



Ashford  
Borough Council

## Ashford Town Centre Framework - 2019 to 2025



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Welcome to Ashford's Town Centre Framework.

High streets up and down the country are facing challenging times with the increase in online shopping and the need to offer something beyond just a shopping experience. In recent years Ashford Borough Council has taken bold steps to support its town centre including purchasing Park Mall Shopping Centre and overseeing a programme of investment totalling £520m which is changing the fortunes of the town.

This is having a positive knock on effect, with Ashford College bringing in students into the town, the Commercial Quarter bringing in office workers plus we have the Elwick Place cinema and new Brewery adding to our leisure and night time offer.

Ashford is bucking some national trends with regards to footfall, however, as the scale of the challenge grows and as other centres compete to differentiate and diversify their offer, we need a clear future direction that builds on the sound foundations being laid. The Ashford Town Centre Framework aims to do just that.

2018 saw an extraordinary programme of events in the town, including the Snowdogs art trail, the Fields of Battle Lands of Peace Exhibition and Splashes of Summer family fun activities. These events enlivened and enriched the town's offer and most importantly brought the community together.

In developing this plan we have listened carefully to what residents, businesses and partners have said about the existing offer of the town centre and what they want to see in the future. Our vision is that:

*Ashford Town Centre is a place where the community meet, share experiences, shop and pursue their interests – a place **people and businesses flourish**. By 2025 our three priority outcomes are that Ashford Town Centre...*

*... has a **sense of community** and is a place to be **proud of**  
... is a **destination** where people **choose** to socialise, relax and have fun  
... is **thriving** and accessible to **all**.*

Ashford has come a long way but we must not rest on our laurels. We must continue to work together with local businesses, partners and the community to realise this vision and to meet the future needs of our borough.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 The Future of the High Street

Ashford is one of many high streets throughout the country experiencing considerable change and significant challenges. Consumer spending habits, levels of disposal income and changes in how people use their leisure time have all had an impact but undoubtedly the biggest impact has been the unprecedented growth of online shopping. In 2000 online retailing accounted for less than 1% of total retail sales, by October 2018 almost a fifth of all retail sales took place online.<sup>1</sup> Technological advances, such as the fast growth in personal computer use, smartphone use and improvements to broadband have facilitated this rapid rise in online retailing. It is the speed of these changes that has meant that many town centres and high street are struggling with high vacancy rates and falling footfall. It has been particularly hard for those town centres that heavily rely on traditional retail. Whilst evidence shows that town centres with a wide choice of retail services, residential and office space are more successful at adapting to change.<sup>2 3</sup>

A strong retail and leisure offer is no longer enough to secure the future prosperity of a town centre. It is also the sense of community, the experiences people have and the social interaction. As Mary Portas put it back in 2011: “The new high street won’t just be about selling goods. The mix will include shops but could also include housing, offices, sports, schools or other social, commercial and cultural enterprises and meeting places. They should become places where we go to engage with other people in our communities, where shopping is just one small part of rich mix of activities”.<sup>4</sup>

## 1.2 Building on our success

Over a number of years Ashford Borough Council has taken an innovative and proactive approach in tackling the challenges the town centre faces to support the regeneration of the town. The 2015-2020 Corporate Plan set out an ambition of achieving a vibrant town supporting a business centre. To achieve this ambition, the council has actively sought inward investment in new jobs, homes, hotels and leisure attractions in the town centre and, where needed, used council resources to help trigger major new investments. A key priority has been creating new daytime and evening activity in the town centre and kick-starting major new office development. The council’s purchase of a town centre shopping centre has supported the development of independent retailers in the town to make it a lively and attractive shopping destination.

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<sup>1</sup> Office for National Statistics (2018), Retail Sales, Great Britain: October 2018

<sup>2</sup> Public Health England (2018), Healthy High Streets

<sup>3</sup> British Property Federation (2016), Town Centre Investment Zones: Getting investment back into the high street

<sup>4</sup> The Portas independent review (2011): the future of our high streets

Ashford's innovative and proactive approach was recognised by the High Street Minister Jake Berry MP following a visit to Ashford in May 2018.

