

Agenda Item No: 8
Report To: Cabinet
Date of Meeting: 10 January 2019
Report Title: Aspire two years on
Report Author & Job Title: Tracey Butler and James Laidlaw
Head of Environment and Land Management and
Aspire Operations Manager
Portfolio Holder Cllr. Mrs Clair Bell
Portfolio Holder for: Environment and Land Management



Summary: This is a report on the progress of Cabinet's decision to bring "in-house" the grounds maintenance service in the form of Aspire Landscape Management. This report reflects the progress of the service since its inception in October 2016 and the future anticipated direction of the service.

Key Decision: No

Significantly Affected Wards: all

Recommendations: **The Cabinet is recommended to;**
I. Note the report and support the direction of travel for the service.

Contact: tracey.butler@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233) 330875

Report Title: **Aspire two years on**

Introduction and background

1. Aspire Landscape Management became the in-house grounds maintenance service provider in October 2016. This decision reflected a bold and decisive move on the part of Cabinet in September 2015, to ensure improved borough presentation, in support of Corporate Priority 4, Attractive Ashford.
2. At the time this decision was taken, this was not the “norm” for local authorities and took the leadership of the authority to realise a vision of what the presentation of the borough could be, at a time when it needed radical and substantial improvement.
3. The priority areas for the service were set by Cabinet as:
 - Deliver on the agreed improvement plan for the Gateways to Ashford including the town’s arrival points (around Jct 9, Drivers roundabout and Jct 10) and key gateway roundabouts (Mace Lane, Orchard Heights, Malcolm Sargent, Newtown Road, Godinton Road, Park Farm, Tithe Barn Lane, Brookfield Road and Spearpoint).
 - Implement the proposals for floral bedding over the next five years, taking into account future developments when prioritising areas in the Memorial Gardens and the High Street.
 - Develop long-term management plans for Victoria Park and the Memorial Gardens and successfully implement agreed management plan recommendations.
 - Revise maintenance regimes to reflect the standards required and maximise the opportunity for operational efficiency.
 - Consult on suggested Parish “clusters” to operate the Village Caretaker scheme, target an additional scheme where appropriate.
 - Provide an accurate tree database including undertaking a detailed tree survey and mapping exercise. (This was envisaged to be outside of the “in- house” service remit and would be a service that was further procured).
 - Undertake a mapping exercise of all ditches and culverts, open water and SUDS to identify all such features, developing a schedule of routine maintenance requirements to minimise flood risks.
 - Continue to develop the partnerships between the Council and conservation organisations.

4. All of the above were envisaged to be one-off improvement works that would then become part of a maintenance regime going forwards. These works were in addition to those outlined as “core work” for the service, which included the following.

Public Parks, Open Spaces, Housing Land, Cemeteries and General Amenity Areas including, but not limited to:

- Two prestige parks (Victoria Park and Memorial Gardens)
- 2,000,000m² of grass maintenance
- 180,000m² of shrub beds, rose beds and herbaceous beds
- Several community woodland, wildlife and conservation areas
- One country park (in development)
- Ashford Green Corridor (3 limbs)
- 21km of hedges
- 1,000m² of annual flower beds
- 87 town centre floral planters
- Nine football pitches.
- Over 1,000 trees
- Approximately 120 burials per annum in four cemeteries (and maintenance of landscaping in 11 closed burial grounds)
- Park gate unlocking and locking
- 40 playgrounds
- Numerous ditches, ponds, river frontages, SUDS and other drainage facilities.

Proposal/current position

5. From the priority areas set, all of the gateway roundabouts listed above (point 3) will have been renovated / upgraded by the turn of the financial year (2018 /19), with the exception of the Brookfield Road roundabout (as this is subject to securing the A28 widening works associated with Chilmington development). However, in addition to these works, we have a further works programme underway in association with KCC to address more roundabouts.
6. The Malcolm Sargeant roundabout mentioned above (point 3) will become the Flanders roundabout, when the priority at this roundabout is re-designated and safety “drive-on maintenance” features are added. In addition, the “Over the Top” display from the Memorial Gardens will move to this new permanent home, to make up a larger permanent installation commemorating World War One and Flanders.
7. Further additional roundabout work to be undertaken includes safety drive-on features and re-engineering of Orchard Heights (already upgraded but being further improved), New Street/ Chart Road, Forestall Meadow and Charing Hill. (see site information on Appendix 1)
8. The floral bedding plans are implemented and reviewed yearly now as part of the Aspire core work.
9. The Memorial Gardens has a management plan and this year saw extensive installation work in commemoration of the centennial anniversary of the end of

World War One. The plan for the gardens in 2019 includes the installation of a carpet badge of the Ashford Coat of Arms and more extensive flower displays “at height” (tiered fountains of flowers) in the gardens to add shape and interest. This prestige park will continue to be improved along the theme of “civic pride”.

10. Aspire continues to support the Heritage Lottery Funding bid for Victoria Park and will be integral to the forward works in the park if the bid succeeds. The team will be involved in extensive clearance works and tree removal and installation programmes over the 2019 / 20 and 2020 / 21 winter works period.
11. Maintenance regimes across the borough have been revised and refined for maximum operational efficiency and maximum improvement in the presentation of the borough.
12. Parish work and devolution has taken an unexpected turn. At the time an “in-house” grounds maintenance service was first proposed, the devolution agenda was very much at the forefront of people’s minds. Parishes were “clustering” together to find efficiencies, cost savings or to procure work together. The quality of grounds maintenance across the borough at the time was such that the clusters were keen to see improvements in their areas and did not feel that would necessarily be delivered through the borough contractor.
13. However, in the time Aspire has been operating, the reverse of the above has become true in many cases. The service has had numerous enquiries from parishes wishing to contract their grounds work back to Aspire, based on quality work and continually improving outcomes. Therefore, Aspire has tendered for work and work has been awarded to the service from numerous parishes, including High Halden, Challock, Westwell, Singleton and Great Chart and Little Chart. Tenterden town council has chosen to retain the grounds maintenance service for their area and have been supported with advice and training from Aspire to get the service “up and running”.
14. Aspire Landscape Management has created its own in-house arboriculture service. Existing staff have had the opportunity for career development and have become trained and experienced arboricultural officers. This service was originally envisaged to sit outside the new “in-house” service but we have been able to offer capable staff with the right attitude and aptitude for that progression. This also now means that surveying of the entire borough’s tree stock is underway (and will continue over a number of years) and the same annual tree maintenance budget now extends to approximately two and a half times the work provided by the same budget to an external contractor. Only in some emergency or extremely complex cases, where several trained officers are required for one tree, is work put out to external contractors.
15. Priority ditches and culverts have been inspected and upgraded (work organised and procured by the Culture service) and are now on maintenance with Aspire.
16. Partnerships between the council and conservation organisations (such as Kent Wildlife Trust and Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership) continue to be fostered through the Land Management Advisory Group.

