

Infrastructure and Regeneration

Continued

East Kent

ASHFORD

Local Plan review

The borough council has begun the process for reviewing the current Local Plan adopted in 2019. The new Local Plan will need to take account of changes to the NPPF but will also seek to support further commercial and employment developments on allocated sites. As such, the council has issued a Call for Sites in September 2023, to identify areas which could be considered for residential and commercial development. The review is in its early stages with additional work taking place over the coming years with a view to submission to the Secretary of State in 2025-26.

Nutrient neutrality

The council continues to respond to the various issues that have arisen from the need for new housing and other developments to achieve nutrient neutrality, due to the deterioration of Stodmarsh Lakes. Since Natural England issued their advice in July 2020, planning applications for up to 10,000 new homes located within the River Stour catchment and/or which discharge foul water into the catchment have not been able to progress, unless they can achieve nutrient neutrality.

The council has been working on ways to unlock the situation and deliver long term solutions. In July, the Leader of the Council, Cllr Noel Ovenden, met with the Prime Minister's special advisers to discuss government support in finding a national solution. The council welcomes the government's aspiration to address the issue in relation to the planning implications for residential developments.



CREDIT: ASHFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

Site for proposed Ashford International Studios.

Town Centre Reset

High streets up and down the country are facing many challenges with the after-effects of the pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis, ongoing financial uncertainty and the growing competition of online shopping. The council understands the challenges that our town centre residents, businesses, users and community groups face. Town centres are facing considerable change influenced by wider economic, environment and social changes. It is vital that we continue to invest in carefully thought-through ideas and solutions for the benefit of all.

The Town Centre Reset, including the revitalisation of our High Street, is a 'Super 6' project and a key priority in our Corporate Plan 2022-24. It identifies a number of areas that require improvement and intervention, prioritised to focus available resources over the next few years. Projects within the Town Centre Reset Action Plan include the delivery of Ashford UnFramed, a street art trail which took shape in the town centre in the spring, with many blank walls and building surfaces being transformed into high quality mural paintings. Artists included the world renowned and local resident Mr. Doodle, the celebrated Alex Chinneck and Charley Peters as well as Ashford Snowdog artist Danielle Williamson and students from Ashford College.

In order to address the issue of vacant shops in the town centre, Ashford Borough Council launched a Town Centre Business Grant scheme in October 2023. The grants will provide up to £10,000 for successful businesses or landlords to fit out, or make improvements to, empty premises in the town centre which will lead to vacant units being filled and open for business.

Development Update

Ashford International Studios – Newtown Works

Plans are gathering pace to deliver an exciting film studios-led £250m investment and regeneration project on the former Newtown Railway Works site. This mixed-use development seeks to deliver TV and film studios with associated production spaces, dedicated film school, residential units, commercial space and a hotel. Much of the enabling work has been achieved over the last year since the successful bid by the council for £14.7m in Levelling Up Funding. The new studios at the derelict site will bring significant benefits to Ashford in terms of investment and job creation.



Proposal for Brompton Bicycle factory, Ashford.

The UK film and TV sector is growing. The British Film Institute forecasts the requirement for 10,000 new employees in this sector over the next five years, and Lambert Smith Hampton have forecast the need for 2.3 million ft² (213,677m²) of new studio space over the next 15 years. Ashford International Development Company (AIDC) has been working to secure interest from the film and TV industry for an operator, and have engaged with a number of leading studio operators. They would work alongside the East Kent College Group's facilities to deliver the film school and develop a curriculum and training programmes. This would support the development of the local workforce, providing the talent required by the studio operator and the production companies renting the studio space.

Brompton Factory

The application for a revolutionary new factory continues to proceed through the planning process. It is envisaged this would deliver a £100m investment for the area and potential for up to 4,000 jobs for the local economy. The UK's largest bicycle manufacturer announced last year that it had chosen Ashford as the company's global headquarters, following a national search with a pledge to work with universities and colleges to build local skills.

Details of how the factory will be constructed within a 100 acre (40.46ha) floodplain, will also provide an opportunity to restore the wetland and promote walking and cycling for the community in this unique, natural setting in the heart of Ashford. The innovative scheme would house a world class production facility and HQ, and by 2028, the company expects to employ over 1,500 staff. Once fully operational, the proposed development could result in further jobs being supported locally, including supply chain jobs, jobs supported by the spending of staff and the factory operation itself.

