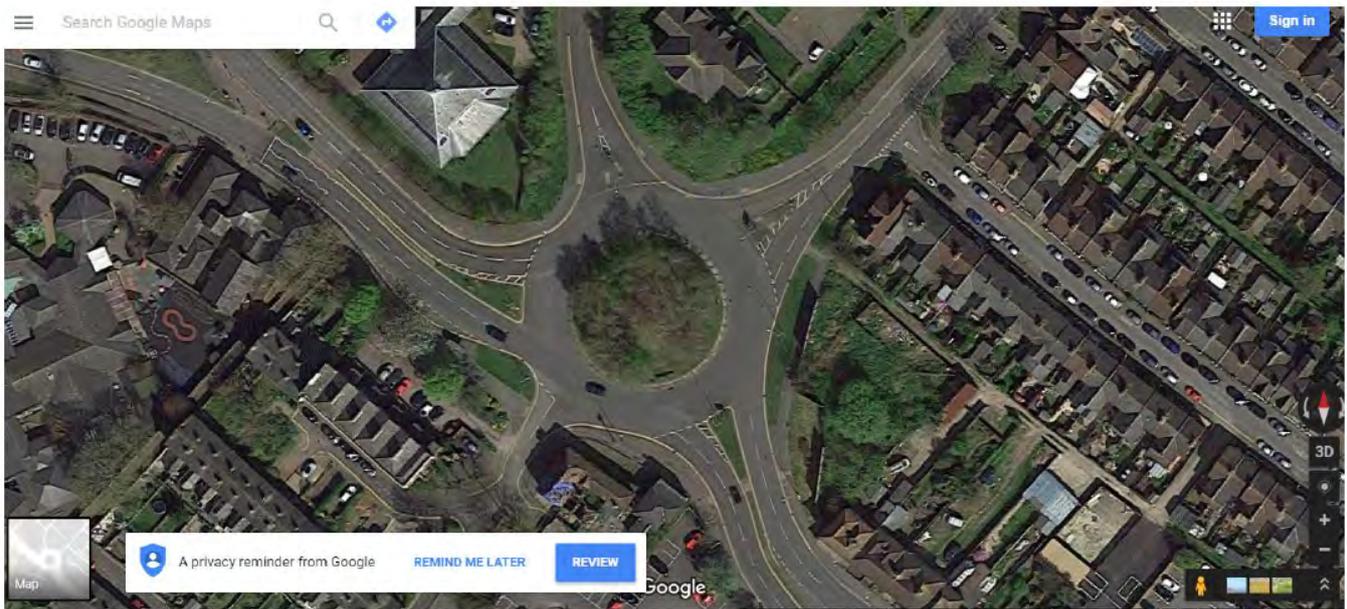
1. A20 MAIDSTONE ROAD / ORCHARD HEIGHTS – GROUND LEVEL VIEW
(approaching roundabout, leaving Ashford heading towards Charing, with Orchard Heights on the left)



1. A20 MAIDSTONE ROAD / ORCHARD HEIGHTS ROUNDABOUT – AERIAL VIEW



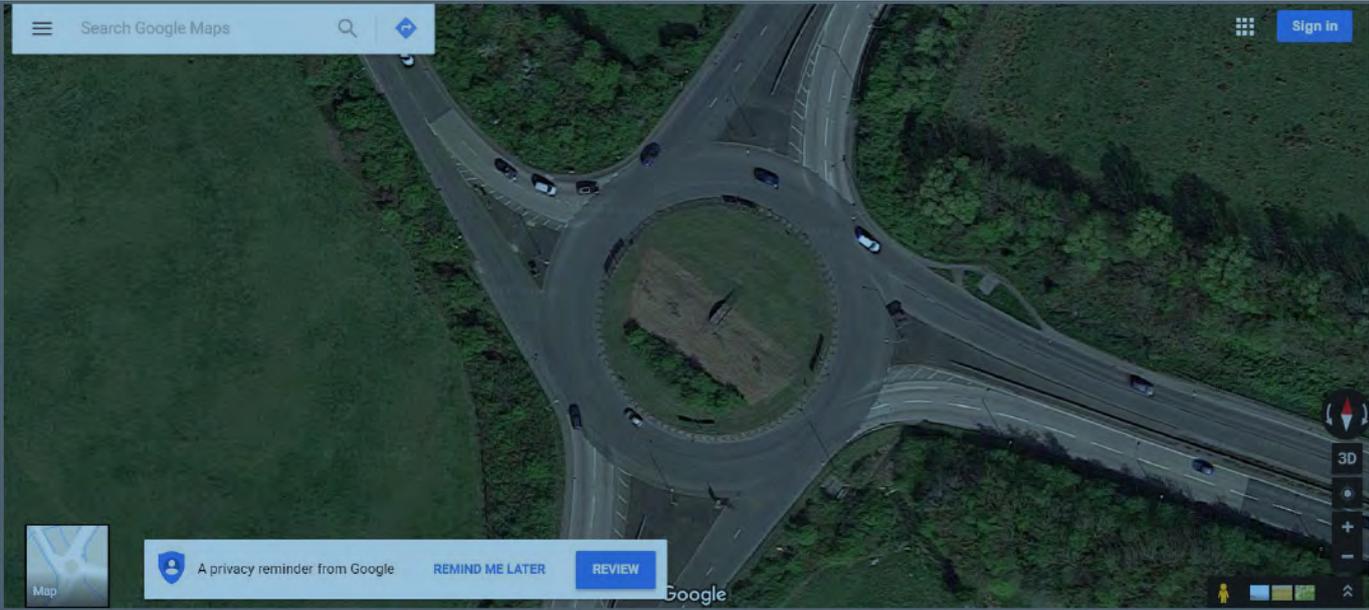
2. A292 NEW STREET / CHART ROAD ROUNDABOUT – GROUND LEVEL VIEW
(New Street, leaving Ashford, Chart Road is straight ahead)



2. A292 NEW STREET / CHART ROAD ROUNDABOUT – AERIAL VIEW



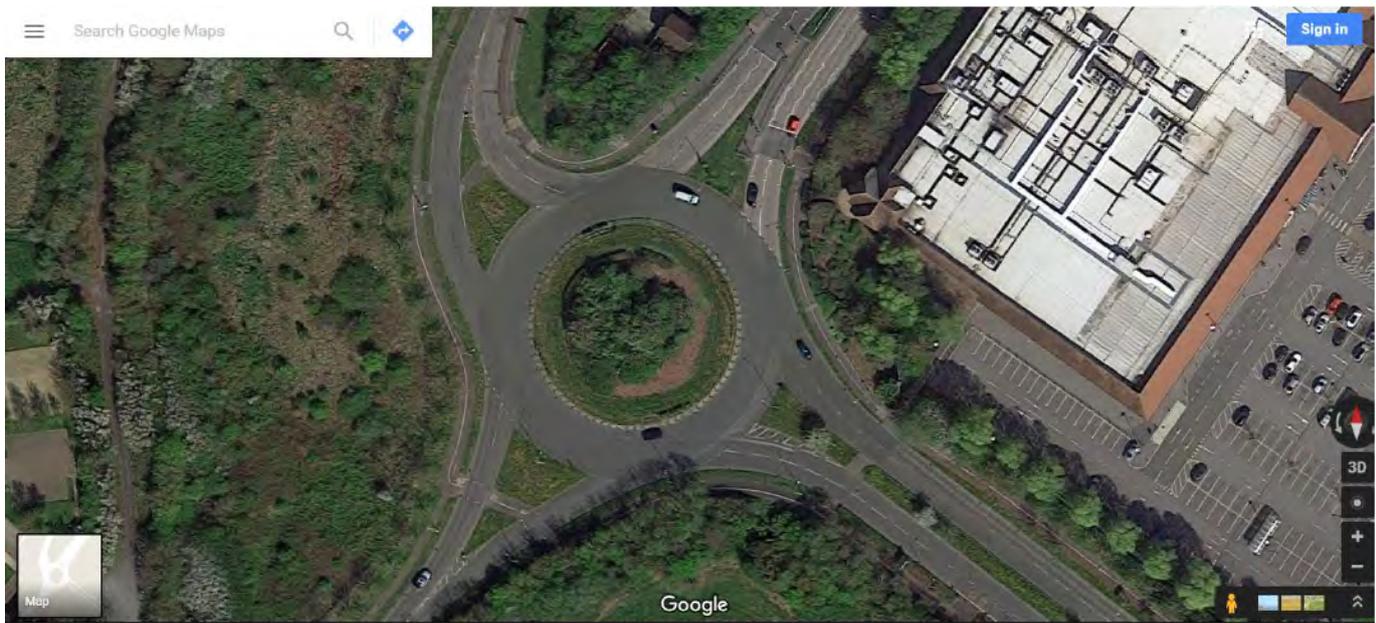
3. A2042 ROMNEY MARSH ROAD / MALCOLM SARGEANT ROAD ROUNDABOUT – GROUND LEVEL VIEW
(approaching from Bad Munstereifel Road, left to Kingsnorth, right to Ashford)