17. All the core work listed above is also on routine maintenance regimes with Aspire and there are 61 play areas now being regularly surveyed for health and safety as well as maintenance issues and dealt with accordingly (21 more than originally intended).
18. The memorial headstone safety inspection programme has been undertaken by qualified memorial masons over a period of 18 months, for every headstone in both our open and closed cemeteries. Now, grounds staff at Aspire have now been trained in memorial headstone inspections and this risk assessment-led work has become part of the team's routine "over-winter works" to check memorial headstones in all four open and 11 closed cemeteries in the borough. It was originally envisaged that this rolling programme of safety inspections would be provided through an external contractor and at a cost to the borough. However, with keen and flexible staff willing to learn new skills, we have been able to provide this programmed work through the service, in its over- winter works programme.
19. Our Environmental Contracts and Enforcement Manager in the Street Scene team has carried out a procurement exercise this year for new street litter bins. It was anticipated that the revisions of the "binrastructure" and replacement / improvement programme would need to also be provided by external contract. However, Aspire has trained staff on the repair and maintenance of moveable assets in parks and open spaces (bins and benches) and has incorporated all this as part of a rolling-forward programme of works.
20. The service now supports civic events such as the "Mayor-making" evening and the civic service, as well as Remembrance Day event support and facilitation.
21. The work of the TCAT team has been incorporated into the service. This has offered the opportunity for considerable cross-training in the service and seen a benefit in terms of resilience and flexibility.
22. There have been considerable achievements for the Aspire landscape management service in the past 2 years, well "over and above" than expected when the service was first brought in-house. At the end of Year 1, we had a first birthday celebration at the depot and produced an "achievements" document (see Appendix 2). This year we have repeated the "achievements" exercise (see Appendix 3). This is important to help celebrate with the staff their extraordinary work and share with them just how much their contribution has improved the appearance of the borough, is appreciated and what a great job they have done and continue to do.
23. One of the most extraordinary results for the team in the last year of operation was the achievement of ISO 14001, 9001 and 45001. Not only is it unusual for one ISO to be applied for and achieved by a council service but to achieve three standards simultaneously is quite remarkable and an achievement of which we are all very proud.
24. The service has been well received by our residents and we have received a considerable number of "thank you" letters and complimentary emails directly

to the service and through third parties, in appreciation of the transformation of the landscape maintenance of the borough.

Next steps in process

25. In the coming year's service plan for Environment and Land Management, there will be the first stage of an improvement plan for our allotment sites to make them more accessible and work with the Allotment Society to drive further structural improvements.
26. 2019 is the "Year of the Environment". Aspire will have a number of projects in the year that support this including a planted replica of the Willesborough windmill (as one of the original "green" energy generators and to celebrate 150 years of the windmill). However, the service will "kick off" the year with tree planting as part of a larger programme in North park / Civic park.
27. Aspire will support Culture in a review of playgrounds which will examine the use of "hub" play areas and an improvement plan from that.
28. Aspire will be integral in the works programme for the Victoria Park HLF bid.
29. Repton Park (including Linear Park), sections of Bridgefields and Park Farm, housing land alleyways, landscaping and soft landscaping maintenance "on programme" for car parks will all be areas of work that Aspire will pick up in the next 12 – 24 months. This represents considerable additional work for Aspire but comes, in the most part, with S106 funding to be able to take on more staff and provide specialist equipment to support maintenance on these areas.
30. We will also be supporting Chilmington work and Discovery Park planning with maintenance in mind.
31. Aspire will, where resources allow, support the Town Centre Place Making Board work. The team will also be supporting this service's "Year of the Environment" communications plan, including a competition for local schools to improve their own landscape grounds, with practical tips from the team.
32. We continue to invest in the training and development opportunities for our staff. We will shortly be offering a small group of staff some specialist horticultural training, to improve the breadth of their knowledge and allow them to cascade that learning to the wider service.

Conclusion

33. Improvement in landscape management is the job of Aspire Landscape Management. We will continue to work in partnership with stakeholders and third party organisations (such as the Kent Wildlife Trust, Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership and the Environment Agency) through the Land Management Advisory Group. We will continue to engage with and encourage all land owners to improve stewardship of their own assets, as well as striving for excellence in the management and maintenance of our own.

34. The decision to bring the grounds maintenance service in-house for the borough has been and continues to be a successful one. From a service that carried out basic landscape tasks we have developed an arboricultural team, including staff with specialist areas of knowledge, which supports a very wide range of service areas and services. The savings to the council this service now provides are considerable and far in excess of what was originally envisaged, alongside extensive improvement in the presentation of the borough. The team are flexible, engaged and take a genuine pride in their work. We will continue to actively seek opportunities for the team to improve the presentation of the borough and strive for ever-greater excellence.

Portfolio Holder's views

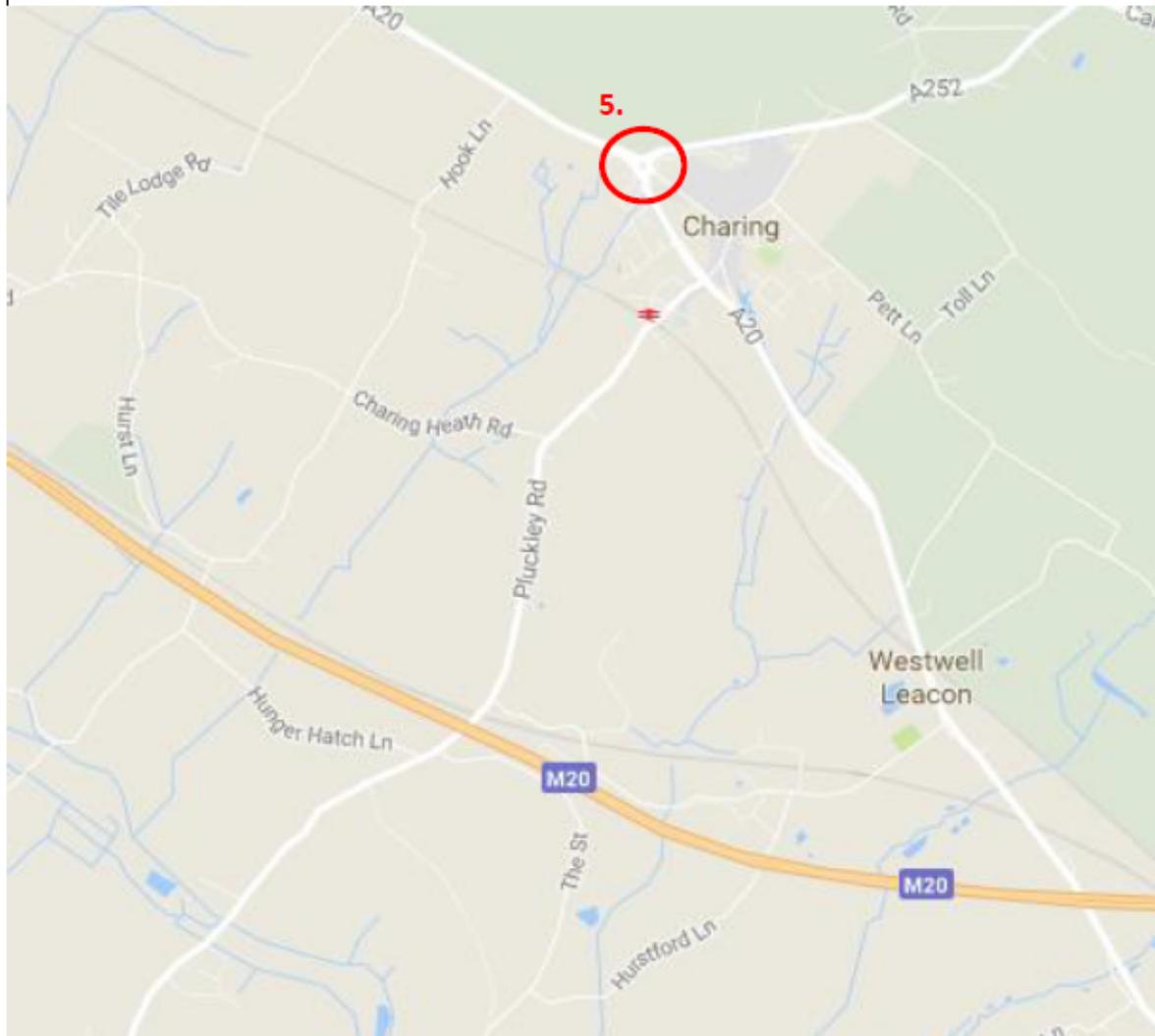
35. Our bold decision to bring the grounds maintenance service in-house has paid dividends. The team continue to strive for excellence and are a credit to the council and the residents of the borough we serve.

