

These notes are an overview of some of the projects and initiatives in each district around the priority themes of the [Kent Environment Strategy](#). Although not a comprehensive reflection of all activity in the area, this note aims to provide an overall picture of the priorities and pressures for delivery of the strategy as well as current and future project development. For background information please also see [Climate Change: A Guide for Kent's Decision Makers](#).

Living Within Our Environmental Limits

Energy Efficiency and Housing in Ashford

Homes in Ashford: Approximately 45,000

Tenure: 77% owner occupied, 5% private rented, 18% social rented.

There are over 24,000 homes in Ashford with significantly inadequate loft insulation and 16,000 homes with empty cavities. There are also 7,500 solid wall properties, which are much harder to treat due to the increased cost and invasiveness of the work required.

There are also around 5,000 flats and 2,000 privately rented homes that are traditionally more difficult to make energy efficient.

Fully insulating all the homes in Ashford would cost in the region of £49m-£116m, but could save residents approximately £6.4m per year on their energy bills and reduce carbon emissions by 26,000t per year.

The **Kent Retrofitting Programme** looked to increase installations across Kent and co-ordinated communications for the county. From the end of November targeted

communications were sent to the wards of Weald South and Weald Central. These areas were selected as having the greatest potential for loft and cavity wall insulation in owner occupied homes, or because they have significant eligibility for government grants. For more information please visit www.kent.gov.uk/homeenergy.



The Green Deal launches nationally from October 2012 and the government hopes it will enable many households and businesses to improve the energy efficiency of their properties. In addition, the new energy company obligation (ECO) will focus on those householders who cannot achieve significant energy savings without an additional or different measure of support. **The Kent and Medway Green Deal Partnership** has been formed to communicate the Green Deal and ECO to residents, to support SMEs to take advantage of any new business opportunities arising from the Green Deal and to build the evidence base across Kent. This will enable a successful partnership with a Green Deal provider that draws in as much ECO for Kent as possible.

Schools Activity

Eco-Schools is an international award programme that helps schools to embed environmental principles and save money on utility bills. Schools work towards gaining one of three internationally recognised awards – Bronze, Silver and the Green Flag award, which symbolises excellence in the field of environmental activity.

Achievement is through following a simple seven-step process incorporating a variety of environmental themes, ranging from litter and waste to healthy living and biodiversity.

In Ashford nine schools have received bronze awards, 16 silver and six have obtained the highest Green Flag award. Eight other schools are registered in the borough with 11 unregistered.

Hamstreet Primary School has implemented projects including LED lighting and solar thermal heating. Tenterden CEJ School, Tenterden Infant School and Aldington Primary School have installed solar PV systems. Tenterden CEJ also improved its cavity wall insulation and Aldington added a wind turbine. Ashford Oaks Community Primary School upgraded its lighting controls.

For further information on projects in your area please visit

http://www.kent.gov.uk/environment_and_planning/environment_and_climate_change/environment_policy_and_targets/renewable_energy_projects.aspx.



Public Sector Estate

Kent County Council's Kroner House office upgraded its lighting controls and Ashford Highways Depot installed a biomass boiler, solar PV and a rainwater capture system.