A summary of some of the key interventions and projects are as follows:

### **Support for Revelation at St. Mary's**

Revelation is Ashford's music and arts venue, delivered by the St Mary's Arts Trust and supported by Ashford Borough Council. Operating since 2011, Revelation Ashford aims to be a beacon for the arts, to which Ashford's growing community can come together and experience high quality performance and exhibitions.

### **Loveashford**

Established in 2014 Loveashford.com has been Ashford's digital high street and was the first website of its kind. Loveashford supports local businesses and business owners by promoting all of the best news, stories, offers and events in Ashford's town centre.

### **Purchase of Park Mall Shopping Centre**

Back in 2015 Ashford Borough Council purchased the then ailing Park Mall shopping centre, where one third of shops lay empty. Today nearly all units are let and it is home to innovative, high-quality independent traders with footfall growing by seven per cent year on year.

### **Support for Made in Ashford**

Operating from Park Mall shopping centre, Made in Ashford is a collaboration of local designer/makers and crafts people helping to support and nurture small creative businesses by giving them an affordable platform on the high street to showcase and sell their products.

### **Ashford College**

Ashford college is a new multi-million pound state-of-the-art building located in Ashford town centre. It opened its doors to the first intake of students of over 1000 students and 100 members of staff in September 2017.

### **St. Mary's Churchyard refreshed**

In April 2018, Ashford Borough Council took proactive action to refresh and refurbish St Mary's Churchyard in the town centre and ensure it is a clean, more attractive and a pleasant place for residents to visit.

### **Splashes of Summer**

Under the Loveashford banner, Splashes of Summer was a series of fun family events aimed at animating the town centre throughout July and August 2018. These free events included live music, street entertainment, and games such as over-sized

chess and table tennis. The programme of events proved to be very successful with over 50% of those attending events visiting specifically for this purpose and 67% of these attendees then visiting businesses in the town.

### **Commercial Quarter**

Phase 1 of the Commercial Quarter, Connect38, opened in 2018 providing an 80,000 sq ft office block on Station Road in Ashford. The council's long term aspiration is that the Commercial Quarter will create several thousand jobs, 590,000 sq ft of office space and 150 homes within the town centre.

### **Elwick Place**

In December 2018 Elwick Place officially opened. Funded by Ashford Borough Council, Elwick Place is Ashford's flagship town centre leisure development. The development includes a six-screen Picturehouse cinema, a 58 bedroom Travelodge Hotel and restaurant complex.

### **Snowdogs arts trail**

Snowdogs Discover Ashford was a Wild in Art event delivered by the council and Pilgrims Hospices. The public art trail of 35 Snowdog sculptures, designed by local and regional artists, was placed around the town during September and November 2018. There was a 15% increase in town centre footfall during these months.

### **Ashford's One You Shop**

Working in partnership with Kent Community Health Care Trust, Kent County Council and Ashford Borough Council, the One You shop provides free health care services, support and advice located in the heart of the town. In 2018 the One You Shop was shortlisted for the Royal Society for Public Health's 'Health on the High Street' Award.

### **Fields of Battle, Lands of Peace 14-18 Exhibition June 2018**

Opening on Monday 30th April 2018 at London's Guildhall, the photographic exhibition was a tribute to all those who took part in, or were affected by, the First World War. Sponsored by Ashford Borough Council, the renowned open air photographic exhibition was displayed in the town's memorial gardens as part of its national tour in June 2018. The exhibition was very well received by local residents.

### **Curious Brewery**

The Curious Brewery, from Chapel Down is set to open in spring 2019. This 1.6 acre craft brewery experience will enable it to grow its domestic and international distribution and contribute to the tourism offer of the town and borough. The brewery will be open to the public for guided tours and will feature a shop, restaurant and bar.

## **Coachworks**

Due to open in summer 2019, the council is working with Carl Turner Architects to develop a meanwhile, mixed-use campus at Dover Place, close to the international train station. Coachworks will provide co-working space primarily aimed at start-up companies, flexible indoor/outdoor event space and a food and drink destination showcasing local producers and suppliers.