Contact and email

36. Mrs Tracey Butler (tracey.butler@ashford.gov.uk)
Head of Environment and Land Management

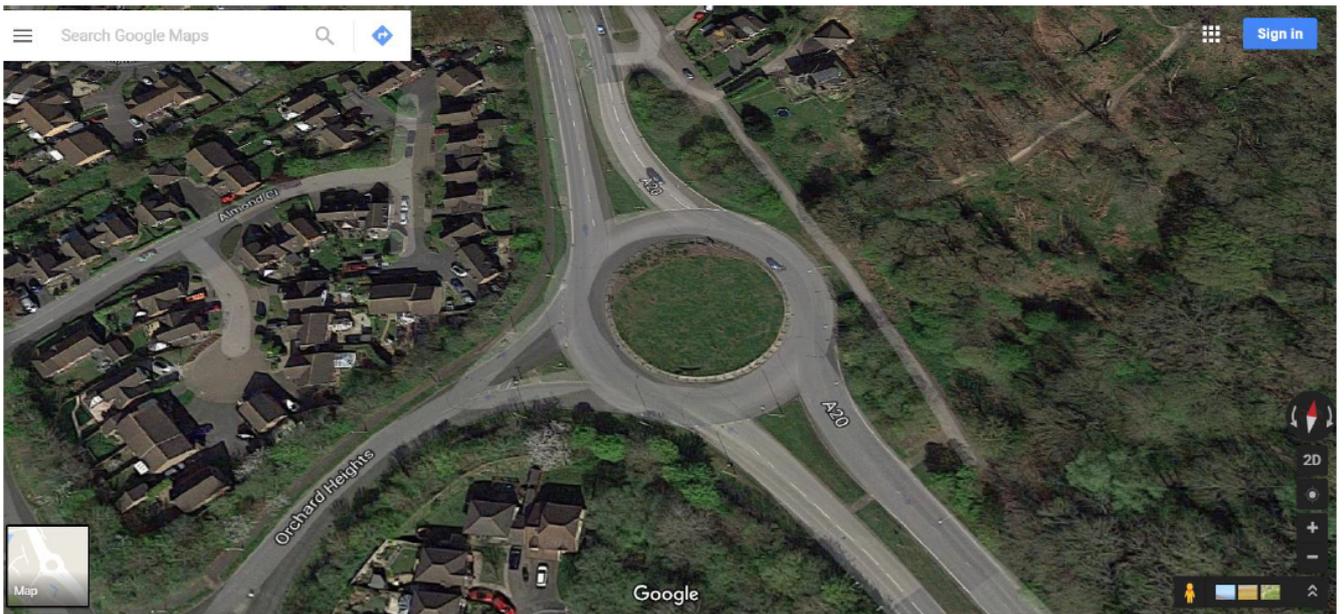
James Laidlaw (james.laidlaw@ashford.gov.uk)
Aspire Operations Manager

Ashford Map 2 – Site 5





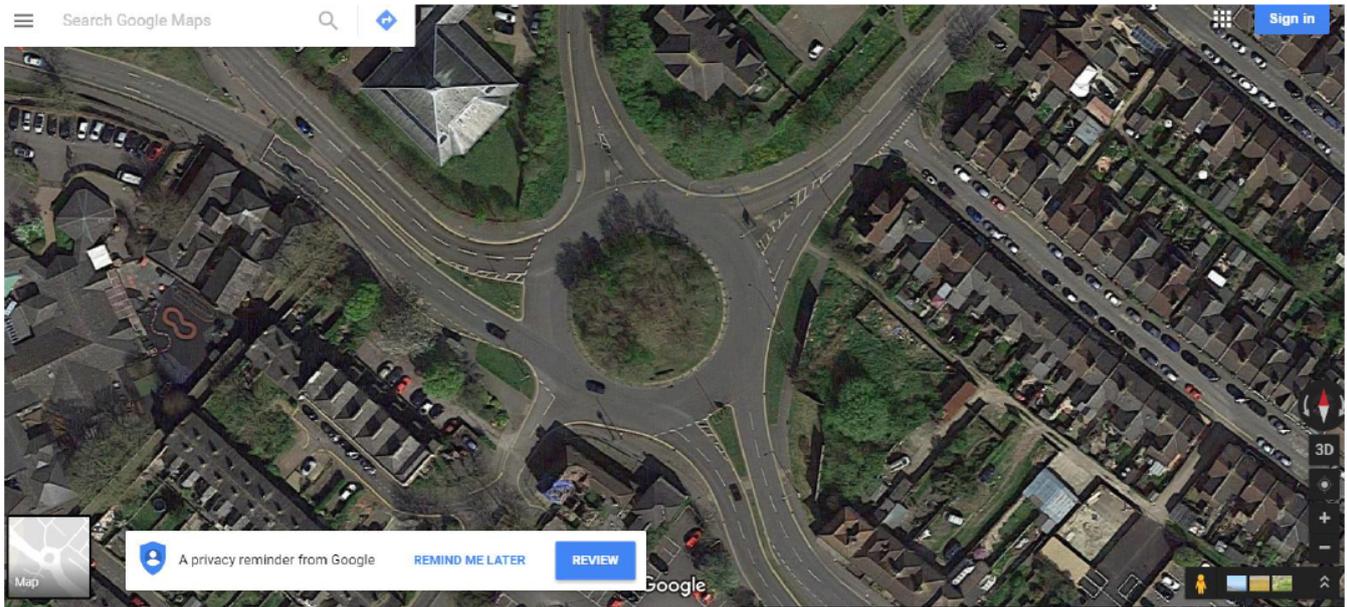
1. A20 MAIDSTONE ROAD / ORCHARD HEIGHTS – GROUND LEVEL VIEW
(approaching roundabout, leaving Ashford heading towards Charing, with Orchard Heights on the left)



