

**A youth strategy responding to  
views and concerns raised by  
local young residents from the  
borough of Ashford**

to download further copies, visit [www.whatmattersashford.co.uk](http://www.whatmattersashford.co.uk)

**WHAT MATTERS  
2006-2009**

**The Ashford Partnership**

Key organisations working together to serve and improve the local community

**"I actually like my neighbourhood, although I hate that the play park is "private" and people over the age of 14 are not allowed in it.**

**I hate the fact that ALL teenagers are stereotyped to be vandalising jobs when in actual fact, the majority of us are reasonable people who just want to sit around and chat with each other, like normal human beings".**  
**age 17**

# Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| <b>Forward</b>   | 2  |
| <b>Executive Summary</b>   | 3  |
| <b>Section 1: The Context</b>                                      | 5  |
| Young people Today   | 5  |
| Local population profile   | 5  |
| Why a Strategy?  | 6  |
| Strategic Links  | 6  |
| Ownership  | 7  |
| What Matters Survey  | 7  |
| <br>   |    |
| <b>Section 2: Key Concerns</b>                                     | 8  |
| Getting to Places  | 9  |
| Having Things to Do  | 11 |
| Having a Say   | 13 |
| Safe and Clean Streets   | 15 |
| Improved Leisure Facilities  | 17 |
| <br>   |    |
| <b>Section 3: What we need to do</b>                               | 19 |
| Implementation Plan  | 19 |
| Monitoring and Review  | 19 |
| The Youth Charter  | 20 |
| Related Research   | 21 |
| <br>   |    |
| <b>Complementary Documents</b>                                     |    |
| <i>What Matters In Action</i> leaflet – a summary for young people |    |
| <i>What Matters In Action</i> implementation plan                  |    |
| <i>What Matters</i> Findings Pack                                  |    |

# Forward

In 2004, Ashford Borough Council through the Youth Development Officer embarked on a consultation process with young people in Ashford. This document highlights what concerns them most, what they need and above all how they feel about their community. It suggests action for what matters.

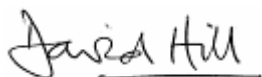
The *What Matters* Strategy is set in a climate where young people are bombarded by messages from the media, fashion trends and are vulnerable to peer pressure. They live in a very different world and society from the one most of us remember as teenagers. These influences create pressures and demands that can affect how they learn to take their place in society. The consequences of this require different support mechanisms to previous generations.

Perhaps the most profound learning experience from the survey is the realisation that most young people share the same fears and concerns as most adults. Most dislike antisocial behaviour, dirty streets, fouled playing fields and crime just as much as most adults. Unlike adults, however, these young people suffer further from being 'tarded with the same brush' and being even more powerless than adults to influence events.

For just about every issue and concern raised by the young people in the *What Matters* survey, there are agencies that have an interest and responsibility. But whilst these agencies are key to helping young people with specific needs, young people cannot be treated solely as departmental or single agency problems. It is, therefore, right that the Youth Strategy and its' implementation plan, *What Matters In Action* has been developed through the active co-operation of many agencies.

Collectively we face challenges now and for the future. The way in which service provision for children and young people is changing and the added pressure and opportunities that Ashford's future growth creates means that partnership working must be the central pin to the successful delivery of *What Matters in Action*. More importantly there needs to be recognition of the importance of shared ownership of young people's issues.

Examples of individual comments from young people that appear throughout this document help to convey the sense of yearning for something better that permeates the survey.



## **To be signed by Chairman of Ashford Partnership**

*The Local Strategic Partnership (The Ashford Partnership) for Ashford Borough. It is a multi-agency partnership with partners from all sectors including private, statutory, community and voluntary: Ashford Borough Council, Ashford (Kent) Chamber of Commerce, Ashford Community Network, Churches Together in Ashford, Ashford Primary Care Trust, Council for Voluntary Services, Government Office for the South East, The Housing Corporation, Kent Association of Parish Councils, Kent County Council, Kent Police, South East England Development Agency, and South Kent College.*

*The initial task of the Ashford Partnership is to oversee the development of a Community Strategy for the Borough. Under the Local Government Act, each local authority is given a duty to produce a Community Strategy that seeks 'to improve the economic, social and environmental well being of an area and improve quality of life for everyone'.*

## **Endorsement from Ashford Youth Forum Trust**

The Ashford Youth Forum Trust fully supports the *What Matters* Youth Strategy. We feel that the strategy is true of young people's views and that young people are and will be happy about it.