3. A2042 ROMNEY MARSH ROAD / MALCOLM SARGEANT ROAD ROUNDABOUT – AERIAL VIEW



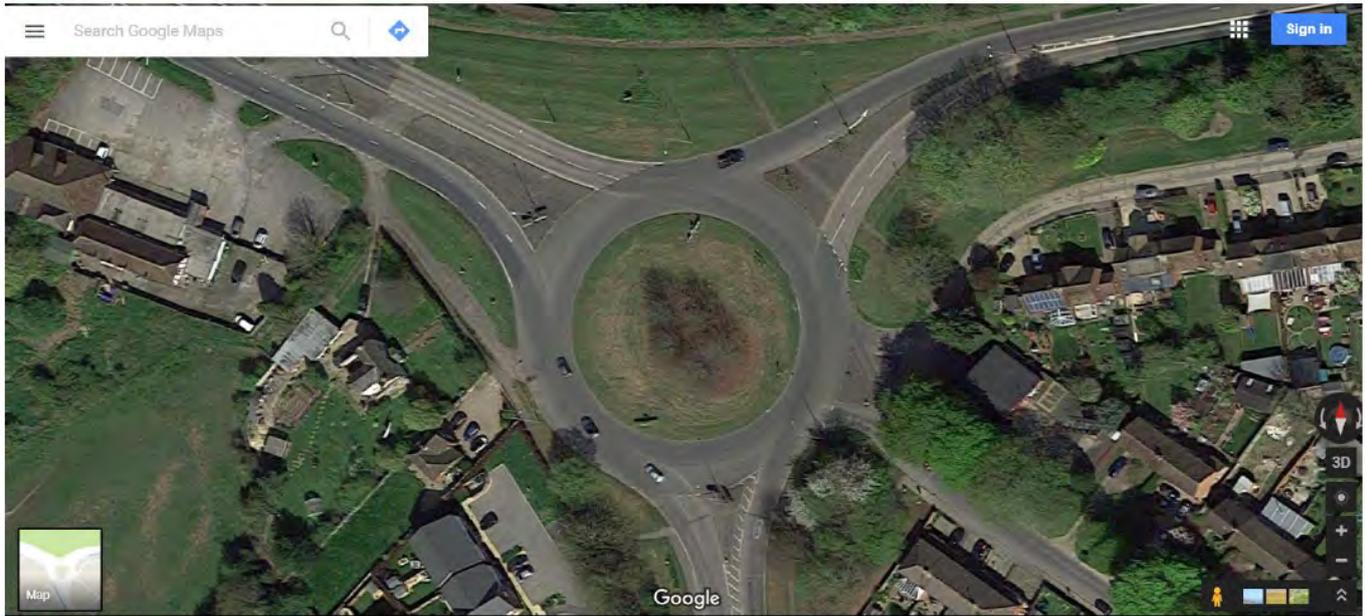
4. A2042 ROMNEY MARSH ROAD / FORESTALL MEADOW – GROUND LEVEL VIEW
(Romney Marsh Road, heading out of Ashford towards Kingsnorth, Forestall Meadow is on the left)



4. A2042 ROMNEY MARSH ROAD / FORESTALL MEADOW ROUNDABOUT – AERIAL VIEW



5. A20 MAIDSTONE ROAD / CHARING HILL – GROUND LEVEL VIEW
(approaching Charing from Lenham, with Charing Hill on the left....)



5. A20 MAIDSTONE ROAD / CHARING HILL ROUNDABOUT – AERIAL VIEW



Achievements

October 2016 to August 2017



Background

In September 2015 Cabinet agreed to take the Grounds Maintenance function in house, in line with Corporate Priority 4 – Attractive Ashford. A one-year project was initialised to establish an in-house grounds maintenance function equipped to deliver from 1 October 2016.

Depot Facility

Planning approval (16/00562/AS) to develop part of the former Rimmel International Site on Cobbs Wood, Carlton Road was put forward for development by Gallagher to include Plot 1 – Grounds Maintenance Depot. Planning permission was granted on the 20 July 2016 for the depot's construction.



Construction started immediately with a timeframe of eight weeks.



The depot was completed on 12 September 2016

Preparing the Depot for the Delivery of Services

Completion of the depot's construction was followed by a period of 2 weeks of equipping the depot for grounds maintenance operations. This included setting up of the offices, delivery of furniture, IT, telephones, tools, equipment, vehicles, personnel protective equipment, hand tools and machinery.



The operational works to prepare the depot were completed on 29 September 2016.



Opening of Aspire Landscape Management

The Depot was officially opened by Councillor Mrs Clair Bell and Pat Gallagher on 29 September 2016. Members were invited on a tour of the depot and to a demonstration of the equipment.

Staff Transfer

On Monday 3 October 2016 the staff joined Ashford Borough Council following a TUPE transfer from the incumbent contractor Landscape Services.

The transfer followed three months of staff consultation which was fully supported by HR. Staff were consulted on all aspects of their employment and documentation was provided to support the verbal communications. In addition staff were seen on a one to one basis, allowing them to raise any concerns during the process.

On Monday 3 October 2016, the transferring staff met the Council Leader, the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services, the Head of Environmental Services, the HR Manager and the Aspire Operations Manager for a series of presentations held in the council chamber. These presentations outlined Ashford's aspirations for the service and the expectations of the staff.

Following the formal presentations, the staff were taken to the new depot and given a tour of the premises.

A service vision was developed which underpinned Aspire's objective to deliver a high quality, responsive and flexible grounds maintenance service to the residents of Ashford, offering a proactive and best value solution for the maintenance of the Borough's green spaces.

A number of service values were developed to reinforce the service vision and bring it to life. Staff were encouraged to embrace these values from day one, dispelling any previous poor behaviours and bad practices.



Staff On-Boarding & Training

On Tuesday 4 October a two-week on-boarding and initial training programme started. A programme of training and events was developed which allowed staff to undertake various activities in small groups, both in the depot and on-site. Machinery suppliers attended during this period to train staff on the use and maintenance of the equipment. Additionally, external trainers took staff through formal training programmes so that staff could obtain nationally-recognised qualifications in the safe use of equipment and its maintenance.

The training included the following key elements:-

- LANTRA Ride on mower certification
- Toro machinery induction
- LANTRA Brush cutter certification
- Stihl machinery maintenance
- LANTRA Hedge cutter certification
- E-learning Modules
- Cemetery operation training
- LANTRA Tractor driving certification
- Fire evacuation
- Depot procedures
- Quality training
- Behaviours and value training
- Risk assessments and safe systems of work

Staff attending cemetery operative training:



Staff attending Toro manufacturer training:



Staff attending LANTRA training:



Spring bedding

Aspire started operational activities with a bang in October 2016. Following two weeks of on-boarding, we saw the delivery of 40,000 pansies and 20,000 bulbs. Work started on the stripping of the summer bedding and the planting of the winter bedding almost immediately.



