

COUNCIL UPDATE 4.2025

PAWS WALK AND TALK

Volunteer Centre Ashford is starting a new project called Paws Walk and Talk project. It aims to connect elderly and the socially isolated with local dog owners for a chat and walk in Victoria Park, along with their dogs of course. The key to the success of the project looks like getting parkrun and other park users on board.

DEMENTIA SUPPORT

Councillors were advised of the work within Kent Mental Health Primary Trust (KMPT) to support dementia diagnosis; there are 52 accredited dementia supporters across Kent and Medway. The aim is for sufferers to be signposted to a wide range of social activities including sports, learning new skills, companionship, friendship and other forms of social interrelation. I attended a great example at Bybrook Barn on 8th April.



Memory Café

Are you living with Dementia, have memory problems and feeling isolated and lonely and want a chat?

New Hayesbank Surgery Patient Participation Group will hold a Memory Café on Tuesday 8th of April 2025 in the Gardeners Restaurant, Longacres Garden Centre, Bybrook Barn, TN24 9JZ. This will be a trial run to establish if there is sufficient demand to continue the event.

If continued, the Memory Café would provide a regular meeting place, and all are welcome to come along, and talk, natter, have company, and fun – and coffee and cakes.

Carers of people with memory problems, who give so much without question or asking favour, are also most welcome, as are patients from other local GP practices.

If you want to attend, please contact kmict.midkentpcn@nhs.net. This will help our preparations. That said, if you only make up your mind at the last minute, you will be welcome.

Do Come

Tuesday 8th April 2025 2-3.30pm
Gardeners Restaurant
Longacres Garden Centre, Bybrook Barn

HGV PARKING AROUND THE IBF

I have seen (and have had reported) a significant increase in the number of HGVs parking on Hythe Road, Mersham and the A2070 around the IBF. They are either waiting to enter the IBF or Ashford Lorry Park or just parking on the highways instead of paying whatever fee is due to the Lorry Park. The action for us is to report all lorries to parkingcustomercare@ashford.gov.uk. ABC only have powers from DfT to levy material fines on HGV parkers at 4 places in Ashford which do not include the A20, Hythe Road and around the IBF. The email reports we submit will help ABC build a case to ask for more

powers around the IBF. Please CC me on your reports using paul.bartlett@ashford.gov.uk so I can keep a record of all reports.

The state of the verges gives power to our argument that increased powers are needed by the Council (ABC in this case) to tackle this. This was all really brushed under the carpet when the IBF had temporary consent. It was originally due to close on 31st December 2025 as the old government believed the need was temporary as the IBF is used for "trusted traders" and the checks could be carried out at the place of departure or arrival not in transit.

DEVOLUTION

On 21st March, the 14 principal authorities in Kent submitted the Kent Interim Plan for Local Government Reorganisation. The paper confirms that while no agreement has been reached on the boundaries of new unitary authorities, they aim to submit a final proposal by November. The plan outlines two potential structures (either three or four unitary councils) and emphasises that devolution (both devolved powers and funding) should take place alongside reorganisation. Currently only reorganisation is planned with no timetable for devolution.

Key issues raised in the submission include: funding for major points of entry, legacy debt management, local plans and the transition between planning authorities and engagement with stakeholders and residents before finalising proposals. Importantly, the paper acknowledges the role of parish and town councils in discussions.

ABC is exploring the potential for community governance reviews for areas without existing Parish, Community or Town Councils. A survey is set for circulation by May to engage parish and town councils before the November final submission. A special meeting will be arranged to allow councils to further engage in discussions in June.

Parish, Town and Community councils are encouraged to review local assets they may be interested in taking on.

COMMUNITY SAFETY UNIT (CSU)

The CSU meeting met on 3rd April. Key issues included.

- Youth participation survey presentation will be made at a future meeting.
- Embedded issues in Ashford is ASB motorbikes in public places and catapults.

- Increased police response to issues around Pitchside/Courtside alongside Moat Housing. A section 34 dispersal notice has been issued.
- A rise in rural burglaries is a concern leading to vehicles seizure and arrests.
- Uprising will deliver youth services in the town centre over the Easter Holiday.
- The CCTV monitoring centre is relocating to International House.
- The number of families in Temporary Accommodation families are 273 possibly increasing due an increased in landlord notices to quit being issued in January.
- A Porchlight project in Dover is accommodating homeless for a 2-year period during which they are hoped to secure move on accommodation.
- There are 7 rough sleepers in Ashford maybe a slight increase due to YMCA being closed.
- KCC Family Hub (formerly Youth Services) will move into Stanhope Library in June.

