



ASHFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Housing Delivery Action Plan

August 2020

1) INTRODUCTION

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and supporting Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) set out the need to complete a Housing Delivery Test (HDT). This test measures the number of homes required (as prescribed by Government) over a three-year period against the number of homes delivered and calculates the result as a percentage.

The latest HDT covers the monitoring years for Ashford borough from 2016/17 to 2018/19 and the results were published in February 2020.

Ashford scored an HDT result of **93%**

Please note that the original publication of the HDT for Ashford wrongly calculated the figure as 88%. As the MHCLG only publish the measurement annually, the publication will not be amended, but the letter below states that 93% is the correct figure.

[View letter from MHCLG explaining Ashford's re-calculated HDT \[pdf\] 108KB](#)

Delivery performance of less than 95% requires a Housing Delivery Action Plan (HDAP) to be prepared and the application of a 5% buffer to our 5-year housing land supply figure (this will be published later in the year).

This HDAP explores the reasons for under-delivery and establishes actions to reduce the risk of under-delivery getting worse and sets out the measures the Council intends to take to rectify the position.

This HDAP is intended to be a practical document, focussed on effective measures aimed at improving delivery within an area underpinned by local evidence and research of key issues. This is the Council's first HDAP and has been produced within 6 months of the HDT 2019 results.

2) HOUSING DELIVERY IN ASHFORD

Ashford is a diverse borough and continues to be a sought after location for housebuilding investment, competing with other nearby markets within the South East. The Borough enjoys excellent connectivity, including the High Speed 1 service which enables 38 minute journey times to London and an excellent road network to local and nearby Kent markets. This has been enhanced recently through the delivery of a new Junction 10a of the M20 – a multi-million pound project, delivered by substantial public funding.

The Council have long recognised the importance of housing delivery in terms of the social and economic benefits it brings. This delivery has been consistently shaped by a range of Local Plans that have provided a clear plan-led approach to help steer and shape the market. This focus continues. The Council's Local Plan 2030 was adopted as recently as 2019. It provides a comprehensive planning policy framework to deliver sustainable housing growth in the borough.

However, it is not about delivering housing above all else. The Council have always placed great importance on the quality of the places that are to be delivered, including how the communities will grow and flourish and ensuring that they are supported by infrastructure.

That said, the Council also recognise that it is the development industry and housebuilders who directly impact how many houses are built. This needs to be understood when looking at housing delivery.

The housing market is sensitive to market forces and fluctuations, such as the local and national economic situation and other influences. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic highlights this fact. As does the previous 2008 market crash and national recession. This clearly restricted public spending on projects and the markets ability to deliver houses, for several years, on a national scale.

Therefore, it is accepted that the rate of housing delivery in the borough will fluctuate over various cycles, despite the Council providing a robust, sound and positively prepared policy framework to help shape its delivery and this framework being up to date.

The recent Housing Delivery Test result of 93% demonstrates how the market can fluctuate and we welcome the opportunity to prepare this Action Plan, as a means of highlighting some of the key issues and establishing actions for addressing these issues.

3) TAKING STOCK

This section of the Action Plan provides a snapshot of various issues that relate to the local housing market and its ability to delivery housing.

It should be noted however, that Government guidance suggests that engagement with stakeholders is required to understand the nature of the housing market and identify any barriers to housing delivery. However, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, some of this engagement has had to be curtailed. It will be undertaken shortly.

This is countered somewhat as the Council recently undertook extensive preparation to support the Local Plan 2030 which was adopted in Feb 2019. This process involved significant engagement with the local housing market, including developers and land agents.