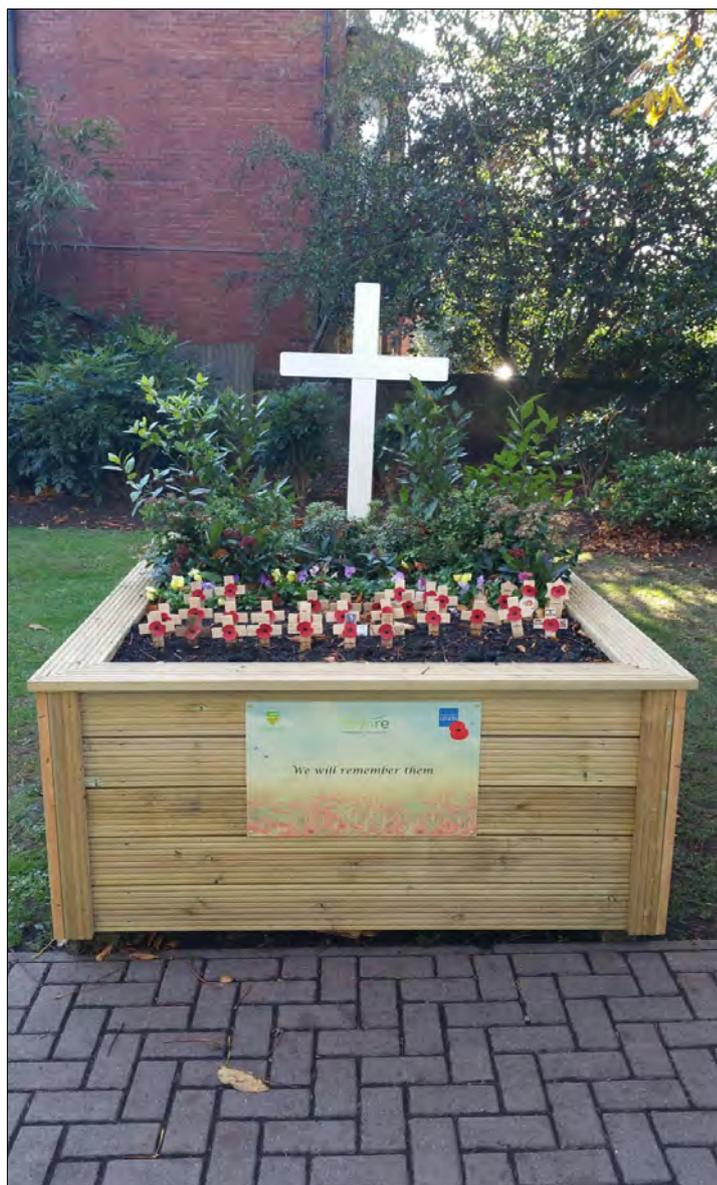
Spring bedding in the Memorial Gardens



The Memorial Gardens & Remembrance

Works were also undertaken in the Memorial Gardens ahead of remembrance commemorations which began on 26 October with the dedication of the garden of remembrance.

The entire block-paved areas were cleaned and scraped by hand between each paver to remove 10 years of built-up moss and detritus. The borders were completely cultivated and weeded. A garden of remembrance was designed, built and installed into the gardens.



Staff consultation

In January 2017, staff were consulted in respect of changes to the working hours. Following this consultation, a review of the staff's terms and conditions on which they transferred and a review of our forward approach to ensure Aspire Landscape Management was "fit for purpose", was carried out.

As a result of this review, we moved to a standardised 40-hour working week and the introduction of an annualised working-hours pattern, which follows the horticultural calendar of peaks and troughs. This allows us to maximise productivity during key growth periods and reduce working hours in the winter months, in line with natural daylight hours.

Recruitment of Health, Safety, Environment and Quality Manager



Following a review of the staffing structure, Colin Munro was successfully appointed as Aspire Landscape Management's Safety, Health, Environmental and Quality Manager in January 2017.

Colin's role over the next year will be to develop procedures



CHAS - Contractors Health and Safety Assessment Scheme.

The Contractor's Health and Safety Assessment Scheme (CHAS) is an HSE-supported third-party accreditation process forming part of the umbrella organisation Safety Schemes in Procurement (SSIP). CHAS accreditation involves an assessor reviewing documentation and evidence from the contractor's health and safety management system to demonstrate conformity with health and safety legislation and HSE codes of practice. CHAS accreditation assures potential buyers that an organisation has been assessed for compliance and robust management of current health and safety legislation. This valuable accreditation also removes the need to duplicate evidence of health and safety compliance as part of the contracting process, as many buyers will accept CHAS accreditation as evidence of robust health and safety management. Aspire Landscape Management were pleased to announce CHAS accreditation in August 2017 and look forward to the opportunities that accreditation will create in the near future, as well as supporting further accreditation.



Wet pour training and repair kit

Following a review of the condition of play areas across the borough, it is clear that a number of these sites are in need of significant repairs to the safety surfacing. This work was previously contracted out, with costs reaching upwards of £200 per square metre. Given the extent of the problem and the continued need for repairs to be undertaken, Aspire has purchased their own wet pour mixer, and trained a number of staff in how to lay the surfacing correctly. As a result, Aspire is now able to undertake this work in-house.



Drovers roundabout

In October 2016 Aspire Landscape Management inherited the maintenance of the Drovers roundabout on the A20 from Kent Highway Services. We set about transforming the overgrown roundabout, cutting and clearing the growth until we established a close-cut and regularly-maintained area.



The woodland garden – Victoria Park

The woodland garden is an area set aside to the far left of Victoria Park, previously developed as such in 1996. Unfortunately, over the years, maintenance has been lacking, resulting in a significant overgrowth and inaccessible areas leading to anti-social behaviour taking place.

Aspire Landscape Management set about a programme of thinning and grubbing out of trees in the winter of 2016, reducing and removing large swathes of dense vegetation and opening up views into the area.



Arboricultural team



Following the commencement of operational delivery, it became apparent that the unit required an arboricultural team. The team would need to be trained to undertake a range of tree works to allow the majority of tree work operations in the borough to be completed in-house without contracting operations.

Following consultation, it was agreed to form an arboricultural team within the Aspire unit in March 2017. We moved to recruit the necessary staff immediately and began a training programme to further equip the team with the latest skills and knowledge to perform their duties both safely and compliantly. The team are now qualified and trained to fell small, medium and large trees, climb and perform aerial rescue as well as fell and process windblown trees, allowing us to tackle the majority of tree works across the Borough, in-house.



Tree inspection service

Aspire Landscape Management will be undertaking a pre-planned regime of visual tree inspections across the Borough commencing in spring 2018. A programme of regular inspections will be formulated and undertaken to identify defects. Rectification works identified will be completed by the newly-formed arboricultural team.

Summer Bedding – 2017

We completed the planting of 25,000 geraniums in June, with the installation of the coffee pot train and 60 planters around the town. We also had an additional 6 three tier planters in the memorial gardens to add some height to the floral displays.



Gateways

Aspire has continued to deliver additional maintenance enhancements to the gateway areas, increasing the cutting regime on all roads and entrances to the town. We have started cutting areas on both Junction 9 and 10 of the M20 entrances as well as increasing cutting regimes in other areas such as Great Chart Bypass, Fougères Way, Templar Way and Orchard Heights.

Relationship with Kent Highway Services

We continue to nurture our relationship with Kent Highway Services, working with them to deliver a better standard of maintenance across the borough. This relationship is providing challenges and opportunities for both parties and will require continual investment from staff in both organisations to balance financial constraints with a desire for improved presentation.

Park Farm additional maintenance

We have introduced an improved maintenance regime in Park Farm, enhancing the specification from a single annual cut of highway shrubs and hedges to more regular maintenance leading to the improved appearance of highway borders. Additionally, a proactive approach to weed management continues to compliment the enhanced specification further improving the presentation of the area.

Singleton Lake car park

This is a new maintenance area which has suffered from a lack of attention in the past and has now been identified by Aspire Landscape Management as a key priority for 2017/18 Winter Works Programme, with works to include the reinstatement of timber bollards, car parking bays and installation of picnic benches. To offer improvement in the appearance of the car park and to reduce the number of potholes in the short term, resurfacing repairs were carried out in July.



These improvements, alongside planned winter works, will complement the promotional work our service is engaging in with Great Chart and Singleton Parish Council to develop Singleton Lakes for residents and visitors.

Summary of some of the feedback we have received.

“Just wanted to say a big thank you for all the beautiful spring flower displays in and around the town centre. They are truly magnificent. Well done, they really brighten my day.”

“The gardens are a real oasis so close to the town centre and at this time of the year a great place to sit enjoying a sandwich at lunchtime.”

“I want to say how beautiful the spring flowers in the town centre are and in particular in the Memorial Gardens. It is a joy to walk through the gardens and many thanks to everyone who has put in all the hard work to provide them.”

“The spring flowers in the town centre are stunning. Congratulations and keep up the good work. It is much appreciated.”

“I would like to commend the two workmen cutting the grass in Godinton Park. They took care in their work and carried out their duties with efficiency leaving a tidy area. The chap on the motor mower even lifted the tree branches whilst he mowed underneath and also litter picked as well. Well done!”

“Pass on my thanks to the two men who assisted with the burial of my mother’s ashes. They were very helpful and caring.”

“I saw the guys out this week maintaining the landscape at Drovers through to Trinity Road. I have never seen the landscape so professionally cut and with no debris left around. The street scene is incredible. Aspire’s start bodes well for the future

Aspire Winter Works Programme – 2017 /2018

In line with Aspire’s objective to improve the overall appearance of the borough we have developed a winter works programme and identified some key areas where works are planned during this coming winter period.