## **Peter Stamp, Chairman of Ashford Youth Forum Trust**

# Executive Summary

## Introduction

1. This strategy takes the views of young Ashford residents and places their key concerns into a strategic framework that is realistic and presents achievable projects and outcomes for local agencies over the next three years.
2. The strategy starts (in Section 1) from the viewpoint that young people can make an enormous contribution to the local community. Ashford's youth population is set to grow unlike most other Kent districts so it is timely to reflect on the needs of the current population and make improvements (appendix A provides the distribution of young people in Ashford today).
3. This strategy responds to the findings of the *What Matters* consultation undertaken in 2004; a summary of the findings is available as a complementary document. This survey concluded that respondents, aged between 11 and 19 years of age, yearn for something better. They want to be involved in deciding what's available and how it's run and have lots of ideas about how to improve things.
4. Clearly, these concerns do not cover all aspects of young people's lives but this strategy aims to focus on them. Under 'Strategic links' in Section 1 the other/additional areas that as agencies we would prioritise for their individual well being including health, education and careers is mentioned. Tackling the needs of vulnerable young people is also covered here.
5. The *What Matters* survey points to five key areas of concern: getting to places, having things to do, having a say, safe and clean streets, and improved leisure facilities. This strategy reviews each key concern in Section 2 that are summarised in the box below.

### Key concerns

**Getting to places** - The lack of appropriate transport is a top issue for most young residents whether considering the bus, cycle or walking. The perception of crime and antisocial behaviour inhibits young people from travelling and accessing key services and leisure facilities.

**Having things to do** - A lack of activity is a major cause of unhappiness for local young people. This may be more to do with informing them on what is already available near their home and empowering them to direct what is provided.

**Having a say** - Young people need the opportunity to be able to access and choose a suitable way of ensuring their voices are not only heard, but listened to, through many different democratic processes such as youth committees, forums, councils, conferences, surveys and events.

**Safe and clean streets** - The issue of 'not feeling safe' in their neighbourhood must be addressed. Media attention on the minority of young people who cause crime locally fuels this perception and creates an unfair image for all young people. Young people are also concerned about having a cleaner and safer neighbourhood and should be encouraged to actively participate in improvements.

**Improved leisure facilities** - It is well documented and understood that Ashford has a dearth of cultural facilities. In the long term, Ashford's Future will go a long way to address this need. In the meantime, the facilities we do have need to be improved and promoted using communication channels young people use and understand.

6. Each concern draws on the *What Matters* findings, as well as other relevant evidence and research to provide 'key challenges for action'. It also explains current activity alongside potential solutions and examples of good practice.

## Implementation

7. This strategy replaces the previous youth plan produced by Ashford Borough Council in 2000. We have identified project ideas here but this strategy has a detailed implementation plan – *What Matters in Action*.
8. Section 2 describes our approach to the implementation of the ideas put forward under each key concern. It explains that the implementation plan that accompanies this strategy is based upon three guiding principles. These are explained in the box below.
9. The Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) will provide a way of ensuring effective joining up and has a key role in establishing realistic and properly resourced implementation.
10. The LSP will need the support of a number of umbrella organisations and their membership including Ashford Children's and Young People's Consortium, Ashford Youth Forum Trust, Ashford Youth Advisory Group, Ashford Community Network, plus parish councils and urban community forums in order to deliver.
11. The involvement of young people in taking forward this strategy is crucial to its success. Young people, as the driving force, are what set this strategy apart from other local policies.
12. This strategy will require long-term commitment. Quick wins are needed to make progress for the sake of credibility amongst young people and agencies. A number of these are identified in the implementation plan.
13. Section 3 covers monitoring and evaluation. It explains that a range of performance measures are included in the implementation plan and suggested that quality of life measures may help to gauge the overall success of the strategy.
14. A 'Youth Charter' completes this strategy and shows that the Ashford Partnership is committed to making a positive difference to what matters to local young people. Local young people will also need to support delivery and further action.

### Guiding principals for action

**More Involvement**– Continue to involve young people in what is provided, how and when. Positive two way processes of listening and expressing views are vital so decision-makers and local young people can respect, encourage and value each other and work together effectively. Channels for influencing programming of activities and services must be created to allow young people to inform delivery and influence how and what is delivered, when.

**Improved awareness** – Improve the way young people receive information on services and what is available. We need to market products, services and facilities better to reach young people. They need to receive information in a format and language they associate with and understand. Coordination of local information for young people needs to be addressed.