Meeting the Climate Change Challenge

Supporting Businesses

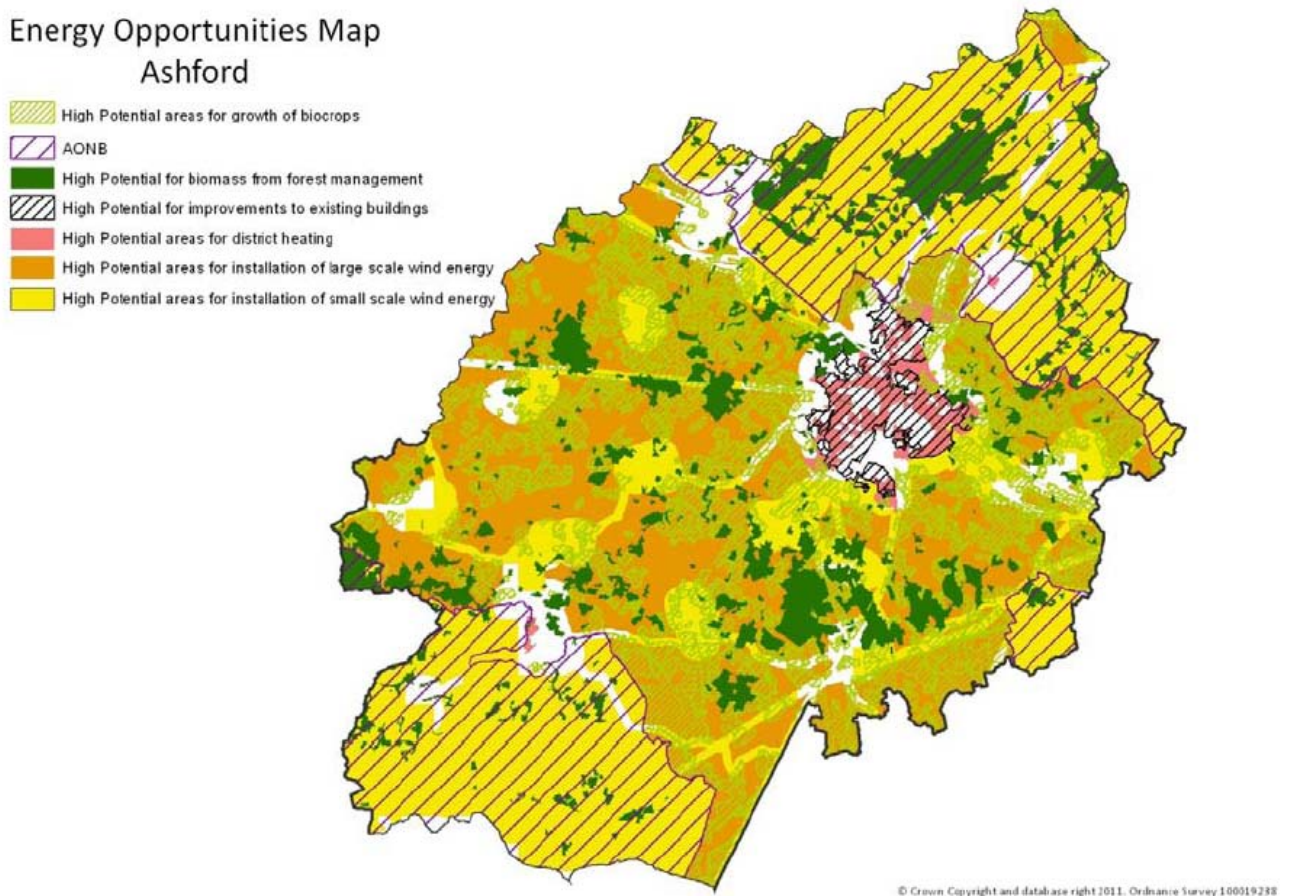
Kent County Council's South East Business Carbon Hub provides a comprehensive range of free environmental services for businesses. There are currently over 950 businesses registered on the Hub, around 50 of which are based in Ashford. The team has been supporting businesses in measuring their carbon footprints, implementing environmental management systems, providing sustainable transport advice, eco-driving lessons and running frequent workshops and online webinars.

At the beginning of 2011 the Steps to Environmental Management (STEM) scheme was launched. STEM is a free step-by-step approach for businesses seeking to put into practice a robust system to reduce their environmental impacts and receive certification. So far, over 360 businesses have achieved the first level of STEM.

The South East Business Carbon Hub and STEM are part funded by the South East ERDF Competitiveness Programme 2007-13 and Kent County Council.

Renewable Energy Opportunities

Consultants AECOM were commissioned by the County Council to undertake a renewable energy resource and opportunities study for Kent. This study builds on work done at a regional level and seeks to test and confirm the availability of renewable resources in the County. It further considers the likelihood of these resources being developed, the role of different partners in their delivery and the wider benefits which can accrue from their deployment. The study is accompanied by a proposed action plan which can assist the development of a low carbon and renewable energy strategy for Kent. This will be further developed over the coming months.



The above shows energy opportunities for Ashford and can help to identify where there may be potential for the development of renewable energy projects. It is important to note that this is purely based on the potential resource identified by AECOM and does not in any way reflect the council's position on the deployment of technologies.

Travel and Transport

There are a wide range of initiatives currently underway in the Borough, funded through a variety of schemes.

Local Sustainable Transport Fund

Kent has secured £2.3 million over four years from 2011/12 to fund projects that cut carbon emissions from transport and create economic growth.

Ashford will benefit directly from:

- £60K of grant funding to East Kent Hospitals University Foundation Trust for improved cycle storage.
- Further development of the Ashford station travel plan.
- Ongoing development of Smartcard ticketing technology.

Public transport investment

- Increase from two to four buses per hour on the E-line route serving Repton Park.

Schools engagement

- Support for a range of walk to school initiatives including Walking Buses, Walk on Wednesday (WoW) and Active Bug.
- Roll out of Kent Rider and National Standard Cycle training with grant funding from Department for Transport.
- Support for school travel plans.
- Targeted road safety and sustainability awareness packages e.g. Small Steps and Zig Zag parking.
- Workplace engagement
- Tracking and monitoring of travel plans secured through the planning process.
- Development of New Ways 2 Work, a collaborative partnership with Kent Business to support work place travel plans and sustainable travel choices.