Aspire Landscape Management - Winter Works Programme 2017 -18			
Location	Summary of works	Duration	Proposed Timing
Buxford Meadow	Cutting works and formulation of regular mown pathways	1 week	Oct-17
St Marys Church	Bulb Planting (Galanthus and Crocus)	1 week	Oct-17
Spearpoint Roundabout	Replanting works	1 week	Oct-17
Drovers Roundabout	Bulb Planting (Galanthus and Crocus)	1 week	Oct-17
Cudworth Recreational areas	Vegetation clearance around scrapes and boundaries, cycle path	2 weeks	Oct-17
Victoria Park Watercress Fields	Cutting back of riverside banks and vegetation management	1 week	Nov-17
Victoria Park Wood Garden	Completion of clearance works & Stump grinding	1 week	Nov-17
Victoria Park Combat area	Clearance work and vegetation reductions around combat areas	2 weeks	Nov-17
Singleton Lake - Lake areas	Vegetation clearance to open up areas and views on to the lake	6 weeks	Dec-17
Singleton Lake - Car Park	Reinstatement of timber bollards car parking bays and installation of picnic benches	2 weeks	Jan-18
Singleton Lake - Lake swims	Repairs and restore swims and picnic bench installation	6 weeks	Jan-18
Bowens Field	Vegetation clearance and management	1 week	Feb-18
Ashford Road Roundabout	Clearance of trees	1 week	Mar-18
Spearpoint Recreation Ground	Soil mound removal	1 week	Mar-18
Park Farm roundabout	Clearance works, trees and shrubs, seeding and planting	2 weeks	Mar-18

Aspire – the future

Aspire Landscape Management is continually looking to improve the presentation of the borough and the standards of land management within it.

We will be supporting the development of Chilmington Green, providing advice and assistance where required.

We will look to expand opportunities to work with parish councils either advising on caretaker schemes or working for parish councils where co-located work allows.

We are and will continue to take the lead in advising on future management and maintenance options on land within our control and will actively support the development of cross service protocols to ensure all options are considered for best value, going forward.

Potential pressures

Since commencement of operations last October, Aspire continues to face high levels of demand, both internally and externally, for additional works. Having seen a considerable impact on borough presentation in a relatively short time, the service is very much a victim of its own success. Requests for additional works to areas owned by the borough, but not previously on former contracts, continue to grow. We were very aware that this year would be a “voyage of discovery” for all concerned, as we delivered a higher standard of presentation for the borough and as a result have a considerable volume of requests for additional areas of land to be cleared, brought up to standard and added to maintenance regimes. It is anticipated that this will continue into the next year, although potentially not at the volumes experienced this year.

As mentioned previously, budget pressures as a result of reduced Kent Highway Services (KHS) funding does, and will continue, to mean that the service faces the need to fund the aspirations for ever-improved borough presentation through sourcing additional work from bodies such as parishes and other land owners, to bridge the budget gap. The service is delivering higher standards and more work for less funding.

We continue to identify areas where there has been little or no maintenance in the last 10 years resulting in overgrowth. As we start to tackle these areas, the initial impact of such activities will be very visually noticeable. Going forward, these assets will require continued, routine maintenance to avoid any reversion.

The intention is also that the maintenance of ditches and waterways in the ownership of the borough, once cleared, will move to scheduled maintenance by Aspire.

Hard landscaping (including bridges, footpaths, fences) in open spaces has been improved, upgraded, installed and incorporated into Aspire’s maintenance regimes. The service has taken responsibility for identifying land within the ownership of the borough that is susceptible to incursion and is implementing a plan of works to secure areas on a risk rated basis.

Aspire welcomes the additional challenges these works present. However, it must be noted that the original remit for Aspire did not include this extensive additional work that has already been provided and is expected in the coming year.

Aspire will make every effort to absorb additional work and rise to these challenges but choices for the management of additional assets must be balanced against service resources and will require the careful management of expectations.

Included below is a list of some of the additional works Aspire has been requested to undertake during the year.

Conningbrook Lake

Requests for ongoing mowing works to be undertaken during 2017. Requirements for maintenance of this area is likely to vary in the forward leisure provisions.

Conningbrook Manor

Requests for varying maintenance and clearance works throughout 2017, to enable renovation works and prepare for the manor house to be let.



Ellingham Industrial Estate

Considerable additional works have been completed here as the original specification and frequency of operations had proved inadequate to deliver the standards of service expected by the tenants.





KCC Cycle Paths

The vegetation around cycle paths have been very poorly maintained. Whilst recognised as a County asset, Aspire has stepped in to cut back encroaching vegetation and kerb edge areas, where paths have become unsafe.



Alleyways and footpaths

A considerable amount of requests have been received for attendance to deal with overgrown alleyways across the borough, which have previously not been maintained or managed.



Alleyways – borough-wide

Requests for Aspire to attend to clear alleyways in varying locations across the borough, where those alleyways are accesses between housing estates, have been considerable. Alleyways that have not been subject to any works for some years have resulted in some being significantly overgrown. We are mindful that one-off clearances do not solve the ongoing maintenance issues, which will result in reoccurring work requirement in the future. We will endeavour to work with asset owners inside and outside the council to ensure on-going maintenance is instituted.



Future sites

We continue to identify new areas of land which are currently not being maintained and will require forward maintenance and management. As part of the open spaces consultation, alongside colleagues in Culture, we are identifying assets that will present a variety of maintenance requirements in the future. We will work with stakeholders and partner organisations to find the most efficient land maintenance solutions.

Boys Hall Meadow



Park Farm / Finn Farm Hibernacula



Lancaster Close



This year for Aspire has proved to be challenging and exciting.

The service is staffed by a team of very dedicated, focused and engaged people, working towards clear aspirations and delivering across the borough on an ever growing mandate of responsibilities.

We look forward in the coming year to developing and growing the service and considering business opportunities for the service in the longer term.



Achievements

October 2017 to September 2018



Background

In October 2016, Aspire Landscape Management was established; this followed Ashford Borough Council's decision to take the grounds maintenance function in house in line with Corporate Priority 4 – Attractive Ashford.

Alongside the day-to-day routine operations Aspire undertake, this document highlights just some of the second year's achievements, operations and activities over and above the "standard day job" which the Aspire team has completed and are worthy of a mention.

Aspire's birthday

On September 28 2017 Aspire held an open afternoon, inviting councillors to attend and celebrate its first birthday.

This gave the staff an opportunity to interact with the council members and demonstrated the broad range and complexity of the equipment and operations that the Aspire team undertake.

Additionally, it was an opportunity for staff to be awarded their certificates of competence by our Portfolio Holder Clair Bell.



Winter Works

In line with our planned approach, Aspire undertook a series of winter works. This focused on improvements across the borough on sites where significant cutting-back or rejuvenation was needed. These works were timed for winter, to allow for minimal impact to the wildlife and the site users accordingly.



Photo of new fencing at Singleton Lake Car Park

Winter works included:-

- Repairs to the swims at Singleton Lake
- General cutting back of vegetation
- Fencing and gate installations to prevent incursions
- Cutting back of vegetation at Cudworth Recreation Ground
- Hamstreet clearance works
- Bowens Field clearance works
- Bulb planting on Drovers Roundabout
- Bulb planting in St Marys Churchyard
- Replanting works at Spearpoint Roundabout

Commercial Business Plan

During the winter of 2017, James Laidlaw and Tracey Butler compiled a business plan; this plan was presented to Directors in April 2018. It focuses on seeking works commercially, allowing the generation of additional funds to support the renewal of small plant and equipment in future years.

Generation of low levels of income over the next five year period will ensure that the service is still clearly focused on the delivery of high standards of maintenance across the borough.

St Marys Churchyard

The Spring saw the crocuses that we planted last Autumn in full flower. The Members and Leader were delighted with the outcome as were the residents around St Marys.



Comments from the Mayor in Spring this year, on the whole Aspire service;

“Thank you so very much for the quick response to resident request. What a wonderful compliment of praise from a resident in the area. Aspire do such an incredible job all around Ashford and has made a huge positive mark on Ashford which is borne by the many comments I receive. On my behalf please thank all the team for their exceptional work and the care and attention they give to residents affected by their work.”

*With the kindest regards
Winston Michael
Mayor of Ashford”*

Mayor's Garden

On 17 May 2018, Aspire designed and installed a garden display in the council committee rooms for the new Mayor's (Cllr Jessamy Blandford) reception following the Mayor Making Ceremony. The garden design featured a waterfall and focused on a woodland theme, ahead of the year of the environment.



Garden display – Mayor making reception, Committee Rooms, 17th May 2018

The garden was extremely well received and delighted all attendees at the ceremony and following reception. There was particular praise from our Chief Executive (Tracey Kerly) and our Director (Ben Lockwood), as well as the Mayor herself.

