

**Notes of a Meeting of the  
Ashford Town Centre Place Making Board  
Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> July 2018 at 4.00 p.m.**

**Present:**

**Board Members**

Cllr. Clarkson (Chairman)  
Cllr. Galpin (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Bell, Bennett, Clokie, Ovenden, Shorter.

**Non-Board Members**

Cllrs. Heyes, Suddards.

Chief Executive, Director of Place and Space, Director of Finance and Economy, Head of Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications, Head of Environment and Land Management, Head of Corporate Property and Projects, Head of Planning and Development, Economic Development Manager, Senior Accountant, Member Services Manager (Operational).

**Apology**

Cllr. Mrs Bell.

| <b>Item</b> | <b>Notes</b>  | <b>Action</b> |
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| 1.          | <b>Welcome</b><br><br>The Chairman welcomed all those present to the first meeting of this new Board. He advised that he was excited about its formation and he envisioned it operating in a similar way to how the highly successful Ashford Strategic Delivery Board had for the 'Big 8' Projects. This Board would oversee masterplanning for a changing town centre under various Work Streams and really help to push things forward. He hoped that this first meeting would give everyone a feel for what was happening and stressed that there was a real opportunity to do something special for Ashford Town Centre. |               |
| 2.          | <b>Ashford Town Centre Place Making Board – An Overview</b><br><br>The Director of Place and Space said that further to the Leader's outline of the purpose of this new Board, a lot of work had gone on over the last two months to give a new   |               |

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|    | <p>focus to this work. Each of the four Lead Officers for the four work streams would give an update to this meeting and he thanked them for the hard work they had already put in. The key point behind all of this was to add a co-ordination and a "pace" to the many interventions that were already happening around the town centre and those that were planned for the future. There was a desire to be 'brave' and 'different' and offer quality experiences that would address the needs of different groups and generations. This was the purpose of the four work streams and bringing them together at these Board meetings.</p>   |  |
| 3. | <p><b>Public and Stakeholder Engagement Work Stream</b></p> <p>The Head of Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications gave a presentation as Lead Officer for this Work Stream. She advised that the key focus so far had been analysing those things that were already known to be wanted by the public, and the results of the recent residents survey and what that had revealed about wishes for the town centre. This was ahead of a larger programme of engagement to come.</p> <p>None of the outcomes so far had come as a particular surprise and indicated that a greater awareness of what was going on in the town centre was needed and satisfaction levels with the town centre needed to improve. She ran through the results of the survey in more detail and explained that they provided a good baseline to move forward from. This particular Work Stream would focus on delivering a programme of engagement that captured the views of the community and other key stakeholders. It would act as a 'call to action' explaining what had happened in the town centre, future plans on the horizon, demonstrate the Council's role and attempt to invoke a sense of pride, ownership and set a collective challenge. This would chiefly be via online methods ('Stickyworld' and an on-line questionnaire) but also through face to face engagement at targeted events. The four key open-ended questions were: -</p> <p><i>"How do we create a buzz about Ashford and make it stand out from the crowd?";</i></p> <p><i>"How do we create a fun, thriving place in the daytime and at night?";</i></p> <p><i>"How do we create a place that is accessible and welcoming to all?"; and</i></p> <p><i>"How can we make Ashford a place we are proud to call home?".</i></p> <p>Members praised the work that had been undertaken so far</p> |  |

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|    | <p>and endorsed the approach of asking open-ended questions. The value would be in receiving inspiring and innovative ideas about the future of Ashford's Town Centre, rather than the usual quibbles on street lights, dog mess etc.</p> <p>Issues such as a theatre and an ice rink had been asked for in the past so there was an opportunity to test those theories through this process. Perhaps the focus should be on temporary or 'pop-up' facilities rather than permanent purpose built buildings to test demand. The idea of a multi-faceted and flexible outdoor performance space/animated public square with provision for a large screen was also something that appeared to have merit. It would however be important to guard against building up a long list of 'wants' that was undeliverable or attempting to provide a solution to every issue raised.</p> <p>The Leader said that whilst he accepted the survey results in that a significant number of people did not appear to know about the developments happening in Ashford, he considered the Council was doing a lot to get their message out and there would always be an element of the community who were not engaged. An additional improvement was the Ashford For You magazine which was now going to every household in the Borough on a quarterly basis and provided an additional opportunity to inform and ask questions</p> |  |
| 4. | <p><b>Impatience Team Work Stream</b></p> <p>The Head of Environment and Land Management gave a presentation as Lead Officer for this Work Stream. She advised that the main focus was to encourage connectivity, particularly for pedestrians/cyclists, by improving the links between different sites. A key focus was the important route from the Designer Outlet to the Town Centre, but also linking with sites such as Elwick Place, the new Brewery and Wool Growers. This would involve tidying up the public realm in those areas in terms of litter and environmental maintenance, as well as looking at the wider issue of town centre lighting to enhance the features of certain key buildings and improvements to signage.</p> <p>Focussing particularly on the link between the Designer Outlet and the town, the key area was the route that included the underpass between the international and domestic sides of the station. Whilst providing key connectivity, it had largely been neglected and was in need of considerable improvement. She outlined a project to make improvements, which was likely to be in three phases and would require considerable partnership working. The</p>  |  |