**Extending access** - Provide better activities and help young people to participate. We need to encourage young people to regularly participate in positive activities by overcoming barriers such as cost, transport, opportunity and choice.

# Section 1: The Context

## Young people today

15. Young people today live in a very different society to previous generations. Changes in the economy, society and technology mean that they have far more opportunities. Most young people take full advantage of them. Young people also have more pressures, especially from the media. The internet and mobile phones have revolutionised the way they communicate and interact with the world.
16. Many young people are committed to succeeding and work hard at school and college and then on to university and/or work. They are passionate about their friends and family and feel strongly about their community and the world in which we live.
17. Young people, like most of us, want to make the most of life, gain new experiences, travel, take risks and be responsible for their own decisions. However we must be mindful that the teenage years are also a time of transition where young people also face a great many challenges (money, relationships, employment, health, self-esteem, etc). The What Matters story in the accompanying 'Findings' document further bears out how local young people feel.
18. We see disengagement and cynicism by local young people, on all issues within this strategy, particularly in the democratic process. Agencies working for young people should be accessible and readily understood.
19. We also know that some local teenagers experience difficulties in their life that mean they need more support than others. Tackling the range and complexity of problems faced by the minority who are at risk goes beyond the remit of this strategy but it does complement other policies such as the Ashford Preventative Strategy led by the Ashford Children's and Young People's Consortia.
20. Ashford is recognised by central government for its strategic location within Europe, the South East and Kent. By 2031 there will be a further 28,000 jobs and 31,000 houses. This brings huge opportunity to the borough together with many challenges.
21. Sustainable development, water and flood plain management, transport infrastructure and the creation of flourishing communities demonstrate the breadth of the work to be done.
22. The Ashford Partnership plays a pivotal role in setting a broader community agenda to help create strong and flourishing communities that will complement this physical construction.

## Local population profile

23. Ashford's population is expected to grow by 13% between 2001 and 2011 from 103,000 to 116,700 with the largest growth being in the urban area. Like the rest of the country, Ashford has an ageing population, even with the growth agenda.
24. Young people aged between 10-19 currently make up 12.5% of the population. Given a range of assumptions it is forecasted that the number of 10-19 year olds is set to grow from 12,900 to 13,400 (a 3.6% rise) between 2001 and 2011.
25. In the longer term, the population of young people aged 10-19 is forecast to grow even greater with a 15.3% increase between 2011 and 2021, leading to a population of 15,500 aged 10- 19 years.
26. Ashford's growth agenda sets us apart from other districts in Kent. The forecasts show that the population of young people will increase greater than other districts. Locally, this increase will occur in the urban area given the master plan for Ashford's growth.
27. Ashford is low on the deprivation indicators for Kent – ranked 8<sup>th</sup> most deprived out of the 12 local authority districts in Kent.

## Why a Strategy?

28. The purpose of the *What Matters* strategy is to tackle the common needs of local young residents.
29. It responds to other research (see P.21) that indicates that the provision of services to young people is the public's top priority for action.
30. The Government wants local youth service providers to give reasonable consideration to the needs and aspirations of local young people and how these might be met. This strategy is a response to that demand.
31. It focuses on the common concerns of the majority of local young people and aims to help inform and influence the work of the private, voluntary and community sector, not just agencies primarily concerned with young people.
32. It aims to complement other local youth policies that look at particular groups, covering health, crime, education, social services, careers and 'those at risk'.

## Strategic Links

33. By focusing on local young people's views and the need for partnership working, this strategy links to frameworks such as Every Child Matters and the Youth Matters Green Paper which concentrate on providing a coherent and integrated local response to young people's needs in partnership with others.
34. The recently published Youth Matters Green Paper acknowledges disaffection amongst young people. It aims to move young people's services towards greater partnership working and streamlined delivery to combat this. The Ashford Children's and Young people's Consortia are promoting integrated policies and action designed to strengthen delivery of services to 'vulnerable' local children and young people.
35. This Consortium aims to build on the ambition and approach of Every Child Matters and create an integrated system which is responsive to the needs of the individual and which strikes an appropriate balance between supporting and challenging young people.
36. It is suggested that when the Green Paper is passed through parliament the Ashford Partnership or the Children & Young People's Consortia will need to consider the bringing together of local strategies to ensure alignment and cohesion in service delivery for young people.
37. Some good work is already being done, particularly where agencies are working together to meet the needs of specific groups of young people. For example, a multi-agency group (including health, Ashford Borough Council, Kent County Council and the voluntary sector) have identified gaps and actions to support vulnerable adolescents. Kent County Council has employed a specialist youth and community worker to pilot youth work with travellers in the borough.
38. Local Area Agreements and their accompanying directives also focus on the needs of 'vulnerable' young people.
39. Whilst social inclusion for the individual is important, the wider social inclusion issue is tackled in this strategy.