1. A20 MAIDSTONE ROAD / ORCHARD HEIGHTS ROUNDABOUT – AERIAL VIEW



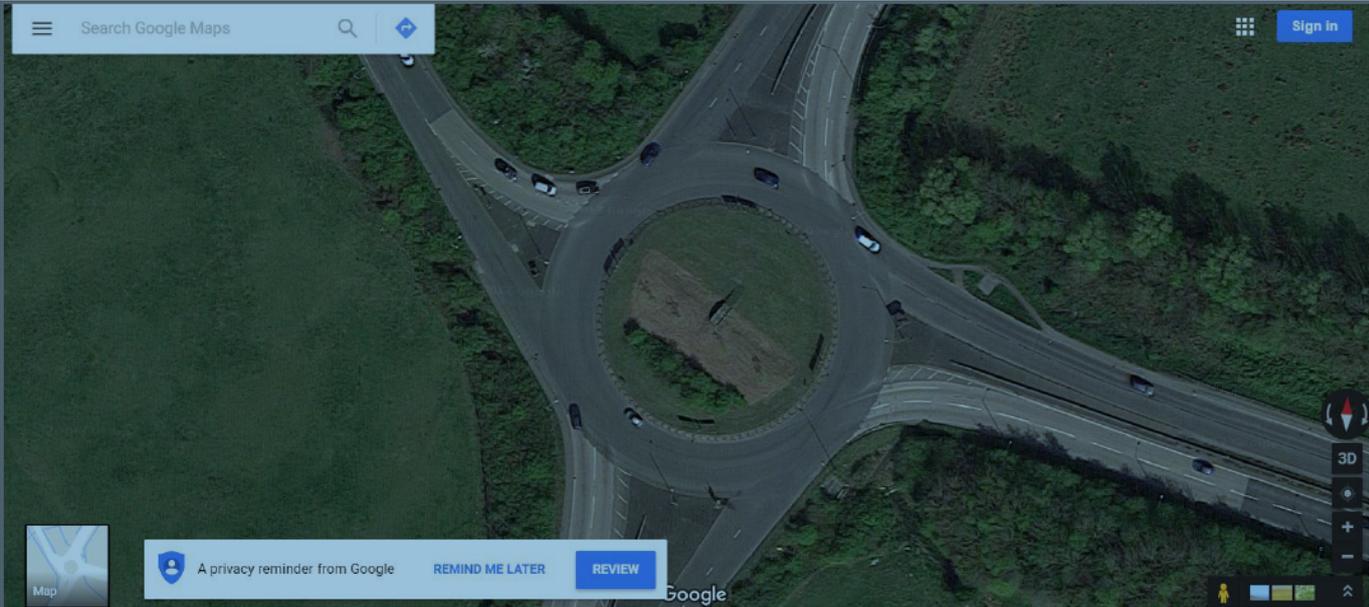
2. A292 NEW STREET / CHART ROAD ROUNDABOUT – GROUND LEVEL VIEW
(New Street, leaving Ashford, Chart Road is straight ahead)



2. A292 NEW STREET / CHART ROAD ROUNDABOUT – AERIAL VIEW



3. A2042 ROMNEY MARSH ROAD / MALCOLM SARGEANT ROAD ROUNDABOUT – GROUND LEVEL VIEW
(approaching from Bad Munstereifel Road, left to Kingsnorth, right to Ashford)

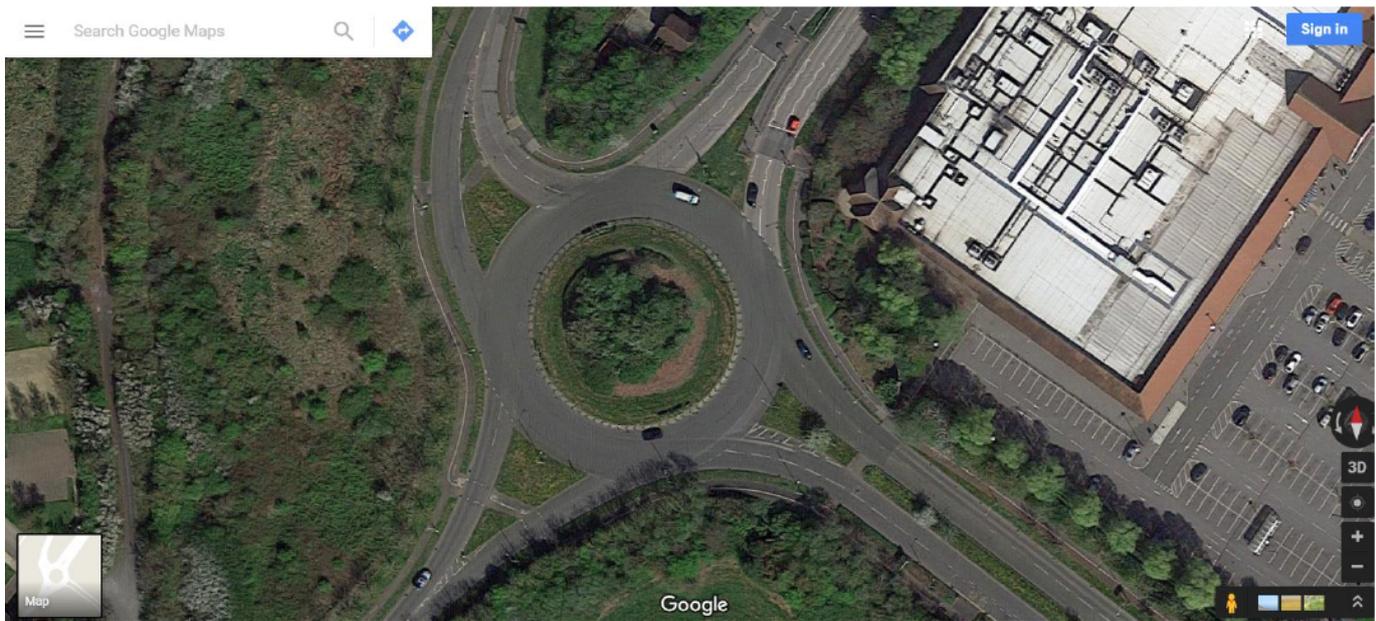


3. A2042 ROMNEY MARSH ROAD / MALCOLM SARGEANT ROAD ROUNDABOUT – AERIAL VIEW



4. A2042 ROMNEY MARSH ROAD / FORESTALL MEADOW – GROUND LEVEL VIEW

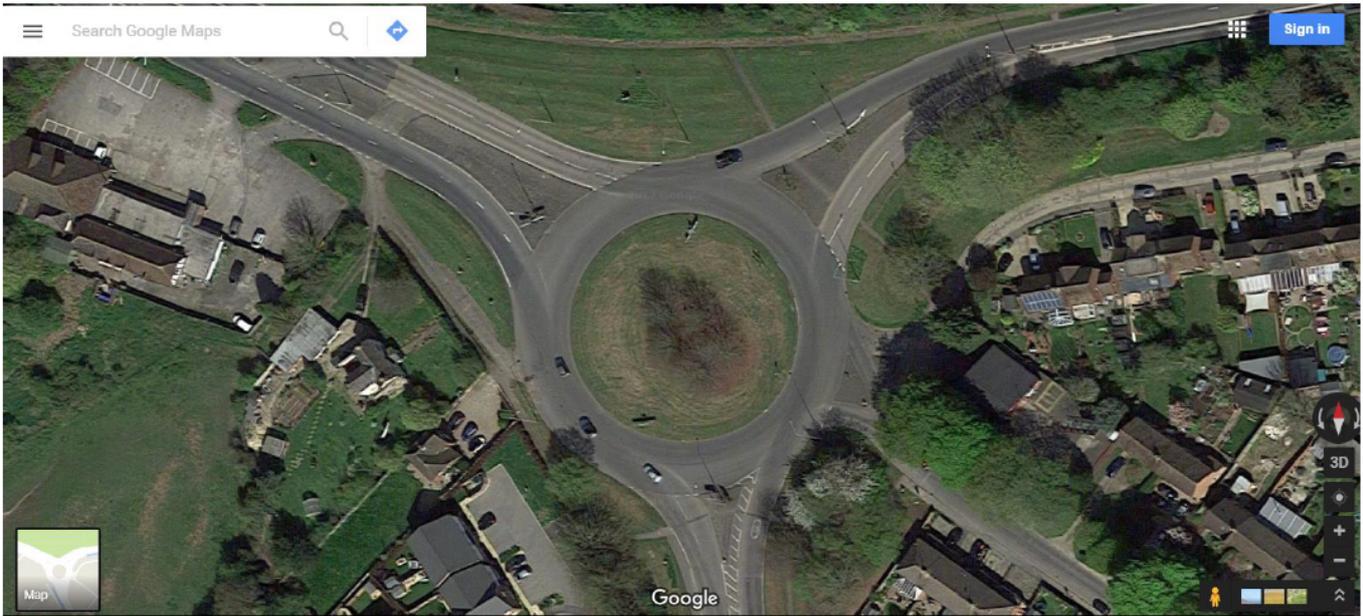
(Romney Marsh Road, heading out of Ashford towards Kingsnorth, Forestall Meadow is on the left)



