



## Greater Ashford Borough – Environment & Land Mapping Commission

### NOTES of the meeting held on Tuesday 23 August 2022 at the Civic Centre, Ashford, Kent TN23 1PL

#### **Present**

##### Commission Members

Neil Bell	Chair of Commission & ABC Portfolio Holder Planning & Development
Michael Bax	Weald of Kent Protection Society (WKPS)
Peter Dowling	River Stour Internal Drainage Board
Christine Drury	Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE)
Nick Fenton	Kent Housing & Development Group
Jo James	Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce (KICC)
Shona Johnstone	Homes England
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
Daniel Carter	ABC Spatial Planning Manager
Simon Cole	ABC Head of Planning & Development

#### **Apologies**

Noel Ovenden	Vice Chair of Commission & Leader of Ashford Independent Party & ABC Chair of Overview & Scrutiny
Sandra Norval	Southern Water
Tracey Butler	ABC Director of Place, Space & Leisure
Tom Marchant	KCC Head of Strategic Planning & Policy
Andrew Osborne	ABC Economic Development Manager

## Notes of the Previous Meeting

The Notes of 14 June were agreed as a true record.

## Chairman's Brief Update

The Chairman welcomed everyone and reiterated that his role as Chair was to ensure that that the work of the Commission was decided – and done - by the Commission itself, mainly within the Terms of Reference as set out in the original document produced by the Executive Leader of Ashford Borough Council.

He also raised the possibility of moving the September meeting from 13<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup>, on the grounds that there would only be three weeks between the August and September meetings if it remained at the earlier date. Although this was agreed in principle, it has subsequently been overridden (see later paragraph).

## Working Group: Draft Report for discussion

The Working Group's draft report (Version iv) had been circulated along with the agenda and it was introduced (DR), giving an outline of its structure and saying that each member of the Working Group would present a section\*, although it was a joint effort by the four members of the group. [*\*NB: Sandra Norval had sent apologies as she was unwell and DR agreed to talk through the section on water*].

- (i) Section A: Recommendation to establish the Ashford Space for Nature Plan (CD)

The Working Group had developed of *Ashford Space for Nature Plan*, based, primarily, on the fact that Ashford as a borough has a great deal of green space, covering parks, agricultural land, wildlife and trees – all of which needs to be considered positively. It was emphasised that the concept is *not* about strategic gaps between villages and other settlements, but that it should include wetlands - with or without public accessibility – and that wildlife/nature is not always compatible with human activity/interest.

The proposals within *Space for Nature* should not be considered in isolation, however, as there are some important existing strategies (e.g. Ashford Green Corridors, AONB Management Plan, etc.) that should be examined to see where there is a 'fit' and to try to integrate the different strategies for maximum benefit. Two cases in point are the Open Spaces Strategy, and the health agenda which could be brought together under the *Space for Nature* 'banner'. Partnership working between various agencies would be required – e.g. ABC, Natural England and land owners.

(ii) Section B: Mapping Recommendations

It was agreed that specific mapping layers still needed to be finalised, but that the Working Group had met with ABC's in-house GIS Manager and agreed that, although there may need (at some point) to be a software update, the in-house GIS system exists and should be used by the Commission to facilitate their mapping recommendations.

(iii) Section C: Recommendations of Principle (CR)

These recommendations had been put forward by the Working Group – not within the original Terms of Reference of the Commission, but considered to be directions that can be set by ABC through planning policy, advisory notices, or by embedding into the contracting/procurement processes.

- Developing a plan for commercial sites, including the rural area, would be easy to map and assist in the rural economy.
- Limiting the expansion of Ashford town would assist in providing Ashford with a definitive boundary through the use of flexible green spaces and would be easy to map.
- Small scale development only in most villages with the recommendation to focus on starter homes for rent and/or purchase.
- Better design of housing developments is intended to improve the quality of house-building and include environmental initiatives – e.g. rainwater harvesting for new homes.
- The recommendation to split Grade 3 agricultural land into (a) and (b) categories was made as a proposal to assist in visual mapping and thereby assist in identifying sites for development or to be green spaces, etc
- Solar panels/roof tiles mandatory on all new buildings. This should include industrial buildings, and solar farms could be positioned only on the poorest land
- Recommendations were also made on improving the very centre of Ashford town and also maintaining the 'special character' of Tenterden with St Michael's and preserving the green gap between them and other settlements.
- Public Rights of Way were also raised as an existing anachronism; they are not fit-for-purpose in many areas and are not looked after. The Working Group would like to see a network of purpose-built routes for walkers, cyclists and riders – but to exclude motorised vehicles.

D. Water Recommendations (DR)

It was agreed that it was a fitting time to be raising many of these issues and that water – both supply and waste - (together with other infrastructure commodities, such as highways, energy and broadband provision) should be under consideration for forward-funding by some means (possibly developer contributions) and that infrastructure provision in Kent is particularly lagging behind other areas.

Eliminating surface water from sewers was agreed as one of the important elements, but it was also pointed out that agricultural detritus is an issue for many sewers).

The particular point on phosphate and nitrate solution being mainly dealt with by water treatment and not wetlands was agreed generally.

#### E. Strategic Recommendations

It was generally agreed that Regional Plans would help in joining up thinking from different disciplines, agencies, strategies, etc.

#### F. Presentational Recommendations

The essence of this section was to join together a number of issues under the heading of 'environment' – one example being using mapping techniques to capture/illustrate accessibility/connectivity via public transport, cycleways, etc.

It was also suggested that for the *Space for Nature* element, a strategic land availability assessment would be needed.

#### G. Implementation Recommendations

The detail of this was not discussed, but will need to be considered for the final report.

#### Further questions/responses raised during the meeting by Commission members

General points are included here; references to specific sections have been submitted separately, and in depth, to all members of the Commission so that the Working Group can consider the points and amend/add to the report where appropriate.

- Suggested that a section on background, context and terms of reference should be included in the report.
- Some indication of how the Commission's proposals could/should link in to the Local Plan should be given
- Detail how to link back in at strategic level
- Look to see how much of this can be combined with existing strategies
- Ensure that high standards are an integral part of the Commission's recommendations
- Need to note that water resources are often outside the borough

#### Next Steps

The report to be amended in line with confirmation on procedure for report (See Timetabling, below)

## Mapping Layers and Handling

It was agreed that the Working Group would have further discussions with the GIS Manager to ascertain the capabilities and capacity of the ABC in-house system and a comprehensive list of mapping proposals would be included in the final report.

## Timetabling

Timetabling for the report has now been clarified and is as follows:

- Report to be amended in line with Commissioners' comments and resubmitted to the full Commission for discussion at their meeting on Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> October.
- If there are any final amendments/additions, these could be added following that meeting.
- If necessary, a Commission meeting could be held on 8<sup>th</sup> November (as originally timetabled) for 'final sign-off' by the Commission
- Agreed report to be submitted to the Office of the Executive Leader for consideration on (date to be agreed)
- The report will then progress to Full Council on Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2022.

Circulation: 25.8.22

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)