## Ownership

40. The Ashford Partnership will give this strategy and associated *What Matters in Action* implementation plan the multi-agency input and support it deserves.
41. The support of the Ashford Children's and Young People's Consortium is vital but the ownership of this broader strategy sits best with the Ashford Partnership and should be included in the Community Strategy and other policy documents, including the Local Development Framework.
42. It is acknowledged that 'quick wins' can build confidence in partnership working. A key target for the implementation plan will be to identify relatively simple practical projects for delivery within the next six months. One immediate project, for example, will be to build awareness of this strategy amongst local young people.
43. Effective two-way communication between the Ashford Partnership and local young people underpins every aspect of this strategy. The Ashford Youth Forum Trust provides a vital link in terms of young people's viewpoint.
44. It is vital that structured and informal consultation with local young residents continues and we build on the work already started.
45. This document is directed at service providers to help establish mutual understanding of local young people's issues leading to the design and delivery of relevant local services. It aims to provide the Ashford Partnership with a focus and a sense of direction on young people's concerns that they can support and contribute to.
46. A more appropriate document will be produced to inform and engage local young people on this strategy and its implementation plan.

## The What Matters survey

47. From July to December 2004, Ashford Borough Council surveyed local young people, aged 11-19 (up to 25 with learning difficulties and disabilities) to understand what matters to them - their issues, needs and desires for the borough of Ashford now and into the future. The online questionnaire included a wide range of subjects - transport, crime, sexual health, library services, sports, arts and leisure, youth clubs & careers.
48. Focus groups were also conducted particularly targeted at more vulnerable young people who were less likely or able to complete the questionnaire. These groups were led by a range of services including Connexions, Social Services, 16 plus team (young people leaving care), Children and Families unit, and Housing. The excellent work that was started by Social Services Children and Families and 16 Plus Team in gathering young people for a What Matters Focus Group has prompted Children and Families to engage and consult with their users on a regular basis.
49. Respondents were in the main from young people aged 12-14. Altogether, 1174 commenced the survey and 626 fully completed it. 90% of respondents came from three schools (Homewood, Christchurch High School and Highworth). Nearly half of all respondents live in TN23 urban area.
50. The results were analysed by an independent consultant. A summary of the findings is available as a complementary document to this strategy. The results are skewed in three directions age, location and education but the responses received do point up a number of areas of concern that can reasonably be assumed to be valid for most young people. National research reinforces this assumption.
51. The *What Matters* survey concludes that respondents yearn for something better. They want to be involved in deciding what's available and how it's run and have lots of ideas about how to improve things.

## Section 2 Key concerns

1. Common areas of concern emerged from the *What Matters* survey. They are:
  - getting to places**
  - having things to do**
  - having a say**
  - safe and clean streets**
  - improved leisure facilities.**
2. The similarity to the five key outcomes in Every Child Matters (being healthy, stay safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution, economic well-being) reaffirms the common needs of young people.
3. We describe each *What Matters* concern on the following pages and include specific findings from the *What Matters* consultation.
4. We also include what local young people suggest to help improve the service. Some quotes are provided to help illustrate the depth of young people's feelings.
5. Each section includes new ideas to meet the clear evidence of local need. The suggested projects seek to do something positive to redress each issue.
6. Current projects are included to help ensure proposals do not duplicate existing or planned provision. More detail is provided on some projects to further illustrate the good work being undertaken.
7. The range of ideas and solutions put forward over the next pages fall into three distinct areas. They are described below. These principals for action underpin the framework for the *What Matters in Action* implementation plan which accompanies this strategy. This provides a shared delivery plan for partners on the areas of work required to make an impact on the key concerns of young people.

### More Involvement

8. Young people want to get involved and influence what is provided. Communication channels need to be improved to allow young people to inform delivery.
9. We need to get young people more involved in neighbourhood and local decision-making forums.