MARTYN'S LAW

The Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025, commonly known as Martyn's Law, has received Royal Assent, and became Law on 3rd April 2025. This legislation is a step in strengthening national security and safeguarding communities to public events on land controlled by Councils.

Martyn's Law, also known as the Protect Duty, is a new piece of UK legislation that enhances safety measures in public spaces. Named in memory of Martyn Hett, one of the victims of the 2017 Manchester Arena attack, this law encourages better preparedness to keep people safe.

The law was given royal assent on 3 April 2025, meaning Councils need to consider how it might apply to their community spaces. Since many councils manage public venues, organise events, and maintain facilities where people gather, it's important to understand the key aspects of Martyn's Law and how to prepare for it.

Martyn's Law is designed to encourage public spaces to consider security risks and implement sensible precautions. It applies to venues, events, and locations where the public gathers, such as town halls, community centres, parks, and markets.

The legislation categorises locations and events based on their capacity (including staff):

- Standard Tier (200 - 799 capacity) — Requires basic security measures and staff training. The Security Industry Authority (SIA) must be notified of the premises.
- Enhanced Tier (800+ capacity) — Involves more detailed risk assessments, security protocols, and collaboration with authorities. If an organisation is responsible for the premises, they must assign a senior individual to oversee compliance.

FULL BINS

When you see a full bin, please report it to ABC who will contact their contractor. I reported this bin on Bybrook Road on 5th April and it was emptied quickly (ref 23116350).

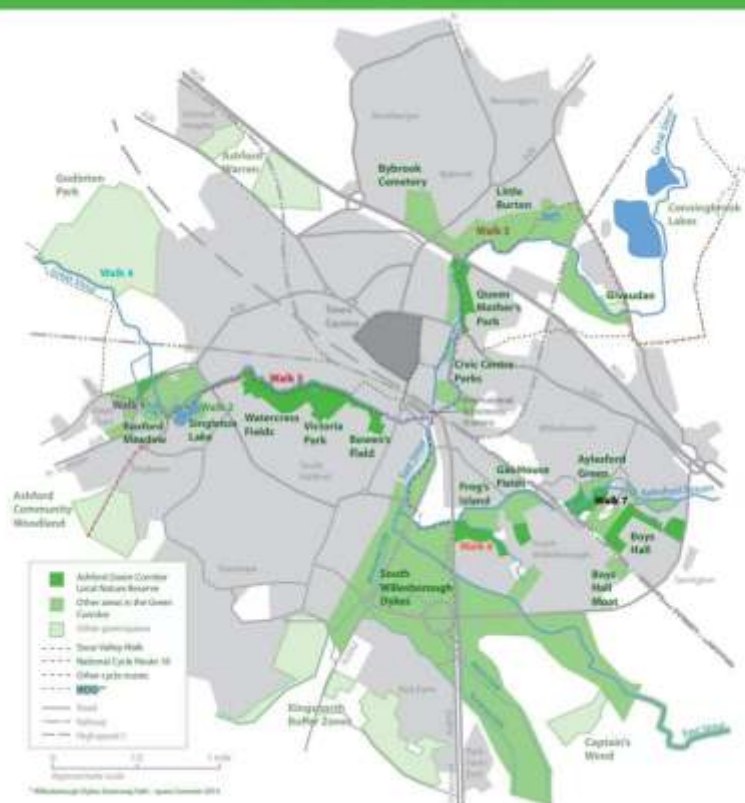


CYCLING AND WALKING ROUTES

Ashford Borough Council (ABC) were successful in their application for the Capability Fund via Active Travel England and KCC for £25,000 to engage a consultancy to expand and refresh of the 2019 Ashford town centre Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) and expand it to cover the wider conurbation. The expanded LCWIP includes the new 15 priority routes in Kent under the KCC LCWIP including two denoted for Ashford (Folkestone to Ashford and Charing to Ashford).

The following areas that will be reviewed to include in the wider expanded borough plan include Finberry, Chilmington, Conningbrook Lakes, Waterbrook, Willesborough and Singleton.

The Ashford Green Corridor



HERITAGE REVIVAL FUND

The Heritage Revival Fund has been created to help communities across England rescue and repurpose neglected historic buildings. It forms part of a broader £270 million investment in arts and culture. The fund will do this by supporting community organisations in taking ownership of, adapting, and reusing the local heritage assets that matter to them, transforming them into thriving spaces that meet their needs.