## **Town Centre CCTV**

In May 2019 public space cameras are to be updated in Ashford. The new cameras will generate high-resolution digital images that will be relayed to the monitoring centre via the Kent Public Service Network (KPSN). The new cameras represent a major investment in the town and will help to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour in the town as well as providing reassurance to town centre residents and visitors.

## **New Homes Planned for the Town Centre**

Increasingly Ashford Town Centre is a place to live which will bring new residents and vibrancy into the town centre. Over 1000 new homes are planned for the town centre including 660 new homes at Riverside Park, 216 new apartments at Victoria Point and 110 apartments in the additional blocks next to the Panorama building.

## 1.3 Challenges for Ashford Town Centre

1. **Ashford Town Centre is predominantly a functional and convenient centre, it lacks a sense of community, distinctive identity and has a weaker retail and cultural offer.**

A key challenge for Ashford that has come out of the residents survey and town centre consultation in 2018, is that the offer in Ashford Town Centre needs to be stronger, that Ashford Town Centre lacks an identity, with most residents citing Ashford Designer Outlet and Ashford International Station as the two key unique selling points (USPs) within the area, both of which are not on the High Street or within the traditional heart of the town centre. Ashford has not been exciting enough local residents to come and visit regularly enough, and especially the more affluent residents that can help create vibrancy. Many Ashford residents perceive Ashford town centre as an unsafe place with high crime levels and incidents of anti-social behaviour, which is creating a significant barrier to attracting people to visit.

Resident satisfaction levels are not as high for the town centre as for Ashford as a whole, with only 40% very/fairly satisfied with Ashford as a place to shop and 25% very/fairly satisfied with Ashford as a place to go out. With closures of shops like M&S, Argos, BHS and Clintons, and the opening of Deichmann, Metro Bank, Café Madeline, and Smiggle, Ashford's retail offer is changing. The Town Centre also competes with Canterbury, Maidstone, Folkestone and Tunbridge Wells, as well as with local out-of-town retail and leisure parks like the Designer Outlet, Ashford Retail Park, Warren Retail Park, John Lewis, and the big supermarkets. Ashford is considered a mid-size Convenience and Community Town Centre, the group most at threat from changes to online shopping and out of town retail. Footfall has risen in the town centre in 2018 off the back of a successful programme of events and activities, but is still not back above 2014 levels.

2. **Ashford Town Centre is going through significant change and growth, and is in transition and at a tipping point with the potential to thrive, but also with clear threats.**

Off the back of the opening of domestic high speed services from Ashford International Station in 2009 on High Speed 1, that reduced journey times to London to 38 minutes, Ashford has attracted approximately £520 m of investment into the town, including new road infrastructure, housing development, a new brewery, a new Aldi, the Connect 38 office building, a new Ashford College town centre campus, the Elwick Place leisure development, and the expansion of the Ashford Designer Outlet. These have been delivered in partnership with private sector developers, but also through the drive and leadership of Ashford Borough Council. Ashford set out its Big 8 projects in 2013, and set up an Ashford Strategic Delivery Board to deliver these, with representation from key public sector organisations. In 2019, many have already completed, and the rest are under construction or progressing. This is creating a positive buzz about the town, but are only the first stages as part of a longer-term strategy to create a thriving town and town centre.

The development and growth in Ashford Town Centre is changing people's habits and creating challenges for tertiary areas such as the Lower High Street, which are becoming less attractive as they become less busy. As the town centre evolves, there is a need to change the use of town centre retail spaces and create new attractive experiences, leisure venues, community space, and living spaces. This will require the redressing of property values with some less commercially viable uses required in the future to stimulate community activity. With over 1000 homes planned or under construction in the town centre, there is the clear challenge of curating the area as a living space for its growing town centre population.

There are lower quality areas of public realm in parts of the town centre such as the Lower High Street and around the Bandstand, which will take significant investment to realise their full potential in the future. With all of the current development and future opportunities, Ashford still has an immature investment market with more challenging development viability, requiring the need for public intervention to ensure the right commercial and community space is created to complete the transformation of the heart of Ashford Town Centre.