### Improved awareness

10. A clear message throughout the survey was that young people don't receive enough or relevant information and generally don't know what is out there.
11. How we market products, services and facilities must be driven by new media and reach young people in a format and language they associate with.
12. Coordination of local marketing needs to be addressed.

### Extending access

13. This is about providing more and encouraging active participation in a range of new activities and joins up with the need to involve young people in how and what is delivered, when.
14. It includes how new facilities are shaped and how young people will easily access activities and leisure provision using different modes of transport, discounts and providing more choice.

# 1. Getting to Places

**'I think the cost of bus fares is really expensive. Also I think that the buses should change their route so they go to more places'**  
age 13

## What Matters findings

- 23% of 12 year olds feel constrained by lack of public transport
- At 13, this jumps to 46%
- Problem increases for older young people (61% of older girls & 46% of older boys)
- 17% say they don't cycle to school due to a lack of routes

## Young people want

- Cheaper fares and discount cards
- More buses and routes
- Improved timetabling particularly outside of school hours
- Cleaner and more modern buses
- Greater civility from drivers

Recent years have seen a growing recognition that transport problems can be a significant barrier to social inclusion. Lack of adequate transport particularly impacts upon young people's quality of life. It prevents young people from participating in school clubs, work or learning or accessing healthcare, shopping and leisure activities.

We know that young people rely on the goodwill of parents and friends to take them to and from places of education and leisure in the car. This of course, is no help to those who do not have a car. There is also the 'school run' that adds considerably to the volume of traffic at peak hours.

Transport is the key to many of the issues highlighted in the *What Matters* survey. It needs to be reliable and timed to the needs of young users. For some the problem is simply the cost of a bus fare home for others there is no service available at the right time. Solutions must be identified to provide young people with safe and affordable, independent mobility or to bring services closer to where young people are.

Historically, no one organisation (public or private) has been responsible for ensuring that local people can get to places, let alone young residents. As a result, services and spending on transport has been fragmented. It is acknowledged that public and private transport providers are guided by specific regulations and operate in a commercial (demand-led) or grant aided (providing for special groups) environment. The challenge here then is to join-up providers and planners. Firstly, we must inform them of young people's lifestyles, the location of key local youth services and the wishes of existing and potential users and secondly to work together on solutions.

There is a need for a young people's transport group to push the agenda forward and help work up youth transport projects such as a new town centre bus service routed to stop at key places. In partnership with agencies and the private sector they could also tackle issues such as targeted promotions, discount schemes and producing appropriate information on services.

Of course, some facilities may be reached by cycling or walking but *What Matters* found safety and distance was a major barrier to overcome for many. Poorly lit, maintained and positioned bus shelters, cycle ways and pedestrian routes contribute to the fear of crime and consequently lack of use.

Clear local responsibility and accountability is needed with a long-term strategy for getting young people to places safely and effectively. Token responses i.e. free off peak travel for young people are not enough.

. . . transport solutions in line with what young people actually need.

## Key Challenges for Action

### 1. Increased involvement

Young people must be centrally involved in the design and provision of transport policies and services. The channel for communication is currently poor mainly due to a fundamental lack of transport leadership and joined up working. A proactive approach is required by local government departments and transport agencies to provide a framework for involvement.

### 2. Routes to the right places at the right times

Being clear about when young people need to access public transport is a priority. This requires an intelligent research led approach to understanding the movements of young people. A *youth transport group* would be helpful as a forum for transport providers to engage with the youth market and help target pilot schemes. This group could inform routes, bus timetabling, price structures and marketing.

### 3. Safe and secure travel

Perceived and actual safety issues on public transport and other modes need to be solved particularly to stop the rising trend of car usage. A marketing campaign could be appropriate to raise the image and profile of public transport or the benefits of cycling and walking. However, this should only be delivered when significant improvement to both security and service is in place. Information on different ways to travel and how to travel safely is also necessary.

## Current Projects

- ✓ Scoping a town centre bus project led by AYFT routed to stop at key service & cultural locations
- ✓ November 2005 edition of the AYFT newsletter will include the distribution of 8000 Ashford cycle maps
- ✓ Youth & Community services developing highly mobile resources, taking services to where young people are



**Vandalised bus stop**

- Safety on public transport, cycle ways and pedestrian routes is a key concern to young people.



**Local cycle route**

- New cycle ways are proposed as part of every new urban development, with an additional 17 new cycle ways proposed within the next five years.