Spring Bedding



Aspire had another successful year with the Spring bedding displays. Many positive comments were received on social media and in letters from the public.

We planted over 20,000 pansies and 15,000 tulip bulbs across the borough.

The work took four weeks to complete, planting commenced in October 2017 and was completed in time for Remembrance Day.

The spring bedding displays were at the peak of colour March and April 2018, before starting to die back in time for the summer bedding to be planted in May.

Civic Service

This year, Aspire supported the Civic Service, which took place on Sunday 3rd June 2018 at Great Chart Parish Church, with the reception being held at the Village Hall in Great Chart. Aspire supported the event in conjunction with Wyvale Garden Centre who supported the event by lending planters and plants which allowed us to decorate the village hall ahead of the reception. The displays were in place by 9.30 am on the Sunday and removed the same day following the end of the reception.



Over the Top installation and 100 Years commemorative displays

To mark and commemorate 100 years following the end of the First World War, Aspire designed and installed a number of commemorative displays within the Memorial Gardens, transforming the “Mound” with sand bags and soldier silhouettes and an artificial carpet measuring 5 metres square.



Over the top displays – memorial gardens with artificial poppy badge



This installation has been chosen to be the centre piece for the new “Flanders” roundabout coming to Ashford. The roundabout at the junction of the Romney Marsh Road, the A2070 and Malcolm Sargeant Way will be re-engineered at the beginning of 2019 and this installation will be the focus of the new design and stand in pride of place in Ashford for years to come.

The Silent Solider

In addition to the displays in the main Memorial Gardens, a “Silent Solider” silhouette was placed in the gardens, adjacent to the memorial, linking the display with those in the main gardens.

Links between the silhouette’s reflective stance and the memorial, along with this being a quieter area of the gardens were the reasons for its positioning.



Silent Solider – Memorial Gardens

The whole Memorial Gardens looked glorious this Summer.



Summer Bedding

In May 2018 we changed the winter bedding plants, stripping all the bulbs and pansies, cultivating the beds and planting over 20,000 geraniums. The works were completed in time for the Fields of Battle Exhibition.



This particular area (Somerset Road) has become a talking point for residents and Members in the town as the cannas have been so spectacular and often remarked upon.

The Floral Tank

This fantastic World War One British battle tank 3D display took over 3 months to produce. The tank weighs just over four tonnes and was installed on site using a telehandler with long forks. The carpet bed alongside the tank depicts the regimental flag of the WW1 tank unit. The carpet bed is displayed in a steel framework, which was also produced to order. Almost 10,000 carpet bedding plants were carefully planted into the tank framework by hand and the plants were grown on for six weeks before delivery.



Floral Tank in position, Vicarage Lane, Ashford, summer 2018

Construction phase of the Floral Tank, showing its weldmesh framework prior to planting spring 2018



Field of Battle Lands of Peace Exhibition

In June 2018, the Fields of Battle, Lands of Peace exhibition came to Ashford, after leaving the Guildhall in London. The exhibition was in place for a month during which time Aspire was responsible for cleaning and checking the displays. Aspire also supported the opening of the exhibition which took place on Sunday 3rd June.



FOLOP Exhibition – Memorial Gardens June 2018

Aspire and TCAT merger



In June Aspire and TCAT joined forces, TCAT staff transferred to Aspire along with their associated work in the Town. The merger followed a brief consultation process, once the staff were successfully on-boarded, town centre improvements have continued throughout the summer period.

Town centre improvements

Since TCAT and Aspire became one, Aspire have undertaken a number of town Centre improvements

These included:

- Bench painting

- Cleaning and painting the bandstand
- Replanting works
- Tree pruning in the churchyard
- Jet washing of the paved areas

Continued works are planned which will see further improvements around the town

Before and after photos of the replanting works carried out at Park Mall Shopping Centre, Ashford.



SnowDogs



Aspire has supported the SnowDogs exhibition, fixing the dogs onto concrete plinths, transporting the dogs to site, the final positioning and affixing signage. During the exhibition we will be regularly cleaning and checking the dogs, before collecting them all together for the Farewell event planned in December.



Impatience Team support

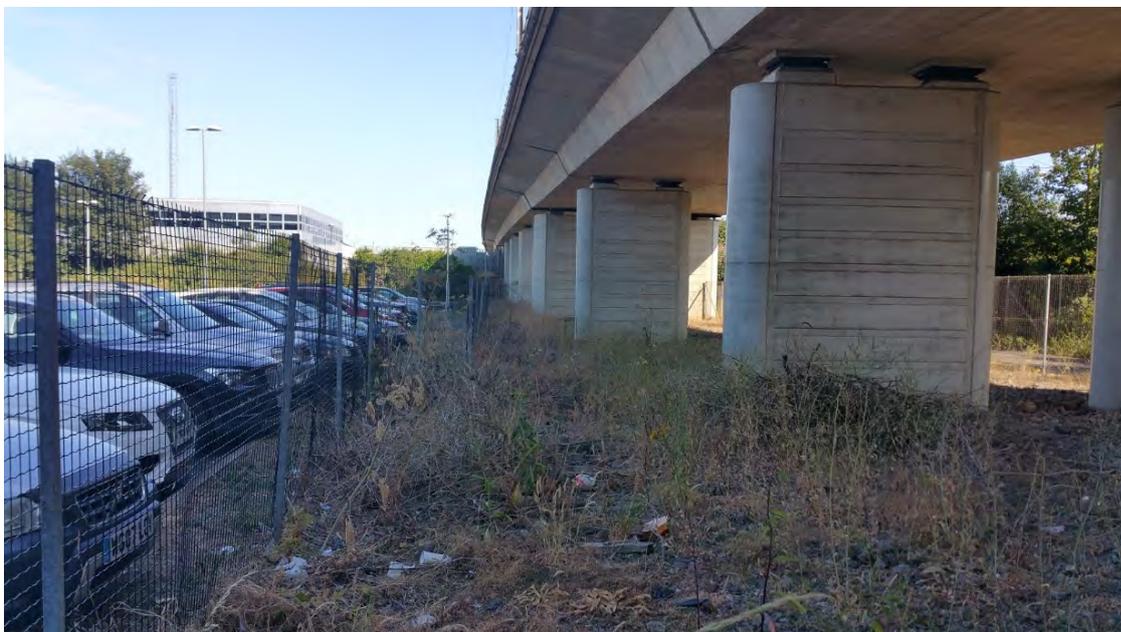


During August 2018, Aspire undertook clearance works along the riverside and cycle pathways leading from the domestic station towards the Designer Outlet and Millstream. These works form part of the Impatience Team project, which is aimed at improving the routes into the town and connectivity with the Designer Outlet.

(Photographs following show before and after images of the cycleway around the subway entrances adjacent to the station and HS1 flyover

Improvements around the underpass access...

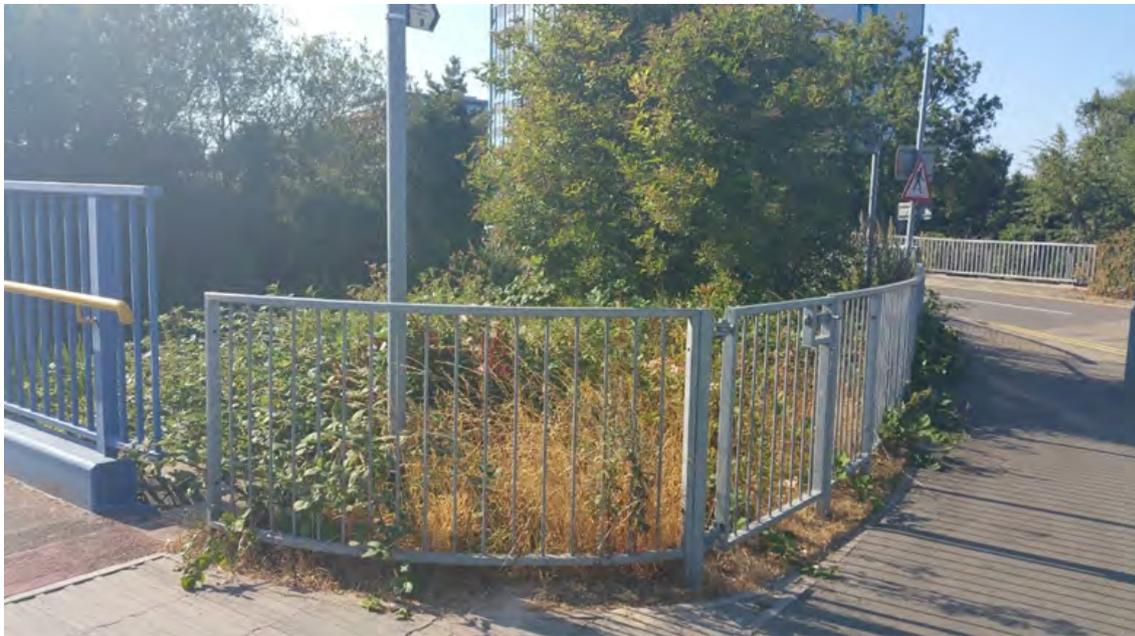




Clearing under HS1



Opening up, cleaning and repainting the underpass access from the Outlet Centre end...