Monitoring the impacts of severe weather in Kent

Ashford Borough Council is a partner in the Severe Weather Impacts Monitoring System (SWIMS), an innovative online tool developed by Kent partners to measure how we are impacted by, and responding to, severe weather events. It provides a decision-support tool, informing risk management and business continuity as well as long term planning. Further details are available at www.kent.gov.uk/SWIMS.

The system is a key activity within the Kent Adaptation Action Plan, developed and adopted across Kent partners. The plan won the Improvement and Efficiency South East award for Progress through Innovation for the Kent Climate Change Network. On-going monitoring of progress across Kent is available on our [webpages](#).



Photograph c/o Duncan Dwinell

Valuing Our Natural Environment

Understanding the Natural Economy

The Natural Environment White Paper, published by Defra at the end of June 2011, outlines the Government's vision for the natural environment over the next 50 years. Much like Theme 3 of the Kent Environment Strategy, the White Paper recognises that a healthy, properly functioning natural environment is the foundation of sustained economic growth, prospering communities and personal wellbeing. One initiative announced by the White Paper was the establishment of Local Nature

Partnerships, which represent a more holistic view of the natural environment and recognise the wider social and economic benefits biodiversity brings.

The Kent Biodiversity Partnership has recently secured £27,000 of capacity building funding from Defra to develop a Local Nature Partnership, which will focus on engaging additional partners (for example from the business and health sectors) and establishing a vision and set of targets for the natural environment that also recognise the potential for social and economic benefits. This partnership will act as a framework for KES theme 3 and the continuation of its aims and objectives past the timeframe of the strategy.

Countryside Access

Public Rights of Way (PRoW) Management

The Countryside Access Service (CAS) will continue to manage and maintain the 1,235km of public rights of way in Ashford, responding to the significant correspondence and prioritising according to public need. The popular PRoW network provides access to Kent's iconic countryside, boosting the rural economy through tourism and improving the health of residents.



Eureka Leisure Park Link

To encourage use of the new M20 pedestrian/cycling bridge we are investigating the possibilities of extending the Public Bridleway (AU27) along Bockhanger Lane to connect with the Eureka Leisure Park and the new bridge. A consultation is currently being run on the already and popular unofficial track and so far the proposal is being well received by the local community. The link would provide an arterial sustainable route to schools and numerous community facilities and connect areas to the North and South of the M20.

Explore Kent

In 2012 Explore Kent will support and promote guided walks and health walks in Ashford. People can find and book a walk on the [Explore Kent website](#) making it easier to get out and walk more.

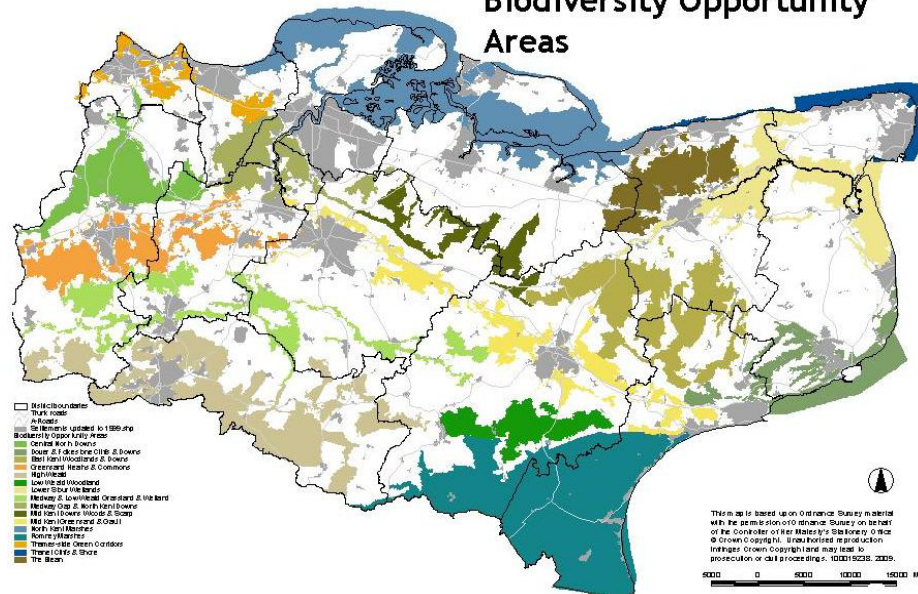
Common Land and Village Greens

The Countryside Access Service continues to work on the much needed task of updating the Registers of Common Land and Village Greens, as part of the pilot implementation of new provisions contained in the Commons Act 2006. Kent is one of seven pilot areas currently using the new legislation ahead of the proposed national implementation. The Countryside Access Service also continues to deal with a high level of activity in relation to complex and often emotive applications to register land as a new village green.