## 2. Having Things to Do

**'More places for teens to go where we can just sit with your mates and hang out...and somewhere to shelter from the rain.'** age 14

**'I think teenagers don't go to sports activities because everybody else at the event has probably been taking part for a longer time, hence the need for new projects.'** Age 14

### What Matters findings

- 90% of girls and 80% of boys (12 year olds) want more things to do
- 40% are not interested in taking part in sport and 47% in the arts
- 79% do not go to youth clubs because it is 'not their thing'
- 25% don't know what sports or arts are available

### Young people want

- Properly advertised information on what is on, where and when
- After school activity – for girls most popular would be drama followed by cookery and sport – for boys sports is preferred activity followed by music and computing
- At youth clubs they would like a wide range of activities – sport, cooking, music, outings and a say in the activities on offer
- Free activity tasters
- Welcome sessions at existing clubs
- Clean and safe informal facilities in open spaces

'Having things to do' covers activities and facilities in young people's neighbourhoods. It can be free activities, such as informal play areas, youth shelters and open spaces, or local youth, sports and arts clubs in a range of different community facilities. The distinguishing factor here is that it is activity near to home. The Youth Matters Green Paper states that providing the right kind of activity can contribute to improving young people's life chances, particularly helping with personal and social development as well as their health. There is also evidence that being involved in positive crime diversionary activities helps prevent teenagers from being drawn into anti-social behaviour and crime.

The *What Matters* findings are in line with other national research; 6/10 young people and 8/10 parents think there is not enough for young people to do in the area within which they live (Mori 2005). Up to ¼ of young people do not take part in any form of positive activities, most often because they are not interested in what is available (Youth Matters 2005). There is a strong link between the issue of 'not interested' with 'not knowing' what is available. Young people clearly need better information on existing activities and more engagement in shaping what is on offer. There was a negative perception of neighbourhood youth clubs from *What Matters*. According to Mori young people want provision like the TV programme *'Byker Grove - facilities for relaxing and socialising, facilities and activities for sport and indoor activities, provision with street cred run by fun loving staff and NOT like school!'*

Whilst the *What Matters* survey points to a wish for a greater choice of activity it also suggests that existing clubs (whether sports, arts or youth) could be more welcoming. Young people find it hard to overcome certain barriers when joining in, be they cultural, financial or simply that they have a lack of confidence or support from friends. The voluntary and community sector has a key role here given they are a core provider of 'things to do' for young people in their local neighbourhood. We need to build on the sector's strengths and commitment and tackle a range of difficulties hampering their efforts such as lack of trained volunteers, short-term project funding and poor equipment.

Local activity and facilities is patchy and of variable quality across the borough. Some Parish Councils and urban Community Forums have identified the lack of activities for local young people. They are aware that not all young people want to be play competitive sport or participate in art or youth clubs; that young people are just as keen to have safe free places to hang out with their friends in parks or open spaces that are dedicated to them. Investment in appropriate 'free play space' and 'hang out' areas is needed.

. . . access to activities and facilities in their neighbourhood.

## Key Challenges for Action

### 1. Access to existing activities

Young people's negative perceptions of current activities and actual barriers to participating should be addressed. A range of practical ways of reducing barriers must be explored using borough wide awareness campaigns, better targeted marketing in local settings and activities such as free taster sessions and discounts for new members.

### 2. Raising quality and choice

The quality and choice of places and activity where young people spend time should be assessed. From the perspective of equality of opportunity a good starting point will be the OMAI research and parish plans. Local leaders will need to work with groups of young people to ensure that any new activities or facilities are what they want and will use. In some cases general community facilities marginalize teenagers as adult users complain when young people hang out in such places. A need for teenage only facilities is imperative.

### 3. Supporting providers

Providers striving to be more responsive to what local groups of young people want should be supported in further engagement and providing new activity that meets the needs of young local residents. The voluntary sector is a major partner here.

The Ashford & District Youth Service Council (ADYSE) has seen a period of tremendous change and requires support and funding to deliver a recent development plan which supports voluntary organisations with training and equipment and initiatives. Supported by KCC, ABC and Ashford YMCA, the ADYSE is developing activities and training for young people.