### **3. The accessibility of Ashford Town Centre is challenging for both pedestrians and vehicles.**

With the second highest number of comments from the Ashford Town Centre Consultation in 2018, accessibility is a key issue for visitors to the town centre. Limited public transport from the rural areas surrounding Ashford, as well as poor bus interchanges, require improvements to public transport. Ashford also suffers from poor convoluted access to central car parks within the former ring road area. These all make Ashford a less attractive offer to visit, and there are opportunities through improved signage and use of technologies to improve this visitor experience.

With the considerable new construction and development over the last few years on brownfield town centre sites, this is changing the structure of the town and how people move around it. A key challenge is the pedestrian route from Ashford International train station through to the town centre, to attract some of the 3.9 visitors to dwell and spend more time in the town centre.

In Conclusion, Ashford is at a tipping point where the momentum built up over the last few years could create a vibrant town centre with some key further investments that create entertainment and leisure destinations that diversify the offer and reliance on retail. The challenge is establishing the capital investment to take forward the next phases of development in Ashford town centre and to regenerate existing spaces to complement the existing events and promotional activity.

## 2. Feedback from research and consultation

### 2.1 2018 Residents' Survey

Research from the 2018 Residents' Survey<sup>5</sup> provides useful insight into how well regarded the town centre is by local people, what draws different groups to the town centre and how frequently they visit. Overall the survey found middling levels of satisfaction with the town as a place to shop and lower levels of satisfaction with Ashford town centre as a place to visit and as a place to go out. Those living in Ashford town itself generally held the town's offer in higher regard than those living in rural areas.

Residents were asked how satisfied they are with Ashford town centre as a **place to shop** - whilst 40% said that they are very/fairly satisfied, 41% said that they are dissatisfied to some extent. There were lower levels of satisfaction with Ashford town centre as a **place to visit** with 25% being very/fairly satisfied but 50% of residents saying that they are dissatisfied to some extent. There were similar levels of satisfaction with the town as a **place to go out** with 22% of residents being very/fairly satisfied compared with 56% of residents being dissatisfied to some extent.

The residents' survey also asked how frequently residents visit key locations in the town centre. The survey found that over half of residents visit Park Mall shopping centre at least once a month or more often. Those living in Ashford tend to use it the most frequently (a third of Ashford town residents visit once a week or more) this compares with just 8% of rural residents using the town centre as frequently. This is also true of visits to County Square shopping centre where 41% of residents living in Ashford town visit once a week or more, compared with only 9% from rural areas.

When it comes to eating out during the daytime, 11% of Ashford town centre residents eat out at least once a week compared with only 2% of residents from rural areas. The survey also found that only 8% of Ashford town residents and 1% of rural residents eat and socialise in the evenings in the town centre.

### 2.2 Town Centre Consultation 2018

The Town Centre Framework has been shaped and informed by the findings from the Town Centre Consultation, which ran from July to October 2018. The consultation was structured around four open-ended questions as follows:

*How do we create a buzz about Ashford and make it stand out from the crowd?*

*How do we create a thriving, fun place to go in the daytime and at night?*

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<sup>5</sup> Ashford Borough Council's 2018 Residents' Survey - <https://www.ashford.gov.uk/media/6916/residents-survey-2018.pdf>

*How do we create a place that is welcoming and accessible to all?*

*How can we make Ashford a place we are proud to call home?*

The consultation sought responses from residents, local businesses and town centre visitors. Over 1500 comments were received which varied from one word answers through to in-depth responses of several pages regarding a number of issues affecting the town centre. Respondents were able to submit their views in a number of ways including:

- an online consultation tool which encouraged comments and debate
- an online questionnaire promoted widely via social media and on the council's website
- Exhibition materials and paper questionnaires were available at the Gateway and at the council offices and questionnaires were also distributed to businesses across the town centre
- A stakeholder conference involving local businesses, community groups and other partners.

