



## Greater Ashford Borough – Environment & Land Mapping Commission

### NOTES of the 4<sup>th</sup> Meeting held virtually on 18 January 2022 at 1030

#### Present

##### Commission Members

Neil Bell	Chair of Commission & ABC Portfolio Holder Planning & Development
Noel Ovenden	Vice Chair of Commission & Leader of Ashford Independent Party & ABC Chair of Overview & Scrutiny
Michael Bax	Weald of Kent Protection Society (WKPS)
Christine Drury	Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE)
Nick Fenton	Kent Housing & Development Group
Jo James	Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce (KICC)
Sandra Norval	Southern Water
Chris Reynolds	Kent Downs AONB
David Robey	KCC Elected Member & Deputy Portfolio Holder for Economic Development
Jeremy Smith	Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC)

##### Professional Advisers

Jeremy Baker	ABC Principal Solicitor & Deputy Monitoring Officer
Tracey Butler	ABC Head of Environment & Land Management
Daniel Carter	ABC Spatial Planning Manager (for Simon Cole)
Tom Marchant	KCC Head of Strategic Planning & Policy
Andrew Osborne	ABC Economic Development Manager
Charlotte Hammersley	ABC Compliance & Data Protection Manager (part of mtg)

#### Apologies

Shona Johnstone	Homes England
Sam Loades	NFU

#### Not present:

Peter Dowling	River Stour Internal Drainage Board
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## **Welcome**

The Chair welcomed everyone and said that the two working groups had each met twice since the previous Commission meeting; progress had been made and the working groups were going to present their work to date.

## **Notes of the previous meeting**

The notes of the meeting on 7 December, previously circulated, were approved.

## **Chairman's Update**

The Chair confirmed that consultants had been approached for the mapping; they are due to attend the Commission meeting on 8 February to explain the process and what is possible in terms of information available and different 'layers' that might be requested by the Commission.

The Chair also asked the Commission whether they would prefer to meet in person at the Civic Centre for the next meeting, or whether they were happy to meet virtually, although he explained that a 'hybrid' version would not be possible. It was agreed that the meeting would take place in the Civic Centre (which can now be moved back to the Council Chamber, as it will be available).

## **Feedback from Working Group 1**

Christine Drury presented on behalf of WG1, detailing the process of looking at the 'What, Who & How' of consultation, using the definitions and working assumptions agreed at the Commission meeting on 7 December.

Through the use of a power point presentation, she explained that WG1 had considered various consultation issues, including, for example, how consultation should be used to probe what constitutes rural 'character', the opportunities to extend green corridors, and the wish to consider a country park 'at scale'.

In terms of who to consult with, Christine confirmed that parish & community councils were included in the terms of reference, but there would be a need to work around long lead times and to talk to KALC about the proposed parish groupings.

Consultation would need to take place no later than March/April and decisions would need to be made on whether it should be by interview, (face-to-face or virtually) or through written submissions/responses.

Various responses were made by the Commission members, including the aim to provide assets that promoted health & wellbeing; the need to consult with a diverse community, including young people (possibly via youth forums and schools and colleges), and to get feedback from the medical community; to consider a social media campaign; and to involve KCC (for PROW); and also to involve representatives from the developers (via Nick Fenton) and Ashford businesses (via Jo James).

On the mechanism for consultation, Charlotte Hammersley was asked to join the meeting; she said that the Council website could be used to promote and make questionnaires available, but that questions to young people would probably need to be tailored to them. Schools could be targeted via the Council's portal, and the Council magazine (Ashford for You) which is distributed to every household in the borough could be used to publicise details of the consultation. This, however, might not result in a representative sample and some thought needed to be given to this.

It was agreed that WG1 would need to meet again before the next Commission meeting and that that meeting should finalise a lot of the arrangements on consultation – in terms of a list of people/groups to consult, agreed methods of consultation, and a time table for doing this.

## **Feedback from Working Group 2**

Sandra Norval presented on behalf of WG2, outlining the progress made on definitions and working assumptions. This had included some discussion which recognised the need to include factors affected by advances in technology, by Covid and its effects, and by climate change. Not least in 'setting the tone' for the Commission was the need to think about diversity and to represent the 'many voices' within the borough. Such issues may well alter the types of buildings, and locations, that people want to live, work and enjoy their leisure time in, etc.

Discussions had also taken place on the provision of infrastructure and how, particularly in smaller developments (which tended to be in the rural areas) new infrastructure may not be triggered either very quickly or, in some cases, at all.

The working group had also looked at potential 'zones' and come to the view that there are two distinct zones: (i) Ashford; and (ii) everything outside Ashford. It may well, as work progresses, become obvious that there are 'zones within zones' but this is not apparent at the moment and no assumptions have been made on that basis.

In terms of mapping, the key features (SSSIs, heritage sites, AONB, etc.) will need to be mapped; another category could be access to broadband, although this may prove more difficult to demonstrate on a mapping 'layer'.

Comments from the Commission members echoed their agreement with responses about the need to understand how businesses and people's needs are changing; how the digital world (fixed or mobile) is changing the opportunities in both living and employment terms. Other infrastructure providers could also be involved.

The next WG2 meeting is on 31 January (2 p.m.) and other Commission members are welcome to join the discussion if they wish (either at the virtual meeting, or via email before the meeting).

Items for discussion will be to determine what the two zones look like, and to achieve a defined list of 'layers' for the mapping.

## Next Stages for the Commission

The two Working Groups will meet between now and 8 February; after this they *may* decide to amalgamate some of their work. In any event the scope of each group, at this stage, needs to be kept tight in order to meet the timescale.

The next Commission meeting will take place, in person, in the Civic Centre (Council Chamber) at 10.30 a.m. on 8 February, where TMA will present their mapping procedures, outline the possibilities, and answer questions from Commission members.

Feedback will also be given to the Commission from each of the Working Groups, with agreement to be achieved on the process and the timetable.

Circulation: 1.2.22

All Commission Members + Executive Leader of the Council

All Professional Advisors + Chief Executive

Secretariat:	Linda Stringer	ABC Senior Executive Assistant
	Jeff Simms	ABC Senior Communications Officer
	Danny Sheppard	ABC Member Services Manager*
	Kirsty Hogarth	ABC Head of Secretariat

(\* denotes not in attendance for meeting)

KH/ELMC/18/1/22