Ashford College expansion

The extension of Ashford College is complete having started in 2022 following the takeover of the college by the EKC Group in 2020 and their successful bid for funding from the government's Post-16 Capacity Fund. Known as Phase 2, the new wing will house classrooms and laboratories for Business, Information Technology, and Engineering. These facilities create a renewed focus on such up-and-coming fields and allows 250 more students each year to access the high quality education offered at the College.

Infrastructure and Regeneration

Continued

The scheme includes an Engineering Hub, which will highlight the role engineering can play in creating solutions to climate change and promoting decarbonisation. The extension will also be key in delivering the new T Level qualifications, which are equivalent to three A Levels and provide learners with work experience as part of their training. Requiring the latest equipment and technology, the courses will benefit from the new facilities offered by Phase 2's completion.

Waterbrook Phase 2

The site is a 130 acre (52.6ha) mixed commercial/residential land holding close to Junction 10/10A of the M20 at Ashford.

With Phase 1 now completed and seeing the delivery of 16 new industrial units alongside the International Truck Stop and a new Jaguar Land Rover centre, Phase 2 is again on the market. The Phase 2 site totals 17.5 acres (7.08ha) and benefits from all mains services and is accessed via a new estate road. The site had received planning consent for the construction of an 120,000ft² (11,148m²) distribution unit which was not implemented. It is primed ready for development with outline planning consent for B1, B2, B8 development with options available to provide units from 35,000ft² (3,252m²) to 290,000ft² (26,942m²). Waterbrook Phase 2 is being marketed by Knight Frank and Sibley Pares.

Entralon Gate

One of the last allocated sites for industrial development in the borough is being brought forward by Entralon Capital. The site is situated on Orbital Park with Junction 10 of the M20 less than a mile away and provides direct access to the M25 and national motorway network to the north east and the Channel Tunnel and Dover port to the south.

Entralon Gate is a 54,000ft² (5,012m²) development consisting of five employment units comprising a mix of B1, B2, B8 uses.

The units benefit from 3 Phase electricity, EPC B rating and minimum eaves of 27ft (8.2m). Additionally each unit has natural internal light, landscaping, cycle parking and EV charging points. Entralon Gate is being marketed by Sibley Pares.

Kent Wool Growers

The former Kent Wool Growers site, between the town centre and the railway station, was bought by the council's Housing Development team. The 2.97 acre (1.2ha) site offers an opportunity to create a vibrant community at the gateway to the town. Work is underway to shape a proposal that is likely to include mixed-use homes, commercial space, a community hub and substantial areas of green space.

Bordered by the Great Stour river to the east, the site is part of the Commercial Quarter, which includes the Connect38 office building, International House and The Coachworks. Historically known as the Tanyard, it had been used as a tannery from the 17th Century. The site includes the remains of the Grade 2 listed Whist House dating back to 1707. The scheme could include a number of one, two and three bed apartments and four bed townhouses, parking bays concealed in undercrofts beneath gardens, a community and cultural hub and communal courtyards. Further design work is being carried out on the scheme before a public consultation in early 2024, ahead of an application later in the year.

The Triangle

This is a striking development, comprising 143 apartments, overlooking the River Stour and neighbouring Victoria Park. Located directly opposite the leisure centre in Elwick Place, the development is only a 12 minute walk from Ashford International. A collection of one, two, and three bed apartments, all feature delightfully modern interiors, communal rooftops, landscaped courtyards, underground parking, bicycle storage and plug-in electric vehicle charging stations. This development, scheduled for completion by the end of 2023 is being developed by Kings Crescent Homes.

Henwood

A proposed net zero-carbon, short-stay accommodation development. Like all local authorities, the council has a duty to house homeless people within the borough. The proposal features 23 units as temporary homes for those people who have found themselves homeless. These would be provided as a 'safety net' and 'stepping stone' until individuals or households are able to move on to more permanent accommodation.



Expansion of Ashford College.

CREDIT: ASHFORD BC/EAST KENT COLLEGE