Frequently recurring comments related to entertainment and culture, accessibility, safety, and general ideas for improvements to the town. Many respondents wanted the council to encourage a variety of entertainment opportunities that are inclusive of all, a mixture of retail so there is something for everyone, as well as making the town more accessible (particularly for those with disabilities or those who use public transport) and feel more safe, especially at night. Other comments included tackling perceptions about aspects of the town, such as vacant retail units, and making the town look more attractive. A summary of the main themes and comments is set out below:

<b>Expanding the offer of the town</b>	<b>Addressing areas for improvement</b>	<b>Creating a community and town to be proud of</b>
<p>A variety of entertainment, leisure and retail</p> <p>More events and activities to take part in</p> <p>The offer of the town should be unique</p> <p>Supporting local and independent businesses as well as enticing bigger brands</p> <p>Introduce facilities and events targeted at groups within the borough</p>	<p>Addressing actual crime as well as perceptions of crime</p> <p>Ensuring disabled access is improved and all new builds are accessible</p> <p>Improve public transport to reduce traffic making the town easier to visit</p> <p>Make parking easier free or cheaper particular for people who just want to pop into town</p>	<p>Create opportunities to meet and socialise with others</p> <p>Protect green spaces and care for the environment</p> <p>Ensure housing is well-placed and affordable</p> <p>Be inclusive of everyone</p> <p>Ensure the town centre is the heart of the community</p>

<p>Introduce facilities and events targeted at groups within the borough</p> <p>Promote events going on in the town</p>	<p>Ensure safety for pedestrians</p> <p>Make navigation easier with better signage and lighting</p>	<p>Keep going with current projects</p> <p>Keep the town clean and looking smart</p> <p>Celebrate Ashford's heritage.</p>
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At a stakeholder conference held on the 2 October 2018, elected Members, residents, businesses and other stakeholders were invited to discuss the future of the Town Centre, including current proposals. A workshop facilitated by Dr Steve Millington from the Institute of Place Management, based at Manchester Metropolitan University, identified some of the key challenges according to delegates. From the analysis of the results of the workshop, it was recommended that Ashford consider:

*Restructuring:* To restructure governance structures and also physical structuring, requiring co-operation with stakeholders and creating strategic networks and public-private relationships

*Rebranding:* Focus on the application of branding, marketing communications and public relations techniques to establish a consistent place identity

*Reinventing:* Encourage diverse leisure/recreational activities to improve perception, and monitor changes in footfall

*Repositioning:* Consider repositioning itself as more than a retail destination, such as by focusing on becoming a "modern market town".

### 3. Vision, objectives and priority outcomes for Ashford Town Centre

The vision and objectives set out in the framework have been informed by the extensive consultation that was undertaken. The framework is structured around an overall vision for the town centre, supported by ten objectives and three priority outcomes to be achieved by 2025, as shown below:

<b>VISION</b> - Ashford town centre is a place where the community meet, share experiences, shop and pursue their interests – a place where <b>people</b> and <b>businesses flourish</b>	
<b>OBJECTIVES</b>	<b>PRIORITY OUTCOMES</b>
i. An <b>attractive</b> and <b>clean</b> town centre	Ashford town centre has a <b>sense of community</b> and is a place to be <b>proud</b> of.
ii. A <b>safe</b> town centre	
iii. A welcoming place with a <b>civic heartbeat</b>	
iv. A <b>desirable place to live</b> for new and existing residents	
v. A town centre known for its <b>quality experiences</b> that appeal to residents and visitors alike	Ashford is a <b>destination</b> where people <b>choose</b> to socialise, relax and have fun.
vi. Ashford has a <b>vibrant evening and night time economy</b> with a wide variety of places to meet, eat and drink	
vii. A town centre with <b>quality cultural and entertainment facilities</b>	
viii. Ashford town centre is known for its <b>mix of independent and high street traders</b> and a place where <b>businesses thrive</b>	Ashford town centre is <b>thriving</b> and accessible to <b>all</b> .
ix. Ashford town centre is <b>easy to navigate</b> by all and <b>well connected</b> by public transport	
x. Ashford is known for being a ' <b>smart town</b> ', digitally connecting people to information, services, experiences and offers.	