4. A2042 ROMNEY MARSH ROAD / FORESTALL MEADOW ROUNDABOUT – AERIAL VIEW



5. A20 MAIDSTONE ROAD / CHARING HILL – GROUND LEVEL VIEW
(approaching Charing from Lenham, with Charing Hill on the left....)



5. A20 MAIDSTONE ROAD / CHARING HILL ROUNDABOUT – AERIAL VIEW



Achievements

October 2016 to August 2017



Background

In September 2015 Cabinet agreed to take the Grounds Maintenance function in house, in line with Corporate Priority 4 – Attractive Ashford. A one-year project was initialised to establish an in-house grounds maintenance function equipped to deliver from 1 October 2016.

Depot Facility

Planning approval (16/00562/AS) to develop part of the former Rimmel International Site on Cobbs Wood, Carlton Road was put forward for development by Gallagher to include Plot 1 – Grounds Maintenance Depot. Planning permission was granted on the 20 July 2016 for the depot's construction.



Construction started immediately with a timeframe of eight weeks.



The depot was completed on 12 September 2016

Preparing the Depot for the Delivery of Services

Completion of the depot's construction was followed by a period of 2 weeks of equipping the depot for grounds maintenance operations. This included setting up of the offices, delivery of furniture, IT, telephones, tools, equipment, vehicles, personnel protective equipment, hand tools and machinery.



The operational works to prepare the depot were completed on 29 September 2016.



Opening of Aspire Landscape Management

The Depot was officially opened by Councillor Mrs Clair Bell and Pat Gallagher on 29 September 2016. Members were invited on a tour of the depot and to a demonstration of the equipment.

Staff Transfer

On Monday 3 October 2016 the staff joined Ashford Borough Council following a TUPE transfer from the incumbent contractor Landscape Services.

The transfer followed three months of staff consultation which was fully supported by HR. Staff were consulted on all aspects of their employment and documentation was provided to support the verbal communications. In addition staff were seen on a one to one basis, allowing them to raise any concerns during the process.

On Monday 3 October 2016, the transferring staff met the Council Leader, the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services, the Head of Environmental Services, the HR Manager and the Aspire Operations Manager for a series of presentations held in the council chamber. These presentations outlined Ashford's aspirations for the service and the expectations of the staff.

Following the formal presentations, the staff were taken to the new depot and given a tour of the premises.

A service vision was developed which underpinned Aspire's objective to deliver a high quality, responsive and flexible grounds maintenance service to the residents of Ashford, offering a proactive and best value solution for the maintenance of the Borough's green spaces.

A number of service values were developed to reinforce the service vision and bring it to life. Staff were encouraged to embrace these values from day one, dispelling any previous poor behaviours and bad practices.



Staff On-Boarding & Training

On Tuesday 4 October a two-week on-boarding and initial training programme started. A programme of training and events was developed which allowed staff to undertake various activities in small groups, both in the depot and on-site. Machinery suppliers attended during this period to train staff on the use and maintenance of the equipment. Additionally, external trainers took staff through formal training programmes so that staff could obtain nationally-recognised qualifications in the safe use of equipment and its maintenance.

The training included the following key elements:-

- LANTRA Ride on mower certification
- Toro machinery induction
- LANTRA Brush cutter certification
- Stihl machinery maintenance
- LANTRA Hedge cutter certification
- E-learning Modules
- Cemetery operation training
- LANTRA Tractor driving certification
- Fire evacuation
- Depot procedures
- Quality training
- Behaviours and value training
- Risk assessments and safe systems of work

Staff attending cemetery operative training:



Staff attending Toro manufacturer training:



Staff attending LANTRA training:



Spring bedding

Aspire started operational activities with a bang in October 2016. Following two weeks of on-boarding, we saw the delivery of 40,000 pansies and 20,000 bulbs. Work started on the stripping of the summer bedding and the planting of the winter bedding almost immediately.



Spring bedding in the Memorial Gardens



The Memorial Gardens & Remembrance

Works were also undertaken in the Memorial Gardens ahead of remembrance commemorations which began on 26 October with the dedication of the garden of remembrance.

The entire block-paved areas were cleaned and scraped by hand between each paver to remove 10 years of built-up moss and detritus. The borders were completely cultivated and weeded. A garden of remembrance was designed, built and installed into the gardens.



Staff consultation

In January 2017, staff were consulted in respect of changes to the working hours. Following this consultation, a review of the staff's terms and conditions on which they transferred and a review of our forward approach to ensure Aspire Landscape Management was "fit for purpose", was carried out.

As a result of this review, we moved to a standardised 40-hour working week and the introduction of an annualised working-hours pattern, which follows the horticultural calendar of peaks and troughs. This allows us to maximise productivity during key growth periods and reduce working hours in the winter months, in line with natural daylight hours.

Recruitment of Health, Safety, Environment and Quality Manager



Following a review of the staffing structure, Colin Munro was successfully appointed as Aspire Landscape Management's Safety, Health, Environmental and Quality Manager in January 2017.

Colin's role over the next year will be to develop procedures



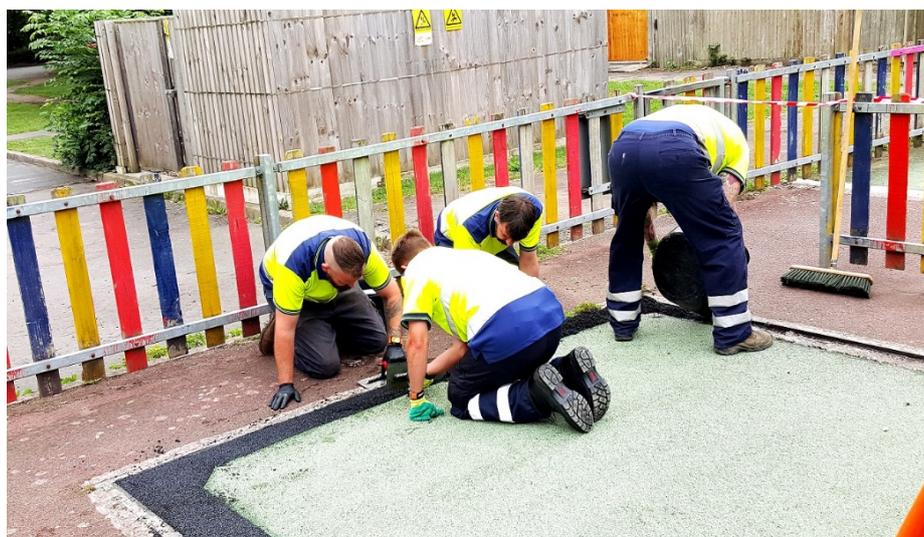
CHAS - Contractors Health and Safety Assessment Scheme.