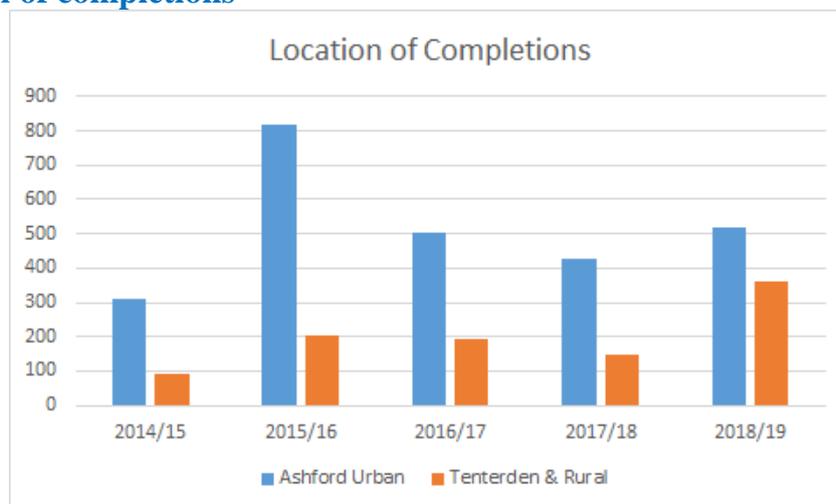
1) HOUSING DELIVERY AND PLANNING DATA

Housing completions: In the past 10 years 5,690 dwellings have been completed in the borough.

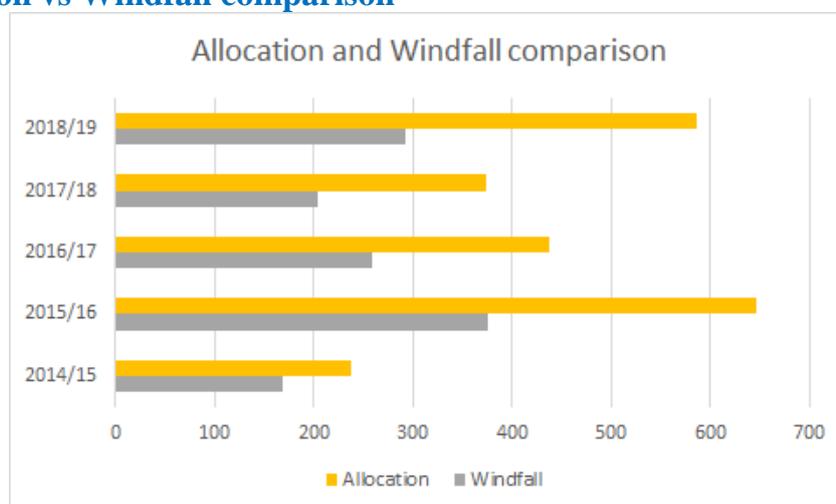
Year	Housing completions
2009/2010	501
2010/2011	555
2011/2012	633
2012/2013	284
2013/2014	137
2014/2015	405
2015/2016	1022
2016/2017	696
2017/2018	577
2018/2019	880



Location of completions



Allocation vs Windfall comparison



Number of dwellings granted over the last 5 years



(Note: this does not include the 12/00400/AS Chilmington Green application for 5,750 homes granted permission in 2016-2017)

Five year housing land supply: The Housing Land Supply Calculation set out in the update for 2019-2024, published November 2019, shows that the Council is able to demonstrate a housing land supply of 5.12 years, including a 5%

buffer. Further details can be found in the Council's AMR¹ and the [Five Year Housing Land Supply Update Report](#)².

2) THE NATURE OF THE LOCAL HOUSING MARKET

Active operators: There are a range of operators active in the housing market within the borough, ranging from national house builders to smaller more local ones. This mix brings diversity to the local housing market and makes it more resilient.

Mix of housing sites: The housing strategy adopted in the Local Plan 2030 recognised the demand from the market for a variety of housing products in the borough. This responds to people's various needs, but also the desire to make the local housing market as diverse as possible – again with resilience in mind.

In doing so, the Local Plan 2030 allocated sites that provided a range of choice and competition to the market, thus providing the greatest chance that housing will be consistently delivered over the whole plan period. Some key examples are as follows:

- ***Flatted development in the traditional Town Centre:*** Over recent years there has been clear market demand to deliver flatted accommodation in the traditional town centre area, utilising High Speed One (HS1) with its excellent and frequent connections to London.

Many of these flats are now under construction. However, as this has been a new housing product for the Town it has taken longer than perhaps anticipated for the market to deliver them. This is to be expected, and market confidence remains sensitive.