### 3.1 Priority outcome 1 - Ashford town centre has a sense of community and is a place to be proud of

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Timescale S/M/L<sup>6</sup></b>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Lead organisation(s)</b>	<b>Measures of success</b>
<b>An attractive and clean town centre.</b>	S	Undertake environmental and safety improvements on the route between the station and outlet centre including CCTV and lighting upgrades and repairs and repainting footbridge.	Network Rail, ABC, McArthur Glen, KCC	<b>Maintain levels of street cleanliness in the town centre.</b>
	S, M & L	Undertake street tree planting project.	ABC, KCC	<b>Reduction in airborne pollutant concentrations in town centre</b>
	M	Support retailers to improve shop front design through grant scheme	ABC working with local retailers	<b>Increase in the % of town centre residents saying that they have pride in the local area.</b>
	S	Improve the appearance of the High Street through small environmental improvements including relocation of three BT telephone boxes and minor repairs to existing red paving and gullies.	ABC, BT, KCC	
<b>A safe town centre.</b>	S & M	Deliver the Community Safety Partnership rolling action plan to help tackle crime and anti-social behaviour in the town centre.	Community Safety Partnership	<b>Reduction in the level of Anti-Social Behaviour and crime in Victoria ward.</b>

<sup>6</sup> \* S = short-term within 1 year, M = medium-term 2-3 years, L= long-term 3 years+

Objective	Timescale S/M/L <sup>6</sup>	Actions	Lead organisation(s)	Measures of success
A welcoming place with a civic heartbeat.	S	Deliver Phase 1 of the Coachworks providing new space for community events and community meeting space.	Carl Turner Architects working with ABC	<p>Increase in the % of residents saying that they feel part of the community.</p> <p>Increase in the % of town centre residents saying that they have pride in the local area.</p>
	S	Introduce small grant funding to deliver a range of community events in the town centre.	ABC	<p>Value of grant funding approved and delivered</p> <p>No. of events delivered, attendance, attendance by target groups, social media reach</p>
	S	Commission 'Made in Ashford' to deliver creative community workshops and events.	ABC working with Made in Ashford	No. of workshops delivered, attendance, attendance by target low engagement groups (to be defined), social media reach

Objective	Timescale S/M/L <sup>6</sup>	Actions	Lead organisation(s)	Measures of success
A desirable place to live for new and existing residents	S, M & L	Delivery of new quality homes in the town centre by 2025	Various development partners and ABC	<p>Increase in the % of town centre residents saying that their local area is a good place to live.</p> <p>Breakdown of type and tenure of new homes in the town centre.</p> <p>Number of new homes delivered in the town centre.</p>
	S	Review existing partnership arrangements in the town centre to increase the involvement of the local community and communities of interest.	ABC working with local community groups.	<p>Increase in the % of town centre residents saying that they have pride in the local area.</p> <p>Increase in the % of town centre residents saying that they can influence local decision making</p>

3.2 Priority Outcome 2 - Ashford is a **destination** where people **choose** to socialise, relax and have fun.

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Timescale S/M/L</b>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Lead organisation(s)</b>	<b>Measures of success</b>
<i>A town centre known for its <b>quality experiences</b> that appeal to residents and visitors alike</i>	S	Commission a programme of town centre events to animate the town centre throughout the year. Determine potential new arrangements to manage the enhanced town centre cultural offer.	ABC	Increase in town centre footfall, spend and dwell time in the daytime, evening and at night.
	S	Improve marketing and branding of town centre events programme to increase reach and impact	ABC working with Ashford Business Forum	Increase in satisfaction with the town centre as a place to go out/visit/shop
	M	Explore the feasibility, design and delivery of new play space in one or more town centre locations	ABC	
<i>Ashford has a <b>vibrant evening and night time economy</b> with a wide variety of places to meet, eat and drink</i>	M	Commission a quality, high profile annual event with a particular focus on driving the night time economy.	ABC	Increase in participation in cultural activities from specific groups/communities where there is low engagement (to be defined)
	L	Explore Purple Flag accreditation to support a thriving evening and night time economy	ABC working with the Community safety Partnership and Business Forum	
	S	Deliver the Phase 1 of the Coachworks to become a new destination for performance, exhibition space and food and drink events selling locally sourced and made products.	Carl Turner Architects working with ABC	Increase in visitor numbers at events
<i>A town centre with <b>quality cultural and entertainment facilities</b></i>	M	Develop Ashford's 'old town' through the Mecca/ Vicarage Lane site to enhance Ashford's heritage by revealing St Mary's Church and retaining the lower high street frontage	ABC working with a development partner	Increase in usage of the town centre from the following ACORN groups:

Objective	Timescale S/M/L	Actions	Lead organisation(s)	Measures of success
	S	Market test options for the 'upstairs space' in the former Mecca building to create a new indoor performance/creative space in the town centre	ABC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Comfortable communities</li> <li>Rising prosperity</li> <li>Affluent achievers</li> </ul> Increase in visitor number as measured through the Visitor Information Centre
	M	Deliver a new outdoor performance area/square at the Mecca/Vicarage Lane site	ABC working with a development partners	
	L	Explore the potential to establish and deliver a new Arts, Entertainment, and Conference venue to include theatre and related facilities.	ABC	
	M	Determine potential new arrangements to manage the enhanced town centre cultural offer.	ABC	

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### 3.3 Priority Outcome 3 - Ashford town centre is **thriving** and accessible to **all**.

Objective	Timescale S/M/L	Actions	Lead organisation(s)	Measures of success
<i>Ashford town centre is known for its <b>mix of independent and high street traders and a place where businesses thrive</b></i>	S	Encourage and support temporary 'meanwhile uses' in key town centre locations and empty units to stimulate and widen Ashford's permanent offer.	ABC	Reduce vacancy rates of units in the town centre
	M	Review existing partnership arrangements with retail/ business stakeholders in the town centre	ABC	
	S	Deliver phase 1 of the Coachworks to create 3,000 sq ft of flexible office accommodation/meeting space for hire.	Carl Turner Architects working with ABC	Increase the number of new businesses locating in the town centre
	L	Deliver Phase 2 of the Coachworks (Corn Mill) to deliver creative studios for local artists, designers and makers.	ABC	Increase the number of cultural and creative businesses locating in the town centre
	M	Develop a business support programme for independent retailers to help them evolve their offer in a continually challenging and changing retail and entertainment environment.	ABC	Increase in business survival rates
	S-M	Continue to support 'Made in Ashford', a pop up shop selling high quality handmade local products in Park Mall.	ABC working with Made in Ashford	Vacancy rates in Park Mall

Objective	Timescale S/M/L	Actions	Lead organisation(s)	Measures of success
	S-M	Ensure Park Mall continues to provide a diverse offer of independent retailers	ABC working with Made in Ashford	
	M	Review the way forward for future market provision in the town centre.	ABC	
<i>Ashford town centre is easy to navigate by all and well connected by public transport</i>	M	Resurface pedestrian and cycling routes in the underpass to the outlet centre.	ABC, KCC, Sustrans	Increase in no. of cycling trips through town
	M	Improve road surface in the Lower High street	ABC, KCC	Increase in town centre footfall  Increase in the % of town centre residents saying that they have pride in the local area.
	M	Deliver Mecca/vicarage Lane project to create a new pedestrian route to the town centre.	ABC	Increase in town centre footfall  Increase in the % of town centre residents saying that they have pride in the local area.
	M	Deliver a new quality, accessible multi-storey car park at Station Road.	ABC	Increase quality and capacity of town centre parking

Objective	Timescale S/M/L	Actions	Lead organisation(s)	Measures of success
	M	Work up designs and detailed costings for the identified key cycleway and pedestrian 'missing links' to better connect the town centre and support the delivery of priority projects.	ABC, KCC, Sustrans	<p>Increase in no. of cycling trips through town</p> <p>Increase in the % of town centre residents saying that they have pride in the local area.</p>
	S	Review town centre signage including car parking, 'entry signs' and way finding to improve navigation to /around the town.	ABC, KCC	Increase occupancy rates and capacity of town centre parking
	M	Plan and deliver an attractive route from the station and International Quarter to the High Street through a series of great spaces.	ABC, KCC	<p>Increase in town centre footfall</p> <p>Increase in the % of town centre residents saying that they have pride in the local area.</p>