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|    | <p>route was owned by a number of stakeholders – Designer Outlet, HS1 (on a lease from the Secretary of State), Network Rail, Southeastern Rail, the Environment Agency and KCC and Phase 1 of the project would include scoping and meeting with all stakeholders to generate commitment, dedicating the time and resource needed and ensuring future engagement. There were more detailed plans for Phases 2 and 3 of the project and the Head of Environment and Land Management ran through these in some detail with particular emphasis on the short term wins and the short and longer term objectives. Some preliminary work had already been undertaken including litter removal, tidying, vegetation clearance, tree pruning and border reductions. Longer term plans included a theme and/or art trail for the route that incorporated the history and heritage of the town, bringing the underpass up to an acceptable standard in terms of lighting and general maintenance and eventually making the route an attraction in its own right, linking the town to the outlet.</p> <p>The Leader considered that this particular Work Stream was a superb thing for the Borough and praised the work that had already been undertaken. It had begun 4 or 5 years ago with the initial work of T-CAT, but things were certainly accelerating now with the work planned and the involvement of Aspire. In response to questions the Head of Environment and Land Management advised that although none of the area in question was in ABC ownership, its cutting would be put on the routine maintenance schedule of Aspire. There was scope to improve the footbridge over the river, but again there were questions of ownership to decipher. The ideas for art work and installations in the area were supported and it was considered this could promote some community involvement and ownership.</p> |  |
| 5. | <p><b>Masterplanning Work Stream</b></p> <p>The Head of Planning and Development gave a presentation as Lead Officer for this Work Stream. He advised that the key to this area of work was ensuring that key strategic development sites in the town centre were looked at in combination, not isolation. They wanted to move away from traditional masterplanning and a number of key themes had already emerged from the initial work including transitions between the old and the new, car parking and pedestrian movement, creating rounded and versatile places and the journey and linkages from the town centre to nearby sites.</p> <p>The two key sites were the Bingo Club/Vicarage Lane site and the Commercial Quarter and the Head of Planning and</p>  |  |

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|    | <p>Development ran through these in some detail, including displaying illustrations of some of the early, first thoughts of the designers. There were however other key sites under this Work Stream including the proposed multi-storey car park behind the bowling alley and the 'Coachworks' development utilising the Victorian buildings and spaces on Dover Place.</p> <p>There was some discussion about the future of the Bingo Hall and the merits or otherwise of retaining the original façade. The Board agreed to reserve judgment and keep an open mind at this stage and let the recently commissioned design study explore this and other issues.</p> <p>A Member said there were other areas in the town centre that were perhaps not in ABC's ownership, but that would nevertheless benefit from some masterplanning. He considered it would be important for the Council to clearly set its ideas out, before the developers came calling.</p>   |  |
| 6. | <p><b>Project Delivery Work Stream</b></p> <p>The Head of Corporate Property and Projects gave a presentation as Lead Officer for this Work Stream. He advised that this was a multi-faceted area, responsible for a range of capital projects being delivered in the town centre. The total value of these projects was somewhere in the region of £80m. Many of these projects were major projects which were supported by their own detailed project planning, whilst some were at the feasibility testing stage and others were progressing to delivery. During the presentation he gave particular updates on: - the Bingo Hall/Vicarage Lane; the Coachworks site; the Station Road Multi-Storey Car Park; Newtown Works and Elwick Place.</p> <p>In response to questions about the cinema complex at Elwick Place it was confirmed that this would contain six screens and there was no reduction in the number of eateries. There may be some sub-dividing in terms of the size of the outlets, and the units may all not be occupied on opening, but the majority would and they would certainly not be left empty for long.</p> <p>Delivery of a quality 'entrance bridge' over the Stour linking with the International House car park was a possibility. There was potential to transfer underspend from the International House car park to this project and it was agreed to discuss this further outside of the meeting.</p> |  |

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| 7. | <b>Dates of Next Meeting</b><br><br>Thursday 11 <sup>th</sup> October 2018, 4pm, Council Chamber |  |
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Queries concerning these minutes? Please contact 01233 330349

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