BOAs (Biodiversity Opportunity Areas)

BOAs reflect targets in the Kent Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). They indicate where we want to focus our work to secure the maximum biodiversity benefits offering the best opportunities for establishing large habitat areas and/or networks or wildlife habitats. It is not intended or proposed that nature conservation becomes the primary land-use within the target areas, so long as the targets and objectives for each area can be met, and development of any kind is not precluded.

Biodiversity Opportunity Areas



Ashford Borough has six BOAs; Romney Marshes, Low Weald Woodlands, Mid Kent Greensand & Gault, East Kent Woodlands & Downs, Medway & Low Weald Grasslands & Wetlands and Mid Kent Downs Woods & Scarp.

The map above illustrates the cross-district locations and proximity of BOAs and consequently the need for joint working. For more information please visit <http://www.kentbap.org.uk/kent-boas/>.

Across the six sites we see features of county, national and international importance, including:

- Floodplains, grazing marsh, wet ditches, small ponds, lakes, wet woodland, fen, and shingle habitats.
- Significant water courses such as the Rivers Len, Great Stour and East Stour, plus a series of small springs at the foot of the Downs.
- Neutral, chalk and acid grassland, heathland.
- Ancient and native woodland, wood pasture.

Within these sites we find several key species including:

Water vole, great crested newt, common toad, medicinal leech, otter, depressed river mussel, white clawed crayfish, river lamprey, Desmoulin's whorl snail, and keeled skimmer dragonfly. Rare plants such as greater water parsnip and lady orchid. Serotine, Bechstein's and soprano pipistrelle bats, tree sparrow, bittern, Hawfinch, Duke of Burgundy butterfly, black-veined moth, brown hare, shrill carder bee, adder, nightingale and wintering and breeding birds.



To maintain and improve the areas, Ashford's current targets include:

- Recreate and enhance wetland habitats such as fen, swamp and grazing marsh. Provide opportunities for flood risk management and recreation.
- Provide guidelines on best practice for managing ditches to maximise biodiversity whilst retaining their effective water management function. Work with landowners to improve connectivity.
- Extend, reconnect and enhance chalk, acid and neutral grassland.
- Comprehensively manage woodland to restore native trees on ancient woodland sites as well as to extend and reconnect fragmented woodlands.
- Continue to encourage positive management, restoration and re-creation of hedgerows.
- Secure and maintain appropriate management of key brownfield sites.
- Improve the management of invasive species.
- Exploit conservation-friendly recreational opportunities. Prevent infrastructure and other developments which further fragment habitats.

Heritage and Protection of Assets at Risk

Funding is being sought to carry out Heritage Crime Risk Assessments in each district which will be incorporated into Strategic Crime Assessments.

Funding is being sought to develop a Heritage Warden programme to help monitor the condition of heritage assets and record damage or loss.

Work is being undertaken in conjunction with Natural England, English Heritage and landowners to increase the number of designated assets in Higher Level Stewardship. The Kent farmsteads survey identifies historic buildings across the county. SHINE funding allows the creation of polygons to identify designated assets and this information will be used by Natural England in their Higher Level Stewardship application assessment, and for identifying potential sites.

Green and Blue Infrastructure

Ashford Borough Council has in place a Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy setting out a framework for protecting, managing and enhancing the Borough's Green and Blue Infrastructure, and for ensuring that the quality of provision is maintained and enhanced in light of the significant housing growth forecast for the borough.

Kent Climate Change Network

The Kent Climate Change Network meet quarterly to share best practice and learning, develop initiatives and provide input into county-wide programmes. Successful joint initiatives include collaboration on the Kent Housing Retrofit programme, the Severe Weather Impacts Monitoring System and development of the Kent Environment Strategy. The Network also won an award for *Progress through Innovation* in 2011 from Improvement and Efficiency South East for their work on the Kent Adaptation Action Plan.

The Climate Change Network representative for Ashford Borough Council is **Janet Hill**
Janet.hill@ashford.gov.uk

Elected Member Support

All of the projects and activities highlighted in this note require Leadership, support and promotion within districts and communities across Kent.

Influencing and Communicating

Some of the issues raised here, such as the housing stock in Ashford, energy efficiency and the deployment of renewable energy require our residents to be aware of the projects, grants and initiatives available to them. Although there are wide ranging communications in place, it is the local knowledge, support and influence of Members which can significantly improve uptake.

As highlighted in this note, businesses in Kent are signing up to the South East Business Carbon Hub to reduce their energy bills with fifty of these in Ashford. Local knowledge and promotion can support uptake for this free resource, benefitting business in the area.

Where there are planning decisions to be made, Member influence is needed to improve resource efficiency, transport networks, the development of BOAs and the deployment of renewable energy as appropriate.

Further information on specific projects can be found in ***Climate Change: A Guide for Kent's Decision Makers*** along with a checklist of key factors to consider in the decision-making process.

Sustainability & Climate Change
Planning & Environment
climate.change@kent.gov.uk