



Greater Ashford Borough – Environment & Land Mapping Commission

NOTES of the meeting held at the Civic Centre, Ashford on 12 April 2022 at 1030

Commission Members

Neil Bell	Chair of Commission & ABC Portfolio Holder Planning & Development
Michael Bax	Weald of Kent Protection Society (WKPS)
Christine Drury	Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE)
Shona Johnstone	Homes England
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)

Apologies

Noel Ovenden	Vice Chair of Commission & Leader of Ashford Independent Party & ABC Chair of Overview & Scrutiny
Peter Dowling	River Stour Internal Drainage Board
Nick Fenton	Kent Housing & Development Group
Jo James	Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce (KICC)
Simon Cole	ABC Head of Planning & Development
Tom Marchant	KCC Head of Strategic Planning & Policy
Andrew Osborne	ABC Economic Development Manager
Jeff Simms	ABC Senior Communications Officer

Notes of the previous meeting

With the March meeting having been cancelled to allow for the two Working Groups to continue with their work and report back to the April meeting, the Notes of the previous meeting were from 8 February. These were agreed by the Commission members present.

Welcome & Chairman's Update

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and said that a lot had been happening since the last full Commission meeting on 8 February. Both Working Groups had continued to meet, and both were due to give updates to today's meeting.

He stressed that the Chair's role was to try to ensure that the Commission delivered its targeted outcomes, and to make sure everything was on time and on target as part of that. He was aware that it was possible that some things might slip a little on time and that the outcomes might not be definitive, but it was important the Commission continued towards its goal and had as good as result as possible by December 2022.

Working Group 1 endorsed this and said that although the initial results of the consultation questionnaire had been received and were in the process of being collated and analysed (as far as possible), further consultation might need to be undertaken as a result of this. WG1 was confident, however, that trends were beginning to be determined, and that some details would be able to be fed into the mapping process, although an important element that was not yet being considered was climate change.

It was agreed that each Working Group should give some thought to climate change and consider what they might contribute in terms of consultation and mapping.

ABC's Head of Environment & Land Management advised that she was also researching and compiling a report on climate change for the Cabinet and that it would be made available to the Commission in due course.

Working Group 2 highlighted the importance of producing different maps for different scenarios, and used the example of a 'green network' map which would assist in helping to determine some climate change parameters.

WG2 also considered that both the consultation and the mapping processes would provide a list of opportunities and barriers/risks to development/infrastructure, etc.

Update from Working Group 1 on Consultation

Chris Reynolds reported back to the Commission on behalf of Working Group 1 and presented slides. A briefing and a questionnaire had been sent to all Parish Councils in February, to provide early sight of the consultation exercise in which they would be asked to participate. Electronic questionnaires were then sent to all Town, Parish & Community Councils and Urban Forums, with an initial completion deadline of the end of March. Extensions were granted to one or two councils/forums, where requested, and 30 responses had been received.

Collation and analysis were still being undertaken as the final extension date was close of play on 11 April, so there had been insufficient time to assess the results before today's meeting.

Early stage feedback on the responses to date included:

- On some questions (e.g. whether the overall character of the borough (i.e. its rural nature) should be protected) – there was 100% agreement from the respondents; or over 90% agreement (e.g. on limiting the expansion of Ashford, allowing villages to retain their individual character as settlements).
- Other questions were more complicated (e.g. dealing with individual characteristics and applying them to different areas across the borough). These questions will require further analysis, and WG1 will work on this and report back to the Commission on 10 May (next scheduled meeting).
- Some organisations felt that the questions were very geographically specific (e.g. the need for, and suitability of, areas for wetlands) and that the geography would determine different answers (for example local councils in different catchments: Stour, Beult and Rother).

Full results will be made available to the Commission in due course, but it was agreed that some of the identified distinctive 'characteristics' received through the consultation would be able to be mapped, although others might need greater consideration as the interdependent nature of some elements might create a 'domino effect' if decisions were made on the basis of what looked like obvious zonal areas.

Under this agenda item it had been intended that feedback would have been given to the Commission on the consultation with businesses and with housing developers, but with neither Jo James nor Nick Fenton present at the meeting, it was agreed these would either be circulated in between the meetings or presented to the next meeting.

Feedback from Working Group 2 on Definitions & Working Assumptions

Sandra Norval reported back to the Commission on the progress of Working Group 2 since the last Commission meeting on 8 February.

WG2 had used a matrix to assist them in determining the characteristics that, if mapped, would assist the Commission in creating a logical classification of all land in the borough of Ashford.

The matrix had assisted WG2 in determining the difference between ‘essential’ needs and ‘desirable’ elements, reflecting things important to a good and healthy lifestyle, but not necessarily needed for basic living.

The inclusion and positioning of each element had been discussed between the members of WG2, and the agreed results were put into a matrix that was presented to the Commission. (Attached to these Notes).

The high priority section of the matrix was regarded as both ‘essential’ (to define the area) and ‘easy to obtain’ (because it either already exists or it was possible to identify how to access it). It is anticipated that this section is extremely useful to the Commission.

Elements in the high priority section include:

- Demographic information (includes groups with specific housing needs)
- Elements that provide accessibility to areas (public transport, roads, stations)
- Provision of schools (capacity, growth potential)
- Biodiversity opportunities (net gain, carbon offsetting, tree planting, wetland potential)
- Buildings (types, character, density of homes)
- Infrastructure investment (essential to include, but possibly more difficult to obtain)
- Levelling up measures (Energy accessibility/affordability, skills/job opportunities, economic mobility). But are they able to be mapped?

There was some discussion about how easy data might be to obtain, and whether elements not in the public domain could be published at all. It was agreed that elements in the public domain should (where determined they would be of use) be included in the mapping; where there are elements not in the public domain, it should be indicated when they would be available.

It was also suggested and agreed that there should be input to the mapping exercise from the consultation exercise, and that the questionnaire will also provide an ‘evidence base’ and will lead to where Ashford wants to be in environmental terms.

Next Stages for the Commission

- (i) Any outstanding items:

The Professional Adviser and ABC Principal Solicitor & Deputy Monitoring Officer – Jeremy Baker - advised the Commission members that the Commission can highlight things to be taken into consideration (for mapping, zoning, etc.) if they are available, and that it is acceptable to use publicly accessible data bases. As much as possible the Commission needs to use publicly available data and evidence in order that the results of the Commission’s work can be publicly challenged and defended.

The Chair rounded up the discussion, highlighting the complexities of the Commission’s work and the dedication of the members of the Commission. There

had been discussions on issues which might appear straightforward but, on examination, were less than clear-cut - such as determining the differences between the objective and the subjective. On this basis, he suggested that various definitions still needed to be discussed and agreed, including subjects such as accessibility and sustainability, which would be important in the writing of the final report from the Commission to ensure the understanding of its readers.

(ii) Plans for future meetings

In terms of the next meeting (scheduled for 10 May), it was agreed that main purpose would be to check the progress of both working groups and to agree the layers that TMA would be requested to map. Unless there are other issues that require attendance in person, it is likely that the May meeting will be held virtually on Teams, with the following meeting (14 June) being held in person at the Civic Centre.

Circulation: 03-05-22

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/Notes 12-4-22