It is open to local councils seeking to take ownership of and/or adapt historic buildings for community use. Funding is available to support projects from the earliest stages to capital works, including feasibility studies, development of business plans, design, surveys, and the costs of acquiring and renovating buildings. When Ashford has its own Town Council after Local Re-organisation in Kent I will promote this as a way to regenerate Ashford but in the meantime could Sevington with Finberry PC consider for Bilham Farm?

KENT YOUTH COUNCIL

Kent Youth Council presented to Councillors on 10th April.

Free school meals & tackling poverty, public transport and mental health were key issues reported across Kent but in Ashford “feeling safe” was considered an issue. To make Ashford safer they asked for more lighting, more police and a safe space for people to go when they feel unsafe. The recent respect

campaign as part of the campaign to reduce violence against women and girls was reported as welcome. Previous issues included the cost of school uniforms. The Youth Council plan to work with the Southeastern/Samaritans to put up some murals around areas of public transport where suicide is common.

PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE BILL 2024-2025

Comments on the Planning and Infrastructure Bill had to be provided to KALC by 24th April. The Planning and Infrastructure Bill had its first reading on 11 March 2025, the second reading took place on 24 March 2025 and it is now at Committee stage. The bill seeks to make changes to the law around planning and infrastructure to support ambitions in the government's Plan for Change. These ambitions include delivering 1.5 million homes and deciding 150 nationally significant infrastructure projects (NSIPs) before the end of the parliament. Key headlines include:

- The bill would make it more difficult to legally challenge major infrastructure projects, the aim being to unlock nationally significant infrastructure.
- The bill would speed up planning decisions – by enabling LPAs to set their own charges for planning applications and by introducing a national scheme of deciding which applications are decided by planning committees and which are delegated to officers. This would speed things up but could impact on the ability for councillors to be involved in as many local decisions.
- The bill would make planning more strategic – combined authorities (there is not one for Kent) will prepare a Spatial Development Strategy, which would help to align housing, growth and infrastructure plans to maximise their benefits, and minimise their costs, for regions as a whole. These would not replace Local Plans though, which will retain the right to allocate specific sites for development but would be required to be in "general conformity" with their area's spatial development strategy.
- The bill introduces significant updates to the legislation for development corporations – the publicly owned delivery vehicles that created the new towns of the 1940s, Canary Wharf in the 1980s and the regeneration of Stratford alongside the Olympics. This is a way for the government to unlock their aspiration to build a series of new towns.
- The bill reduces environmental red tape - The bill proposes that a delivery body (i.e. Natural England) produces higher-level 'Environmental Delivery Plans' (EDPs), determining standardised levels of environmental mitigation needed for certain types and scales of development in a specific area. Where an EDP exists, developers will have the option to pay into a new 'Nature Restoration Fund', which the delivery body will use to fund appropriate

- mitigations, including by pooling contributions from multiple developers.
- The Local Government Association (LGA) is calling for mandatory solar panels on all new homes to meet climate targets and reduce household bills. Currently, 60% of new builds lack solar panels, but the LGA argues that their installation could save households an average of £440 annually, according to the Resolution Foundation. The LGA's report also calls for long-term funding for energy upgrades, community benefit funds for renewable projects, and the ability for local authorities to enforce higher energy standards.

Alongside the bill, the government is seeking to reform the statutory consultee system. Statutory consultees play an important role, providing expert advice and information on significant environmental, transport, safety, and heritage issues to ensure good planning decision-making. However, their involvement introduces additional requirements into the process of securing permission for some developments, and wide-ranging concerns have been raised by local planning authorities, developers and others across the sector. The government wants to make it harder for local councils to respond to applications in terms of meeting the deadlines, restricting feedback to advice that is strictly necessary.

BYBROOK WWTW

Southern Water are proposing to increase the number of HGV movements at Ashford's Wastewater Treatment Works in Kinney's Lane on bank and public holidays from the current 12 HGVs in/out to 30 in/out.

This means that there would be 30 HGVs travelling up or down Kinney's Lane during the 5-hour operating hours, equating to one approximately every 10 minutes from 8am to 1pm every Bank Holiday, adding to the already intrusive lorry activity in the Lane.

Please have a look at the planning application and consider commenting, for the good of the community. Comments/objections should be received by 26 April 2025, preferably via the direct link on KCC's website:

(<http://www.kent.gov.uk/viewapplications>). There are two applications (KCC/AS/0153/2024 and KCC/AS/0172/2024) – please post your comments to both applications rather than just the one.