However, a balanced view needs to be taken. These sites are now coming forward and they have the ability to deliver large numbers of new housing in the short to medium term, in what are highly sustainable brownfield locations within the urban area – an area which is well supported by existing infrastructure and infrastructure that is planned to be delivered.

- ***Chilmington Green and the South of Ashford Garden Community:*** Chilmington Green is another type of housing product within borough. It is planned to be a sustainable urban community that will deliver 5,750 homes, over 1,000 jobs, five schools and associated infrastructure. The scheme is underpinned by many of the Garden City principles. The emerging development being planned at Court Lodge will extend this sustainable urban community further east.

¹ Ashford Borough Council's 2018/2019 AMR available at:
<https://www.ashford.gov.uk/media/9166/annual-monitoring-reports-2018-19.pdf>

² Five Year Housing Land Supply Update 2019-2024 Report available at:
<https://www.ashford.gov.uk/media/8875/five-year-housing-land-supply-update-19-24.pdf>

However, delivering such a large development has taken time. This experience is not limited to Chilmington Green – many large-scale developments across the country face similar problems when moving from the planning phase to the delivery phase.

Issues such as securing financial agreements, establishing robust cash flow models and land assembly has all resulted in significant lead in times and subsequently delayed housing delivery from what was originally planned. It also takes time to properly plan and deliver the much needed supporting infrastructure, such as the desire to deliver health facilities in the surrounding area – important to ensure that the development delivers a quality and sustainable place.

Housing completions are now coming forward at Chilmington Green. There is little doubt that this scheme can deliver substantial levels of new houses in the short, medium and longer term in a sustainable location which has a robust policy framework supporting delivery.

- ***Sites in the rural areas:*** The Borough has an extensive rural area. Most of this area is countryside, including two internationally protected sites, two nature reserves, 13 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and 68 Local Wildlife sites. A significant proportion of the countryside falls within two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

This context was recognised in the recent Local Plan 2030 in terms of housing sites. The strategy is to target appropriate levels of housing growth to different rural settlements based on their relative sustainability whilst also protecting the attractive characteristics of the countryside and existing rural settlements.

As such, a broad and varied range of rural residential site allocations were identified in the Local Plan 2030 to provide the local housing market with choice. Most of these rural site allocations were phased to be delivered early in the plan process, to assist housing supply in the short to medium term.

The approach to housing in the rural area remains a balanced one – a scale of development is proposed which can be sustainably accommodated in the rural area. This reflects the local circumstances and remains appropriate. This position has recently been supported by two independently appointed Planning Inspectors, as part of the Local Plan 2030.

3) INFRASTRUCTURE ISSUES

To ensure great places are delivered, it is essential that new residential development is supported by the necessary social, community, physical and e-technology infrastructure, facilities and services. This is a key Strategic Objective in the Council's Local Plan 2030 and something which the Council

has a strong record of delivering, through working with public stakeholders and partners, as well as developers.

Recent successes include improvements of Junction 9 and Junction 10 of the M20. In addition, a new Junction 10a has recently opened which provides greater capacity. Also, upgrades have been recently delivered at Bybrook Wastewater Treatment works to increase its capacity.

However, infrastructure issues remain. These include issues associated with the wider A28 corridor to the south west of Ashford. Discussions on this are progressing.

The Council continue to engage in discussions with key stakeholders through various channels, including:

- ***South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP):*** The SELEP is the key body determining strategic economic priorities and investments for the area which includes East Sussex, Essex, Kent, Medway, Southend and Thurrock. The Borough has already benefitted from significant funding for projects through the SELEP Growth Plan and Local Growth Fund, including major contributions towards M20 Junction 10a, Chart Road and Ashford College.
- ***Ashford Strategic Delivery Board:*** The Board comprises Ashford Borough Council and other key public sector partners including Kent County Council, Homes England, Skills Funding Agency, Arts Council England, the Highways Agency and Ashford College. The local Member of Parliament is also a Board member and the Board has a good track record in helping to get projects delivered and funded.
- ***Kent County Council:*** The Borough and County Councils have already achieved a lot by working together on projects over recent years. This approach is reflected in the 'District Deal' signed by both Councils - a formally agreed statement of the Councils' shared commitment to work together in key areas. This is the first such agreement in Kent. A District Deal board oversees delivery of the agreed projects.
- ***Chilmington Green Delivery and Implementation Board:*** The "Chilmington Together Delivery and Implementation Board" is a public / private partnership made up of nine representatives to facilitate, nurture and sustain long-term value-creating relationships through the delivery of the Chilmington Green development. Reporting on a quarterly basis to the Ashford Strategic Delivery Board (ASDB), the DIB sets out actions on a rolling 12-month delivery plan, identifies and secures public / private sector investment to the project, and champions a placemaking approach to the new community of Chilmington Green.