## Current work

- ✓ Upgrading goashford.com to include more on the local offer on things to do and places to go.
- ✓ Youth and Community working directly with Parish council's to develop local youth facilities.
- ✓ A new research study (OMAI) will assess what is available in parishes and wards including youth provision.
- ✓ Upgrade and refurbish the Ashford Skate Park



### Julie Rose Stadium

- Empowering young people to play sport in their community and to ultimately be part of competitive activities will be greatly influenced by the London 2012 Olympics. New funding streams will hopefully underpin the realisation of the Olympics and encourage local clubs and organisations to drive forward grass roots development.
- Updating the 'Working With Young People' pack to include information such as the building of MUGA's, 'free play space' and youth shelters. The 'Working With Young People' pack also aims to provide information on bringing parish councils and other adult-led groups into closer engagement with young people.
- KCC is supporting financially a new project 'Nomad' which will bring a range of mobile youth projects to rural areas around Tenterden, including mechanics and fitness pods.

### 3. Having a say

**'Show young people what the council does. Also get councillors to visit schools more to tell them about the council and why they should vote and what is currently going on. However, try and make sure the councillors are not going to be too boring!!' age 19**

#### What Matters findings

- Lack of awareness of Ashford Youth Forum, 80% of girls and 86% of boys age 12.
- 85% have not visited goashford.com in the past twelve months
- Half of respondents are not aware of SK8side (higher at age 12, 67%)
- 76% of 12 year olds do not use public libraries regularly
- They want information provided in a number of ways – through school, on websites and .....

#### Young people want

- Councillors to visit schools, explain what they do and effectiveness of local government
- Politics to be more interesting and fun
- To see (through posters and press releases) the work of the Council
- Councillors to follow through what they say they will do
- Their views taken into account and acted upon.
- A Children's Council to channel the views of young people to elected representatives.

'Having a say' is more than just consulting with local young people. It is about giving them a real voice in decision-making and increasingly, putting spending power in their hands. Young people must be given a voice to actively encourage them to support and contribute to their local community particularly to make it a better place for themselves and consequently for the population as a whole.

Ashford Borough Council's communication strategy and local councillors need to reflect on recent research and the *What Matters* survey that finds that it is not young people that are disconnected from formal politics, but political institutions that are disconnected from young people. Local young residents want to meet councillors and find out what decisions are being taken that effect them. They want better information and a chance to shape the services they receive.

Ashford Youth Forum (now a Trust) was set up in 2001 to do just that. It aims to increase local young residents active involvement with decision-making agencies. It has grown in number and strength year on year and wants young people from the widest range of backgrounds and communities to be actively involved. However, the *What Matters* survey shows there is low awareness of this forum. Effective promotion, hand in hand with more positive media coverage is required urgently. They need to succeed on a number of high impact projects in order to combat cynicism and apathy from those taking part. Their annual conference is well thought of by those that attend and should continue to focus on linking local young people to a range of provision and service providers.

Generally the gathering of young people's views on services and facilities is sporadic and in some cases non-existent. A coordinated approach is necessary to encourage local young people to become actively involved in decisions that effect them and their community. By combining marketing activity and flow of information to local young people, we can provide more creative and distinctive ways to engage young people. There should also be a range and choice of ways young residents can interact with decision makers and get feedback. Options such as joining the Ashford Youth Forum or Kent Youth County Council and shaping specific projects, to online participation and Councillors visiting schools should be built upon.

Increased use of the Sk8side Connexions Access Point proves that joined up 'drop in' points, staffed by trained workers, that provide relevant information and more importantly allow young people to actively feed back face to face on issues and problems concerning services are working. More 'drop in' points should be made available.

. . . empower young people to shape the services they receive.

## Key Challenges for Action

### 1. Better communications

A coordinated and coherent communications service for local agencies is required to connect decision-makers with young people. A communications strategy that provides opportunities for young people to interact or feedback on issues that effect them could start by utilising and if necessary upgrading websites and other methods of communication that young people already use. It should include training for adults who will be responsible for engaging with young people to ensure common standards.

### 2. Participation and interaction

We need to encourage all young people to become actively involved in decisions that affect them. Support for Ashford Youth Forum, Parish Councils and Community Fora on inviting young people to influence local issues and volunteering is required. Clear and readily accessible information on how to access organisations, influence services and what young citizens have a right to expect from local leaders would be helpful.

### Current work

- ✓ Ashford Youth Forum Trust recent initiatives include:
  - a newsletter for local young people distributed through schools and youth clubs that informs of latest issues and provides information on services;
  - a link with school councils and decision makers across geographic areas to open a channel of communication.
- youth web site upgrade via goashford.com
- ✓ Ashford Voice promoting activities and issues of interest to young Ashford residents.
- ✓ Local Democracy month to involve a programme of activities, including councillors visiting local schools.
- ✓ Kent Youth County Council represented by a minimum of four elected KYCC members.