The Contractor's Health and Safety Assessment Scheme (CHAS) is an HSE-supported third-party accreditation process forming part of the umbrella organisation Safety Schemes in Procurement (SSIP). CHAS accreditation involves an assessor reviewing documentation and evidence from the contractor's health and safety management system to demonstrate conformity with health and safety legislation and HSE codes of practice. CHAS accreditation assures potential buyers that an organisation has been assessed for compliance and robust management of current health and safety legislation. This valuable accreditation also removes the need to duplicate evidence of health and safety compliance as part of the contracting process, as many buyers will accept CHAS accreditation as evidence of robust health and safety management. Aspire Landscape Management were pleased to announce CHAS accreditation in August 2017 and look forward to the opportunities that accreditation will create in the near future, as well as supporting further accreditation.



Wet pour training and repair kit

Following a review of the condition of play areas across the borough, it is clear that a number of these sites are in need of significant repairs to the safety surfacing. This work was previously contracted out, with costs reaching upwards of £200 per square metre. Given the extent of the problem and the continued need for repairs to be undertaken, Aspire has purchased their own wet pour mixer, and trained a number of staff in how to lay the surfacing correctly. As a result, Aspire is now able to undertake this work in-house.



Drovers roundabout

In October 2016 Aspire Landscape Management inherited the maintenance of the Drovers roundabout on the A20 from Kent Highway Services. We set about transforming the overgrown roundabout, cutting and clearing the growth until we established a close-cut and regularly-maintained area.



The woodland garden – Victoria Park

The woodland garden is an area set aside to the far left of Victoria Park, previously developed as such in 1996. Unfortunately, over the years, maintenance has been lacking, resulting in a significant overgrowth and inaccessible areas leading to anti-social behaviour taking place.

Aspire Landscape Management set about a programme of thinning and grubbing out of trees in the winter of 2016, reducing and removing large swathes of dense vegetation and opening up views into the area.



Arboricultural team



Following the commencement of operational delivery, it became apparent that the unit required an arboricultural team. The team would need to be trained to undertake a range of tree works to allow the majority of tree work operations in the borough to be completed in-house without contracting operations.

Following consultation, it was agreed to form an arboricultural team within the Aspire unit in March 2017. We moved to recruit the necessary staff immediately and began a training programme to further equip the team with the latest skills and knowledge to perform their duties both safely and compliantly. The team are now qualified and trained to fell small, medium and large trees, climb and perform aerial rescue as well as fell and process windblown trees, allowing us to tackle the majority of tree works across the Borough, in-house.



Tree inspection service

Aspire Landscape Management will be undertaking a pre-planned regime of visual tree inspections across the Borough commencing in spring 2018. A programme of regular inspections will be formulated and undertaken to identify defects. Rectification works identified will be completed by the newly-formed arboricultural team.

Summer Bedding – 2017

We completed the planting of 25,000 geraniums in June, with the installation of the coffee pot train and 60 planters around the town. We also had an additional 6 three tier planters in the memorial gardens to add some height to the floral displays.



Gateways

Aspire has continued to deliver additional maintenance enhancements to the gateway areas, increasing the cutting regime on all roads and entrances to the town. We have started cutting areas on both Junction 9 and 10 of the M20 entrances as well as increasing cutting regimes in other areas such as Great Chart Bypass, Fougères Way, Templar Way and Orchard Heights.

Relationship with Kent Highway Services

We continue to nurture our relationship with Kent Highway Services, working with them to deliver a better standard of maintenance across the borough. This relationship is providing challenges and opportunities for both parties and will require continual investment from staff in both organisations to balance financial constraints with a desire for improved presentation.

Park Farm additional maintenance

We have introduced an improved maintenance regime in Park Farm, enhancing the specification from a single annual cut of highway shrubs and hedges to more regular maintenance leading to the improved appearance of highway borders. Additionally, a proactive approach to weed management continues to compliment the enhanced specification further improving the presentation of the area.

Singleton Lake car park

This is a new maintenance area which has suffered from a lack of attention in the past and has now been identified by Aspire Landscape Management as a key priority for 2017/18 Winter Works Programme, with works to include the reinstatement of timber bollards, car parking bays and installation of picnic benches. To offer improvement in the appearance of the car park and to reduce the number of potholes in the short term, resurfacing repairs were carried out in July.



These improvements, alongside planned winter works, will complement the promotional work our service is engaging in with Great Chart and Singleton Parish Council to develop Singleton Lakes for residents and visitors.

Summary of some of the feedback we have received.

“Just wanted to say a big thank you for all the beautiful spring flower displays in and around the town centre. They are truly magnificent. Well done, they really brighten my day.”

“The gardens are a real oasis so close to the town centre and at this time of the year a great place to sit enjoying a sandwich at lunchtime.”

“I want to say how beautiful the spring flowers in the town centre are and in particular in the Memorial Gardens. It is a joy to walk through the gardens and many thanks to everyone who has put in all the hard work to provide them.”

“The spring flowers in the town centre are stunning. Congratulations and keep up the good work. It is much appreciated.”

“I would like to commend the two workmen cutting the grass in Godinton Park. They took care in their work and carried out their duties with efficiency leaving a tidy area. The chap on the motor mower even lifted the tree branches whilst he mowed underneath and also litter picked as well. Well done!”

“Pass on my thanks to the two men who assisted with the burial of my mother’s ashes. They were very helpful and caring.”

“I saw the guys out this week maintaining the landscape at Drovers through to Trinity Road. I have never seen the landscape so professionally cut and with no debris left around. The street scene is incredible. Aspire’s start bodes well for the future

Aspire Winter Works Programme – 2017 /2018

In line with Aspire’s objective to improve the overall appearance of the borough we have developed a winter works programme and identified some key areas where works are planned during this coming winter period.

Aspire Landscape Management - Winter Works Programme 2017 -18			
Location	Summary of works	Duration	Proposed Timing
Buxford Meadow	Cutting works and formulation of regular mown pathways	1 week	Oct-17
St Marys Church	Bulb Planting (Galanthus and Crocus)	1 week	Oct-17
Spearpoint Roundabout	Replanting works	1 week	Oct-17
Drovers Roundabout	Bulb Planting (Galanthus and Crocus)	1 week	Oct-17
Cudworth Recreational areas	Vegetation clearance around scrapes and boundaries, cycle path	2 weeks	Oct-17
Victoria Park Watercress Fields	Cutting back of riverside banks and vegetation management	1 week	Nov-17
Victoria Park Wood Garden	Completion of clearance works & Stump grinding	1 week	Nov-17
Victoria Park Combat area	Clearance work and vegetation reductions around combat areas	2 weeks	Nov-17
Singleton Lake - Lake areas	Vegetation clearance to open up areas and views on to the lake	6 weeks	Dec-17
Singleton Lake - Car Park	Reinstatement of timber bollards car parking bays and installation of picnic benches	2 weeks	Jan-18
Singleton Lake - Lake swims	Repairs and restore swims and picnic bench installation	6 weeks	Jan-18
Bowens Field	Vegetation clearance and management	1 week	Feb-18
Ashford Road Roundabout	Clearance of trees	1 week	Mar-18
Spearpoint Recreation Ground	Soil mound removal	1 week	Mar-18
Park Farm roundabout	Clearance works, trees and shrubs, seeding and planting	2 weeks	Mar-18

Aspire – the future

Aspire Landscape Management is continually looking to improve the presentation of the borough and the standards of land management within it.