4) THE ACTION PLAN

<u>Theme 1 – Understanding the barriers to delivery</u>			
Action	Purpose	Timing	Priority
Assess relevant planning data	Assess the available data to determine whether some planning consents aren't being implemented and whether any trends arise – are certain site typologies or locations presenting issues more than others, and if so, map a way forward.	Short term	High
Market feedback	Pro-actively contact landowners/site owners where applications have been granted for a time, and not yet commenced. And, Pro-actively contact landowners/site owners where applications have not been submitted on sites allocated in either the Local Plan 2030 or adopted Neighbourhood Plans.	Short term	High
Developer/ Land Agent workshop	Set up a general stakeholder working group to include developers and land agents as a means of discussing emerging issues to delivery with local stakeholders (ideally every six months)	Short term	High
Establish better working practices	Progress a more collaborative approach with all delivery partners to understand what barriers might exist and what is needed to unlock delivery	Medium / Longer term	Medium
<u>Theme 2 – The Planning Process</u>			
Action	Purpose	Timing	Priority
S106 process	To review the S106 process to see whether it is fit for purpose and as efficient as possible. To include liaison with key partners.	Short term	High

Action	Purpose	Timing	Priority
Review Planning Committee data	Review planning committee data to see if any trends emerge.	Medium term	Medium
PAS review implementation	To implement the PAS review where it relates to improving planning performance.	Short term	High
Planning Performance Agreements	To review the use of Planning Performance Agreements when staffing levels return to a suitable level.	Medium term	Medium
To review planning application process	To review the wider planning application process, ranging from pre-commencement conditions, the role of pre-app advice, on-going case management and the service we provide to customers.	Short term	High
Planning application prioritisation	To review whether certain types of planning applications need to be prioritised above others.	Medium term	Medium
Engagement with Stakeholders	To review and enhance engagement methods with Ward Members, Parish Councils, Community Groups and the public on development schemes and plan making process	Ongoing	High

Theme 3 – Infrastructure Delivery

Action	Purpose	Timing	Priority
Engagement with key partners	Continue to work proactively with key partners and stakeholders in relation to the delivery of key infrastructure.	Ongoing	High
Funding opportunities	Continue to actively review and pursue relevant funding from Government in order to unlock key developments and support our partners aspirations.	Ongoing	High

Theme 4 – Maintain a Plan led approach

Action	Purpose	Timing	Priority
Local Plan	Continue to adopt a comprehensive plan led system through assisting in the implementation of the recent Local Plan 2030.	Ongoing	High
Neighbourhood Plans	Continue to provide appropriate levels of support and advice to bodies engaged in Neighbourhood Plans and ensure that their objectives are clear regarding housing delivery.	Ongoing	Medium
Monitoring data	Establish better practices for the monitoring of housing data, including housing completions so that we are more aware of the issues in a timely way so we can map a response more quickly.	Medium	High
Brownfield Register	Review and update the brownfield register to grant permission in principle.	Medium	High
Local Plan Review	Trigger a Local Plan review if needed and if considered to be a suitable response to emerging issues. Work to include a 'call for sites' exercise, reviewing housing and economic land availability assessments and potential revisions to existing policies / introduction of new ones.	Longer term	Low (at this point)

5) MONITORING AND REVIEW

The actions from the HDAP will be implemented in due course and then monitored. This will allow the Council to better understand any root causes of under delivery. If required (depending on the outcome of a future Housing Delivery Test), another Action Plan will be produced next year. This will review the actions and successes from this Action Plan, as well as highlighting if further actions (including new actions) are needed.