Objective	Timescale S/M/L	Actions	Lead organisation(s)	Measures of success
	M	Work with partners to deliver improvements to community/ public transport provision to serve the town's urban and rural hinterland.	ABC, KCC, Stagecoach	Increase bus patronage, maintenance of service frequency and routes
<i>Ashford is known for being a 'smart town', digitally connecting people to information, services, experiences and offers.</i>	M	Building on Love Ashford, take forward the 'smart town' concept to digitally connect people to information, services, experiences and offers.	ABC	Increase reach through social media  Increase in the % of town centre residents saying that they have pride in the local area.
	M	Explore extending public Wi-Fi provision in the town centre (e.g. using new lighting and street furniture) and supporting the development of 5G technology.	ABC	

## **4. Delivery, measuring impact and review**

### **4.1 Our guiding principles**

In working towards the renaissance of the town centre, the following principles have guided Ashford Borough Council to ensure delivery. These principles will be taken forward into the partnerships supporting the delivery of the Ashford Town Centre Framework. Together we will:

1. Deliver real, qualitative change at pace – don't wait for the 'perfect' masterplan
2. Celebrate and consolidate our 'old town', and excite people in the contrasting character of the emerging new Ashford alongside it
3. Recognise the key Council role of 'curating' our town centre – 101+ small initiatives will add up to help drive change and build confidence
4. Be brave and determined to be different – be afraid of being the same!
5. Recognise that, first and foremost, people want quality experiences
6. Work hard to understand what different generations and different groups of people want – e.g. millennials; grey pounders; young families
7. Enable temporary, 'meanwhile uses' and activity in public spaces are key points on the roadmap to more permanent solutions
8. Capture the imagination of the '5%' of creative innovators in the population and use and grow local talent
9. Achieve more by working with partners and critical friends to harness their skills and capacity
10. Get the welcome to our town centre right - first impressions matter

## 4.2 Working with our partners and the local community

The diagram below sets out the roles of the key partnerships and the council in the delivery, oversight and review of the framework.

	Ashford Strategic Delivery Board	Town Centre Place Making Board	Ashford Town Centre Business Forum	
Purpose	The Ashford Strategic Delivery Board is a collaborative board which works together to negotiate practical and pragmatic solutions to problems of delivery and to promote these solutions within the member organisations.	The Ashford Town Centre Place Making Board provides strategic and operational direction for the regeneration of Ashford town centre.	The Ashford Town Centre Business Forum is an advisory group dealing with operational matters impacting on the town centre.	
Membership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ABC</li> <li>• KCC</li> <li>• Highways England</li> <li>• Arts Council</li> <li>• Ashford College</li> <li>• Homes England</li> <li>• Damian Green MP</li> </ul>	ABC Member Board Supported by four workstreams: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public and professional engagement</li> <li>• Project Delivery</li> <li>• Master-planning</li> <li>• Impatience team</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Town centre businesses</li> <li>• County Square shopping centre</li> <li>• Park Mall shopping centre</li> <li>• Community organisations</li> <li>• ABC</li> </ul>	
Focus	The Big 8	<b>ASHFORD TOWN CENTRE FRAMEWORK</b>		Economic Development
Framework role	Oversight of potential future 'Big 8' framework projects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mecca/Vicarage Lane</li> <li>• New multi-storey car parks</li> <li>• Accessible Ashford</li> <li>• Town centre placemaking</li> <li>• Arts, Entertainment and Conference venue</li> <li>• Commercial Quarter</li> </ul>	Identification of town centre regeneration projects across work streams, co-ordination and prioritisation of capital works and service provision.	Review to be undertaken of how businesses and local communities are involved in the management of the town centre in the future. At the moment the forum is largely consultative.	
Town Centre Framework monitoring arrangements	Quarterly updates to Board on progress of Big 8 projects	Board meetings to update on workstream progress and oversee review of the framework.  Annual report to Overview and Scrutiny	Regular liaison and consultation with forum membership	

### **4.3 Annual impact report**

The Ashford Town Centre Framework will be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that the action plan is being effectively delivered and the focus of the framework is still relevant and achievable. The review will be informed by feedback from partners and the community. An annual impact report will be produced showing progress against the delivery of the action plan and performance against the measures of success. This update will be reported to the council's Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

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