Transforming the area adjacent to the station access..



ISO Certification

Aspire has been certificated to ISO 9001, Quality, ISO 14001, Environment and ISO 45001, Health and Safety, in July. Colin Munro, Health, Safety, Environment and Quality Manager has been working hard to achieve these accreditations. This certification follows weeks of preparation and compliance checks to ensure Aspire fully complies with the standards.



Commercial Customers

Aspire has continued to build its customer portfolio with other local organisations, providing grounds maintenance and associated services allowing the generation of income. Customers include:

- High Halden Parish Council
- Westwell Parish Council
- Shadoxhurst Parish Council
- Challock Parish Council
- Singleton and Great Chart Parish Council
- Morgan Sindall
- Julie Rose Stadium



Kent Highway Services

Aspire continue to provide Kent Highway Services with the maintenance of the highway verges and border areas across the borough, enhancing the maintenance frequencies accordingly to provide a suitably-maintained appearance. As a result of these enhanced frequencies and standards, this Spring Aspire received commendations on the appearance of the borough from Kent Highways and thanks for our hard work from highway officers, confirming the positive comments they had received since Aspire had commenced operations.

Winter Works Programme 2018/2019

Tabled below are some of the projects and enhancements that Aspire intend to complete over the winter months into the Spring of 2019

Location	Summary of works	Duration	Proposed Timing
Park Farm Central Park	Clearance of hedging and knee rail	2 weeks	Dec-18
Allotment Project William Rd	Development of seating area, raised beds and community store / potting shed	2 weeks	Feb-19
Litter Bin Roll Out	Replacement of bins	Ongoing	Jan-19
Memorial safety inspections	Cat 1 and 2 re-inspection works	4 weeks	Nov-18
Singleton Lake	Installation of picnic benches, bollards and further clearance works. Review re-surfacing options and costs	8 weeks	Dec-18
Victoria Park	Combat area and watercress fields further vegetation clearance works	8 weeks	Dec-18
Lancaster Close, Hamstreet	Continuation of reinstatement works further to clearance works	2 weeks	Jan-19
Fairfield Terrace	Hedge reduction	1 week	Jan-19
Bowens Field	Clearance works	2 weeks	Jan-19
A28 Gateway Roundabout	Re -landscaping	4 weeks	Dec-18
Forrester Place	Planting works	2 weeks	Nov-18
Park Farm	Hedge planting works	2 weeks	Jan-19
Town Centre	Planting works (bulbs)	1 week	Oct-18
St Marys Churchyard	Tree planting	1 week	Feb-19
Memorial Gardens	Remembrance Sunday preparation	1 month	Oct-18
North Park	Poppy Field installation	1 week	Nov-18
Car Parks	Initial clearance and tidying	2 months	Feb-19



Achievements

October 2018 to April 2019



Autumn – Civic Centre flag poles

Enhancements were made to the bed at the front of the flag poles at the Civic Centre. New top soil was imported and the bed was planted with seasonal bedding to brighten the area.



Flag poles – before improvement



Flag poles – after improvement

The One Show

Aspire undertook cleaning of the bandstand and planting works ahead of The One Show event on Friday 9th November. Aspire were integral in facilitating the event, supporting the BBC in the offloading of barriers and equipment on the day.



“I wanted to put on record a note of thanks to you and your teams for hosting us for the evening for the rickshaw challenge arrival, I’m sure you will agree – it was a great evening, the coverage of the rickshaw arrival from Ashford was very well received. The evening drew one of the largest crowds we have had in a long time in the history of the rickshaw challenge!”

“From the initial approach through to the realisation of the project you were very welcoming & a pleasure to deal with – very on side and can do, which really does make things easier for us – so thank you again.”

“Please could you be so kinds as to pass on our thanks to all involved in making this production happen.”

*Regards
Dave Rutter
Production Engineering Manager – The One Show*

*NBH 07BR
BBC Broadcasting House
Portland Place
London W1A 1AA*

Autumn - Remembrance Day

Aspire supported the Remembrance Day events within the Memorial Gardens. Works involved the provision of red carpeting for spectators, and a remembrance garden which featured a silent soldier silhouette, similar to the one we displayed on the Civic Park.



Preparations for the remembrance service – Memorial Gardens

Remembrance Garden

A silhouette of a soldier was used as the backdrop to the remembrance garden. The remembrance garden was placed adjacent to the memorial, and surrounded with sand bags, reflecting the area's purpose and ties with the Great War.



Autumn - Battles Over

As part of Ashford Borough Council tribute to commemorating the end of the Great War, Aspire was heavily involved in the delivery of the Battles Over event hosted on Civic Park on the evening of the 11th November 2018.

The event included the planting of 3000 ceramic poppies around a silent soldier silhouette.



Dear Colleagues

I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank you and all who have contributed so much to making last Sunday, such a special day of tribute on behalf of the Borough of Ashford.

The Remembrance Service in the morning was attended by the biggest turnout of the public that I have ever seen. The work that went into the preparation and indeed on the day itself was clearly reflected in the wonderful execution of the event. It was both poignant and dignified and the Memorial Gardens were a picture to behold.

The evening event was a stunning and moving tribute, that was clearly much appreciated by a really large gathering of our local residents and visitors. Our Mayor set the scene with a warm welcome, but in doing so reminded us of the debt we owe to so many who give their all to defend our nation and ensure that we can live in harmony and freedom. Cllr Stephen Dehnel, drawing on his military experience, contributed to the precision and quite rightly kept us all on our toes to ensure that programme was executed according to the plan.

The Civic Memorial Beacon - lit for the first time as part of the nationwide tribute, lived up to every expectation. The Poppy Tribute flowing around the beacon was quite magical. Then add the military band, the Colour Party, the solitary soldiers standing vigil over the carpet of poppies, was just so fitting. The moving content of the poetry readings coupled with the old footage shown on the big screen, all blended so well to create such a comprehensive event. The Big Screen must remain an integral part of our future events.

We should all be so very proud of what we have been able to achieve and this clearly sets the standard for the future.

I would not want to miss thanking anyone who contributed in whatever way to the success of this special Sunday, and I am accordingly relying on all senior managers to convey this message of thanks to all staff.

Once again my sincere thanks and appreciation for such first class commemorative events.

Kindest regards

Gerry

*Gerry Clarkson CBE, QFSM, BA (Hons).
Leader - Ashford Borough Council
Ward Member Charing*

The Snow Dog – Moves

Aspire undertook the movement of the snow dog starting with the collection of the dogs from around the town which took place on a Sunday afternoon and evening. Moving them from their locations to the pound for a pamper, before moving them to the Farewell event hosted at the Julie Rose Stadium. On both occasions the dogs could not be lifted from position until after two pm. The Aspire management team worked into the evening moving the dogs.



Winter – Santa’s Grotto

Santa’s grotto received a full make-over in December in line with our commitment to support the town and the town centre generation team. The grotto was fully painted and featured a snow covered roof, frosted windows and front garden features.



Christmas Trees

Aspire installed three Christmas trees within the Civic Centre in early December. One was placed in Customer Services main reception, one outside the Leader’s office and the other was placed within the Committee rooms for full council on the 13th December, before it was transferred to the Mayor’s Parlour.



Winter - Clearance Works

Over the winter period Aspire undertook a number of improvements to areas previously overgrown with bramble, with a view to maintaining these areas as amenity grass in the future. These clearances have been met with really positive feedback from residents and the local community.

Gordon Close



Gordon Close – Prior to clearance works



Gordon Close – After clearance works

Hunter Road Recreation Ground Clearance Works



Before clearance



After clearance

Park Farm Clearance Works



Before clearance works



After clearance

Dear Aspire Team

“This is a belated but sincere Thank You to you for the work done earlier this year to improve the amenity pathway around the perimeter of Park Farm.

Following on from the clearance work done last winter which cut back the vegetation and opened up pleasant walkways again, the new hard surfacing replaces the muddy tracks that were impassable in places and restores an important leisure facility on the development.

Thank You once again.”