ASHFORD CHURCHYARD CSU

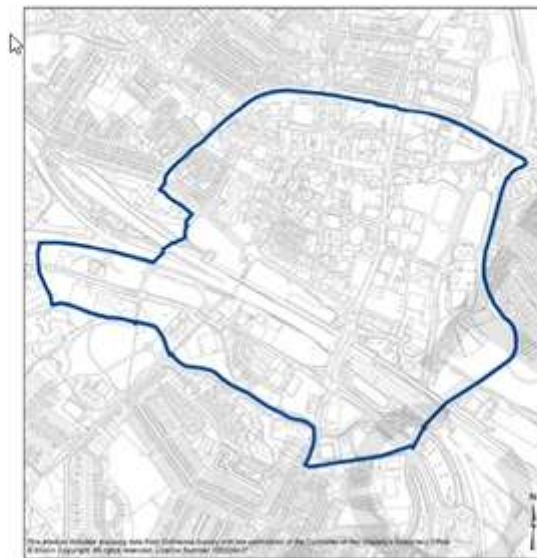
We seem to have an issue with people sitting on the seats in a Church Yard not only sitting there but being highly intoxicated but also using the area as a public laboratory. On 18th April people were witnessed twice urinating under the CCTV camera. The last one was approximately at 1530. One offender

apologised while the other two thought it was funny. I will raise the question with the Community Safety Unit on the point of having a public space protection order and how it can be enforced.

TOWN CENTRE DEVELOPMENT

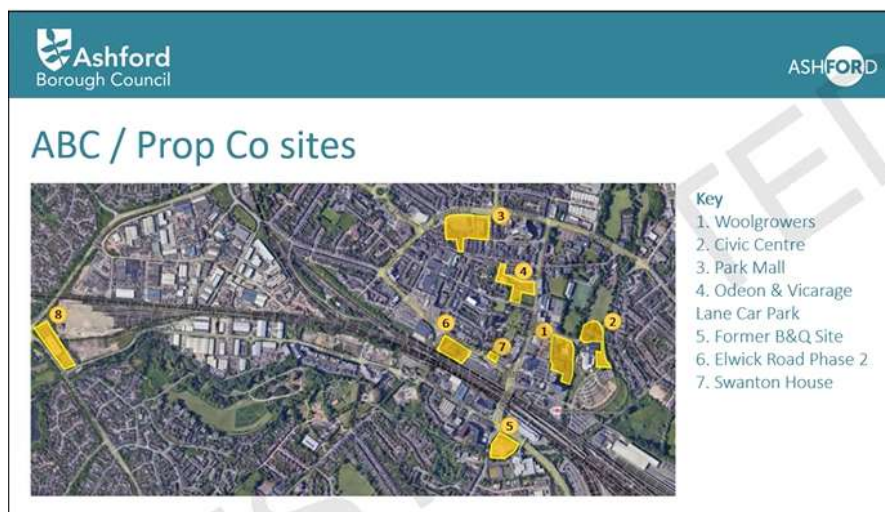
Councillors met on 23rd April to discuss and agree the extent of the town centre for the new local plan.

Town Centre Boundary as defined in the Ashford Local Plan 2030



Town Centres are defined to determine the extent of area to attract retail. The purpose is to encourage retail to the town centre and then must justify whether retail should go outside these areas. Keeping the Designer Villager outside the town centre enables planning policy to control what goes on there (eateries and leisure). If ABC extends the town centre to include the Outlet, then the consequences may be problematic for those businesses already in the town centre.

These are the sites put forward in the “Call For Sites”:



COMMUNITY SAFETY ACTION PLAN

The Plan was agreed during April. Ket achievements in 2024/25 included.

- A new Town Centre Violent Crime Strategy was agreed. The strategy was based on a detailed assessment of available data, with a number of priorities developed.
- Cases where ABC CCTV capabilities have been crucial, including an Ashford Monitoring Centre (AMC) operator reviewing footage to link a person to a vehicle that was involved in the hit and run of a Kent Police officer. This evidence identified who the driver was, resulting in a 10-year prison sentence.
- Ashford Domestic Abuse Refuge is the largest in Kent and has 16 self-contained flats. Any children housed in the refuge are supported by staff who provide play therapy, after school clubs and social events. All children have their own individual support plans. Adults are supported by refuge staff, including support to move on to a permanent new home.

Based on the findings of the a Strategic Assessment and engagement across the community, the following priorities are agreed:

- Reducing Serious Violence including youth violence, weapon enabled crime, organised or group related crime.
- Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls including domestic abuse, stalking and harassment, sexual offences
- Reducing Anti-Social Behaviour and Concerning Behaviours including drug and alcohol related behaviours
- Tackling Hate Crime and Extremism

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