We will be supporting the development of Chilmington Green, providing advice and assistance where required.

We will look to expand opportunities to work with parish councils either advising on caretaker schemes or working for parish councils where co-located work allows.

We are and will continue to take the lead in advising on future management and maintenance options on land within our control and will actively support the development of cross service protocols to ensure all options are considered for best value, going forward.

Potential pressures

Since commencement of operations last October, Aspire continues to face high levels of demand, both internally and externally, for additional works. Having seen a considerable impact on borough presentation in a relatively short time, the service is very much a victim of its own success. Requests for additional works to areas owned by the borough, but not previously on former contracts, continue to grow. We were very aware that this year would be a “voyage of discovery” for all concerned, as we delivered a higher standard of presentation for the borough and as a result have a considerable volume of requests for additional areas of land to be cleared, brought up to standard and added to maintenance regimes. It is anticipated that this will continue into the next year, although potentially not at the volumes experienced this year.

As mentioned previously, budget pressures as a result of reduced Kent Highway Services (KHS) funding does, and will continue, to mean that the service faces the need to fund the aspirations for ever-improved borough presentation through sourcing additional work from bodies such as parishes and other land owners, to bridge the budget gap. The service is delivering higher standards and more work for less funding.

We continue to identify areas where there has been little or no maintenance in the last 10 years resulting in overgrowth. As we start to tackle these areas, the initial impact of such activities will be very visually noticeable. Going forward, these assets will require continued, routine maintenance to avoid any reversion.

The intention is also that the maintenance of ditches and waterways in the ownership of the borough, once cleared, will move to scheduled maintenance by Aspire.

Hard landscaping (including bridges, footpaths, fences) in open spaces has been improved, upgraded, installed and incorporated into Aspire’s maintenance regimes. The service has taken responsibility for identifying land within the ownership of the borough that is susceptible to incursion and is implementing a plan of works to secure areas on a risk rated basis.

Aspire welcomes the additional challenges these works present. However, it must be noted that the original remit for Aspire did not include this extensive additional work that has already been provided and is expected in the coming year.

Aspire will make every effort to absorb additional work and rise to these challenges but choices for the management of additional assets must be balanced against service resources and will require the careful management of expectations.

Included below is a list of some of the additional works Aspire has been requested to undertake during the year.

Conningbrook Lake

Requests for ongoing mowing works to be undertaken during 2017. Requirements for maintenance of this area is likely to vary in the forward leisure provisions.

Conningbrook Manor

Requests for varying maintenance and clearance works throughout 2017, to enable renovation works and prepare for the manor house to be let.



Ellingham Industrial Estate

Considerable additional works have been completed here as the original specification and frequency of operations had proved inadequate to deliver the standards of service expected by the tenants.





KCC Cycle Paths

The vegetation around cycle paths have been very poorly maintained. Whilst recognised as a County asset, Aspire has stepped in to cut back encroaching vegetation and kerb edge areas, where paths have become unsafe.



Alleyways and footpaths

A considerable amount of requests have been received for attendance to deal with overgrown alleyways across the borough, which have previously not been maintained or managed.



Alleyways – borough-wide

Requests for Aspire to attend to clear alleyways in varying locations across the borough, where those alleyways are accesses between housing estates, have been considerable. Alleyways that have not been subject to any works for some years have resulted in some being significantly overgrown. We are mindful that one-off clearances do not solve the ongoing maintenance issues, which will result in reoccurring work requirement in the future. We will endeavour to work with asset owners inside and outside the council to ensure on-going maintenance is instituted.



Future sites

We continue to identify new areas of land which are currently not being maintained and will require forward maintenance and management. As part of the open spaces consultation, alongside colleagues in Culture, we are identifying assets that will present a variety of maintenance requirements in the future. We will work with stakeholders and partner organisations to find the most efficient land maintenance solutions.

Boys Hall Meadow



Park Farm / Finn Farm Hibernacula



Lancaster Close



This year for Aspire has proved to be challenging and exciting.

The service is staffed by a team of very dedicated, focused and engaged people, working towards clear aspirations and delivering across the borough on an ever growing mandate of responsibilities.

We look forward in the coming year to developing and growing the service and considering business opportunities for the service in the longer term.



Achievements

October 2017 to September 2018



Background

In October 2016, Aspire Landscape Management was established; this followed Ashford Borough Council's decision to take the grounds maintenance function in house in line with Corporate Priority 4 – Attractive Ashford.

Alongside the day-to-day routine operations Aspire undertake, this document highlights just some of the second year's achievements, operations and activities over and above the "standard day job" which the Aspire team has completed and are worthy of a mention.

Aspire's birthday

On September 28 2017 Aspire held an open afternoon, inviting councillors to attend and celebrate its first birthday.

This gave the staff an opportunity to interact with the council members and demonstrated the broad range and complexity of the equipment and operations that the Aspire team undertake.

Additionally, it was an opportunity for staff to be awarded their certificates of competence by our Portfolio Holder Clair Bell.



Winter Works

In line with our planned approach, Aspire undertook a series of winter works. This focused on improvements across the borough on sites where significant cutting-back or rejuvenation was needed. These works were timed for winter, to allow for minimal impact to the wildlife and the site users accordingly.



Photo of new fencing at Singleton Lake Car Park

Winter works included:-

- Repairs to the swims at Singleton Lake
- General cutting back of vegetation
- Fencing and gate installations to prevent incursions
- Cutting back of vegetation at Cudworth Recreation Ground
- Hamstreet clearance works
- Bowens Field clearance works
- Bulb planting on Drovers Roundabout
- Bulb planting in St Marys Churchyard
- Replanting works at Spearpoint Roundabout

Commercial Business Plan

During the winter of 2017, James Laidlaw and Tracey Butler compiled a business plan; this plan was presented to Directors in April 2018. It focuses on seeking works commercially, allowing the generation of additional funds to support the renewal of small plant and equipment in future years.

Generation of low levels of income over the next five year period will ensure that the service is still clearly focused on the delivery of high standards of maintenance across the borough.

St Marys Churchyard

The Spring saw the crocuses that we planted last Autumn in full flower. The Members and Leader were delighted with the outcome as were the residents around St Marys.



Comments from the Mayor in Spring this year, on the whole Aspire service;

“Thank you so very much for the quick response to resident request. What a wonderful compliment of praise from a resident in the area. Aspire do such an incredible job all around Ashford and has made a huge positive mark on Ashford which is borne by the many comments I receive. On my behalf please thank all the team for their exceptional work and the care and attention they give to residents affected by their work.”

*With the kindest regards
Winston Michael
Mayor of Ashford”*

Mayor's Garden

On 17 May 2018, Aspire designed and installed a garden display in the council committee rooms for the new Mayor's (Cllr Jessamy Blandford) reception following the Mayor Making Ceremony. The garden design featured a waterfall and focused on a woodland theme, ahead of the year of the environment.