Kind Regards

Sue Past

Volunteer Parish Footpath Observer for the Ramblers [PROWs in Kingsnorth]

Volunteer Local Footpath Officer for the Ramblers

[PROWs in the Parishes of Kingsnorth, Shadoxhurst, Great Chart with Singleton, and Stanhope]

Resident Engagement and Improvements – Forrester Place

During the autumn, Councillor Jenny Webb asked Aspire to attend a residents meeting at Forrester Place to discuss the housing scheme outdoor spaces. It was clear the residents had a keen interest in the presentation of the area and would welcome some improvements. Aspire undertook a walk around the site and together with the residents identified some key areas where planting and fencing improvement could be made. Over the winter period a number of areas were planted and new fencing was erected to avoid car parking issues.



Winter - A28 Great Chart Roundabout

Phase one of improvement works to the small roundabout on the A28 were carried out in January 2019.

Although a KHS asset, under Aspire's maintenance, the roundabout was earmarked for improvements as part of a 'spend to save' initiative.

The shrubs were of a poor species and weed control was difficult as the roundabout was located within a 60 mph speed limit giving rise to safety concerns.

Following the appropriate consultation with KHS and the Environment and Land Management Portfolio holder, agreement was reached to grub out the existing shrubs and replace with simple stones.

Before



After



Winter - New Planting Works

New schemes were planted to enhance previously bare areas around the borough; two notable areas photographed below include an area at New Rents on the ring road and three raised planters in Royds Road. Both of these areas were previously in a poor state and lacked colour and planting.



New Planting works at New Rents, Town Centre, Ashford



New Planting works – Royds Road



Winter - Memorial Inspections

Aspire have taken on the role of inspecting memorials within the open cemetery areas. Operatives have been trained in the laying-down of memorials, avoiding the additional cost of outsourcing this operation.



Winter - Litter Bin Installations

Aspire has taken on the installation of the new litter bins across the borough, with the first 50 being installed over the winter period. Further roll-outs will continue over the next three years.



Winter - Car Park Maintenance

Aspire had taken on the maintenance for the Borough Council owned car parking facilities. Areas of these car parks have seen limited maintenance to the soft estate in recent years.

Aspire undertook initial clearance of the car park areas over the winter period prior to establishing an on-going regular maintenance regime.



Spring - Civic Park Tree Planting

In March, Aspire undertook the planting of 17 Liquidambar trees on Civic Park. The first of which was planted by the Mayor in January to mark the start of the Year of the Environment.

The trees have been planted to form a structured avenue along the parallel with the footpaths either side of the park.

Each tree has been protected by a tree guard which carries three Ashford crests.



Spring - Bedding

Aspire had another successful year with the spring bedding displays. Many positive comments were received on social media and in letters from the public.

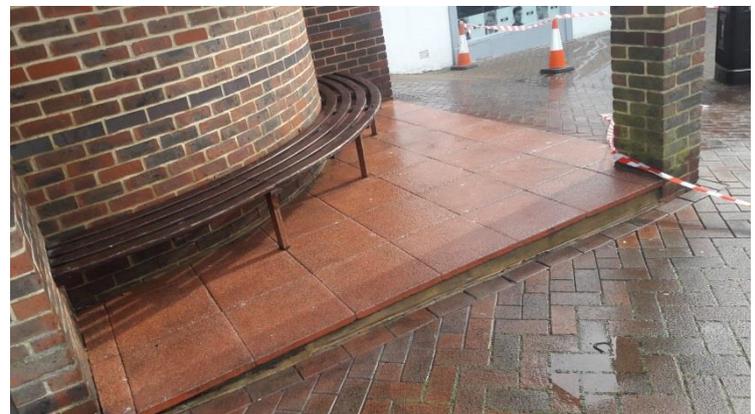
We planted over 20,000 pansies and 15,000 tulip bulbs across the borough.

The work took four weeks to complete, planting commenced in October 2018 and was completed in time for Remembrance Day.



Spring - Town Centre Improvement Works

Following the merger of TCAT and Aspire, we have continued to maintain, enhance and tidy the town centre. Works have included tackling areas of land not under maintenance, pressure washing and bench cleaning.



Jet washing and bench painting New Rents,



Tidying works at the Telephone Exchange



Bench washing works

Spring - Memorial Gardens – Improvements

In a drive to allow greater access into the Memorial Gardens for large vehicles and enhance visibility for remembrance events, Aspire undertook a reconfiguration of the entrance gates, together with the replacement of an overgrown hedge with metal railing fencing. Areas of bare border were turfed to allow greater standing space and hedges planted to soften the fence lines



Spring – Bentley Road, Willesborough

Works have been undertaken to improve the security of this piece of open land, to prevent any potential incursion. This has also succeeded in significantly improving the appearance of the entrance.



Vicarage Lane Car Park – Improvements



Aspire undertook the reframing of the mural on the side of the storage container in Vicarage Lane Car Park. The frame and surround were broken and damaged. The Aspire reframed the mural with a black surround.



Biddenden Play Area – Refurbishment



Aspire have completed the re-painting of the play equipment at Biddenden





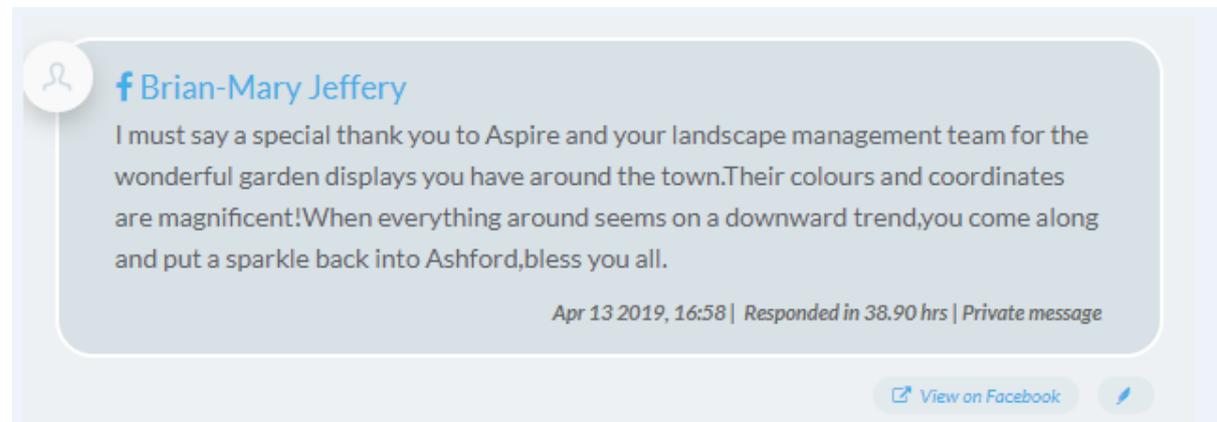
New Play Equipment Installations

Aspire have arranged the installation of some items of new play equipment on play areas in need of refurbishment. The budget for this element is limited and consequently with the capital expenditure being so high our ability to undertake this work is limited.



New see-saw at Little Burton Play Area

Positive feedback



A screenshot of a Facebook private message. The message is from a user named Brian-Mary Jeffery, who has a profile picture of a person. The message text is: "I must say a special thank you to Aspire and your landscape management team for the wonderful garden displays you have around the town. Their colours and coordinates are magnificent! When everything around seems on a downward trend, you come along and put a sparkle back into Ashford, bless you all." The message was sent on April 13, 2019, at 16:58, and the recipient responded in 38.90 hours. At the bottom right of the message box, there are two buttons: "View on Facebook" and a blue pencil icon for editing.

 **f Brian-Mary Jeffery**

I must say a special thank you to Aspire and your landscape management team for the wonderful garden displays you have around the town. Their colours and coordinates are magnificent! When everything around seems on a downward trend, you come along and put a sparkle back into Ashford, bless you all.

Apr 13 2019, 16:58 | Responded in 38.90 hrs | Private message

[View on Facebook](#) 

Churchyard Tree Planting

Dear James

“I just wanted to pass on my thanks to Jamie and the rest of your team who helped me on Tuesday to make the tree planting ceremony occur in St Marys Church Yard. The vicar Richard attended, as did a few of his colleagues, and I felt it really helped to build stronger ties between us and the Church.

Richard said how pleased he was with the work that's been done in the Church Yard, especially the trimming of trees and vegetation, and the bulbs (7000 of them!) which were up and spectacular when we were there. So many thanks for all your hard work and that of your team that has, bit by bit, helped to make the centre of our town a better place.”

Kind regards

Bill Barrett.

“Thank you all for your work on this”

Kind regards,

**Cllr Graham Galpin MSc, FIPM
Member for Stour Ward
Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Corporate Property**

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Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Report Tracker – 23 July 2019

Report Title	Date due to O&S	Reporting Service	Scope of what is to be scrutinised
Ashford For You	23 July 2019	Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications	A review of the Magazine's first year of publication, its reception among residents and plans/potential for development/digitalisation of the magazine/other communications
Aspire performance	23 July 2019	Environment and Land Management	An overview of the performance and development of Aspire Landscape Management.
Wye3 Masterplan	27 August 2019	Planning and Development	Findings of the O&S Task and Finish Group's review of the Wye3 masterplan consultation.
Quarter 1 Performance	27 August 2019	Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications	Information on what the Council has achieved through its decision making; key performance data and wider contextual information.
Quarter 2 Performance	22 October 2019	Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications	Information on what the Council has achieved through its decision making; key performance data and wider contextual information.
Budget Scrutiny Preparation	22 October 2019	Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications/ Finance and IT	An introduction to the budget scrutiny process at Ashford Borough Council
Budget Scrutiny Task Group – Final Report	21 January 2020	Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications/ Finance and IT	Presentation of the findings of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group for discussion and endorsement by the Committee.
Community Safety Partnership	18 February 2020	Community Safety and Wellbeing	A review of the decisions made and action taken in connection with the discharge of crime and disorder functions by the members of the Community Safety Partnership. The Committee operates as the designated Crime and Disorder Committee for the council.

Safeguarding Update	18 February 2020	Housing	Annual update to the committee on the council's work on safeguarding adults and children at risk.
Quarter 3 Performance	18 February 2020	Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications	Information on what the Council has achieved through its decision making; key performance data and wider contextual information.
Items for future consideration			
Staff Resources – Legal & Democratic		Legal and Democratic	Requested to be considered by the Budget Scrutiny Task Group
Void properties		Housing	Requested by the Budget Scrutiny Task Group in regard to work undertaken to address void properties in the PSL sector.
Broadband provision and planning		Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications/ Planning and Development	Requested by the Budget Scrutiny Task Group in regard to the council's work on delivering high-speed broadband to new and existing properties within the borough.
Future plans for public transport		Community Safety and Wellbeing	Requested by the Vice-Chairman in regard to the use of low emission and fit for purpose buses in Ashford
Ashford Waste Water Treatment Works		Community Safety and Wellbeing	Requested by the Leader in regard to odours impacting on the quality of residents' lives in Kennington/Little Burton Farm
Kent Fire and Rescue Service – volunteer support		Community Safety and Wellbeing	Requested by the Committee in regard to a shortage of volunteer support for KFRS being noted at Tenterden.
Accessibility concerns at Elwick Place		Corporate Property and Projects	Requested by the Committee in response to concerns raised by Ashford Access group.

Overview and Scrutiny - Topic Selection assessment

Topic under consideration.....

1. Does the topic represent a key issue for local people and is it likely to result in improvements for local people?

		Yes
		No

2. Is the issue strategic and significant?

		Yes
		No

3. Does the topic fall within a Community or Corporate priority area?

		Yes
		No

4. Is it likely to lead to effective outcomes?

		Yes
		No

Stage 1 (validity) assessment - reject any topic with a 'No' response to any of questions 1 to 4.

5. Will scrutiny involvement be duplicating some other work?

		Yes
		No

Stage 2 (validity) assessment - reject any topic with a 'Yes' response to question 5

6. Is it an issue of concern to partners and stakeholders?

		Yes
		No

7. Is it an issue of community concern or is there a high level of dissatisfaction with the service?

		Yes
		No

8. Are there adequate resources available to do the activity well?

		Yes
		No

9. Is the scrutiny activity timely?

		Yes
		No

Stage 3 (priority) assessment

*Topics with a 'No' response to any of questions 6 to 9 should be deemed **LOW PRIORITY***

*Topics with a 'Yes' response to all of questions 6 to 9 should be deemed **HIGH PRIORITY***

Stage 1 - Validity

Does the topic represent a key issue for the public and is it likely to result in improvements for local people?

Yes

Is the issue strategic and significant?

Yes

Does the topic fall within a Community or Corporate priority area?

Yes

Is it likely to lead to effective outcomes?

Yes

No

No

No

No

Stage 2 - Validity

Will scrutiny involvement be duplicating some other work?

Yes

No

REJECT

Is it an issue of concern to partners and stakeholders?

Yes

No

Is it an issue of community concern or is there a high level of dissatisfaction with the service?

Yes

No

Are there adequate resources available to do the activity well?

Yes

No

Is the scrutiny activity timely?

Yes

No

Stage 3 - Priority

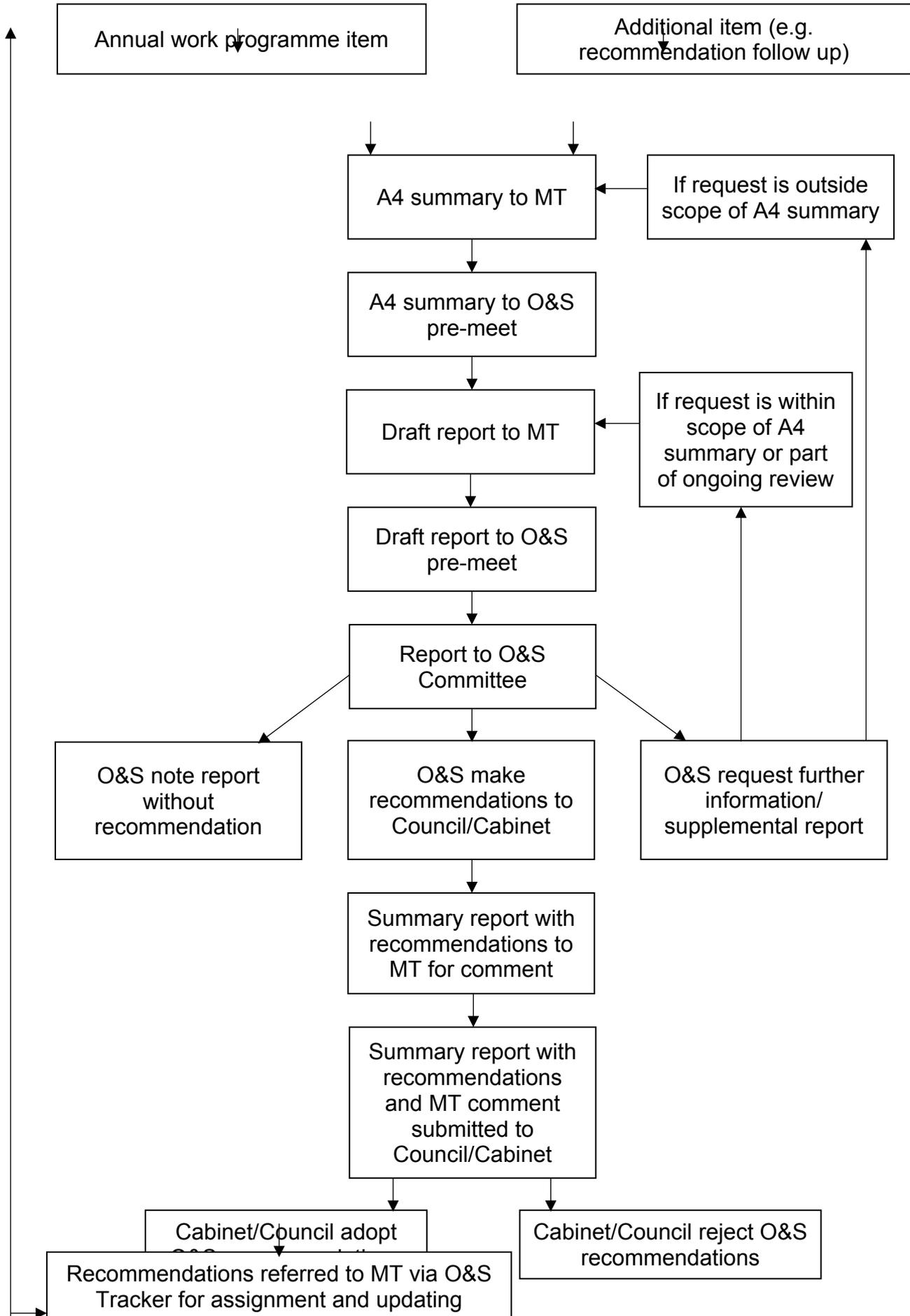
ADD TO WORK PROGRAMME

High Priority

CONSIDER LOW PRIORITY

O&S Reporting flowchart

O&S Tracker records Committee forward plan and recommendations made



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