Garden display – Mayor making reception, Committee Rooms, 17th May 2018

The garden was extremely well received and delighted all attendees at the ceremony and following reception. There was particular praise from our Chief Executive (Tracey Kerly) and our Director (Ben Lockwood), as well as the Mayor herself.

Spring Bedding



Aspire had another successful year with the Spring bedding displays. Many positive comments were received on social media and in letters from the public.

We planted over 20,000 pansies and 15,000 tulip bulbs across the borough.

The work took four weeks to complete, planting commenced in October 2017 and was completed in time for Remembrance Day.

The spring bedding displays were at the peak of colour March and April 2018, before starting to die back in time for the summer bedding to be planted in May.

Civic Service

This year, Aspire supported the Civic Service, which took place on Sunday 3rd June 2018 at Great Chart Parish Church, with the reception being held at the Village Hall in Great Chart. Aspire supported the event in conjunction with Wyvale Garden Centre who supported the event by lending planters and plants which allowed us to decorate the village hall ahead of the reception. The displays were in place by 9.30 am on the Sunday and removed the same day following the end of the reception.



Over the Top installation and 100 Years commemorative displays

To mark and commemorate 100 years following the end of the First World War, Aspire designed and installed a number of commemorative displays within the Memorial Gardens, transforming the “Mound” with sand bags and soldier silhouettes and an artificial carpet measuring 5 metres square.



Over the top displays – memorial gardens with artificial poppy badge



This installation has been chosen to be the centre piece for the new “Flanders” roundabout coming to Ashford. The roundabout at the junction of the Romney Marsh Road, the A2070 and Malcolm Sargeant Way will be re-engineered at the beginning of 2019 and this installation will be the focus of the new design and stand in pride of place in Ashford for years to come.

The Silent Solider

In addition to the displays in the main Memorial Gardens, a “Silent Solider” silhouette was placed in the gardens, adjacent to the memorial, linking the display with those in the main gardens.

Links between the silhouette’s reflective stance and the memorial, along with this being a quieter area of the gardens were the reasons for its positioning.



Silent Solider – Memorial Gardens

The whole Memorial Gardens looked glorious this Summer.



Summer Bedding

In May 2018 we changed the winter bedding plants, stripping all the bulbs and pansies, cultivating the beds and planting over 20,000 geraniums. The works were completed in time for the Fields of Battle Exhibition.



This particular area (Somerset Road) has become a talking point for residents and Members in the town as the cannas have been so spectacular and often remarked upon.

The Floral Tank

This fantastic World War One British battle tank 3D display took over 3 months to produce. The tank weighs just over four tonnes and was installed on site using a telehandler with long forks. The carpet bed alongside the tank depicts the regimental flag of the WW1 tank unit. The carpet bed is displayed in a steel framework, which was also produced to order. Almost 10,000 carpet bedding plants were carefully planted into the tank framework by hand and the plants were grown on for six weeks before delivery.



Floral Tank in position, Vicarage Lane, Ashford, summer 2018

Construction phase of the Floral Tank, showing its weldmesh framework prior to planting spring 2018



Field of Battle Lands of Peace Exhibition

In June 2018, the Fields of Battle, Lands of Peace exhibition came to Ashford, after leaving the Guildhall in London. The exhibition was in place for a month during which time Aspire was responsible for cleaning and checking the displays. Aspire also supported the opening of the exhibition which took place on Sunday 3rd June.



FOLOP Exhibition – Memorial Gardens June 2018

Aspire and TCAT merger



In June Aspire and TCAT joined forces, TCAT staff transferred to Aspire along with their associated work in the Town. The merger followed a brief consultation process, once the staff were successfully on-boarded, town centre improvements have continued throughout the summer period.

Town centre improvements

Since TCAT and Aspire became one, Aspire have undertaken a number of town Centre improvements

These included:

- Bench painting

- Cleaning and painting the bandstand
- Replanting works
- Tree pruning in the churchyard
- Jet washing of the paved areas

Continued works are planned which will see further improvements around the town

Before and after photos of the replanting works carried out at Park Mall Shopping Centre, Ashford.



SnowDogs



Aspire has supported the SnowDogs exhibition, fixing the dogs onto concrete plinths, transporting the dogs to site, the final positioning and affixing signage. During the exhibition we will be regularly cleaning and checking the dogs, before collecting them all together for the Farewell event planned in December.



Impatience Team support



During August 2018, Aspire undertook clearance works along the riverside and cycle pathways leading from the domestic station towards the Designer Outlet and Millstream. These works form part of the Impatience Team project, which is aimed at improving the routes into the town and connectivity with the Designer Outlet.

Improvements around the underpass access...



(Photographs following show before and after images of the cycleway around the subway entrances adjacent to the station and HS1 flyover



Clearing under HS1



Opening up, cleaning and repainting the underpass access from the Outlet Centre end...



Transforming the area adjacent to the station access..



ISO Certification

Aspire has been certificated to ISO 9001, Quality, ISO 14001, Environment and ISO 45001, Health and Safety, in July. Colin Munro, Health, Safety, Environment and Quality Manager has been working hard to achieve these accreditations. This certification follows weeks of preparation and compliance checks to ensure Aspire fully complies with the standards.



Commercial Customers

Aspire has continued to build its customer portfolio with other local organisations, providing grounds maintenance and associated services allowing the generation of income. Customers include:

- High Halden Parish Council
- Westwell Parish Council
- Shadoxhurst Parish Council
- Challock Parish Council
- Singleton and Great Chart Parish Council
- Morgan Sindall
- Julie Rose Stadium



Kent Highway Services

Aspire continue to provide Kent Highway Services with the maintenance of the highway verges and border areas across the borough, enhancing the maintenance frequencies accordingly to provide a suitably-maintained appearance. As a result of these enhanced frequencies and standards, this Spring Aspire received commendations on the appearance of the borough from Kent Highways and thanks for our hard work from highway officers, confirming the positive comments they had received since Aspire had commenced operations.

Winter Works Programme 2018/2019

Tabled below are some of the projects and enhancements that Aspire intend to complete over the winter months into the Spring of 2019

Location	Summary of works	Duration	Proposed Timing
Park Farm Central Park	Clearance of hedging and knee rail	2 weeks	Dec-18
Allotment Project William Rd	Development of seating area, raised beds and community store / potting shed	2 weeks	Feb-19
Litter Bin Roll Out	Replacement of bins	Ongoing	Jan-19
Memorial safety inspections	Cat 1 and 2 re-inspection works	4 weeks	Nov-18
Singleton Lake	Installation of picnic benches, bollards and further clearance works. Review re-surfacing options and costs	8 weeks	Dec-18
Victoria Park	Combat area and watercress fields further vegetation clearance works	8 weeks	Dec-18
Lancaster Close, Hamstreet	Continuation of reinstatement works further to clearance works	2 weeks	Jan-19
Fairfield Terrace	Hedge reduction	1 week	Jan-19
Bowens Field	Clearance works	2 weeks	Jan-19
A28 Gateway Roundabout	Re -landscaping	4 weeks	Dec-18
Forrester Place	Planting works	2 weeks	Nov-18
Park Farm	Hedge planting works	2 weeks	Jan-19
Town Centre	Planting works (bulbs)	1 week	Oct-18
St Marys Churchyard	Tree planting	1 week	Feb-19
Memorial Gardens	Remembrance Sunday preparation	1 month	Oct-18
North Park	Poppy Field installation	1 week	Nov-18
Car Parks	Initial clearance and tidying	2 months	Feb-19