**Local Democracy Month – An audience with key decision-makers, Christ Church High School**

- The Ashford Youth Forum is looking to increase feedback to young people who are not directly involved to ensure wider representation across the community.
- Young people are also actively involved in advising on local youth services through the KCC Youth Advisory Group.
- Voluntary work is a great way for young people to develop skills and knowledge that helps them make the transition between adolescence and adult life. The Green Paper has as a core objective 'young people as citizens: making a contribution'.

## 4. Safe and Clean Streets

**'You can't feel safe wherever you go, and nothing you do can change that. Perhaps you can offer a little more sense of security, or the knowledge that there is help if we need it...but just walking down a street (no matter how posh and 'nice') offers a vast amount of threats to any person. You can't trust anybody'. Age 17**

**'The green would be free of bottles, litter, graffiti and dog mess. It would be safe to go out at night (there would be no drunkards from the local pub shouting in the early hours of the morning). There would be more community spirit, the neighbours would know each other and the children would play together'. Age 16**

### What Matters findings

- Just under a third do not feel safe
- 19% of girls age 12 do not feel safe, and 30% of boys
- at 14 girls not feeling safe falls slightly to 27% but for boys, it jumps to 38%
- Half in later teens do not feel safe

### Young people want

- More surveillance cameras and visible policing
- A greater sense of security
- Knowledge of where to get help when they need it
- Less discrimination of young people
- Less littering and vandalism
- Cleaner play parks

Of all the issues that affect the immediate health and well being of young people and their neighbourhood, none is as important as crime and the fear of crime. Fear of crime affects active participation in local activities. Community Safety is a high priority for Ashford Borough Council and Kent Police and is now a statutory duty for the Council.

In general, crime is lower in Ashford than most other districts in Kent. Young people are just as likely to be the victims of crime as any other population and equally have a fear of crime the same as the adult population.

The Ashford Community Safety Partnership is delivering on the local Crime Reduction Strategy and responds to crime and young people. It focuses on prolific and persistent young offenders, those at risk of offending, the fear of crime and tackles antisocial behaviour. The Ashford Children's and Young People's Consortium is looking at activities that aim to divert young people from crime and anti-social behaviour through participation in meaningful and high quality cultural, art or sport based activities.

Whilst crime figures are relatively low, *What Matters* and other research shows young people and adults have a perception that the streets are not safe. Constant messages on the need for vigilance and securing one's home and property are contributing to this feeling of insecurity. Anti-social behaviour media coverage is also contributing. The generalisation that all 'youths' that congregate in the street are a threat is unacceptable.

Young people are far more likely to be blamed for crime than any other sector of the population. Local young people believe they are stereotyped as 'local jobs'. Young people feel even more powerless than adults to influence events. This does little to encourage them to be good citizens.

Many people currently perceive young people as a troublesome population who have little or no respect for adults or their neighbourhood. However, *What Matters* shows they care about their local environment. They want improved living conditions such as cleaner play parks, less vandalism, safe roads. A package of measures has been developed to tackle the many problems of the quality of our local environment (the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005). As part of the citizenship curriculum in schools, young people should bring forward solutions for their local setting on cleaner streets and crime prevention.

..... creating a sense of security and active participation.

## Key Challenges for Action

### 1. Fear of Crime

Information about the facts of crime and criminal activity along with information about keeping safe will help to combat young people's feelings about being insecure. An awareness campaign that targets young people from both their perspective and the wider community should be worked through.

### 2. Positive Messaging

This includes both promoting young people as good citizens who care about their environment and crime. It should deal with discrimination, particularly the label of 'job culture'. Working with the local media will be paramount.

### 3. Promoting participation

We need to build on young people's wish to live in a better environment. Engaging them into active participation in their local neighbourhood through information and activity in schools and working with environmental action groups. We need to empower young people to report offences. We need a high profile campaign to promote cleaner, greener spaces.

## Current work

- ✓ AYFT are working with the Police on an anti-bullying/text message video for dissemination through schools/youth groups
- ✓ The Crime and Disorder Strategy includes projects to tackle anti-social behaviour, the fear of crime in priority neighbourhoods, enhanced neighbourhood policing and improving quality of life for local residents
- ✓ The Spikey Campaign – aimed to allow young people to protect their drinks whilst socialising.
- ✓ Purse Chain campaign – given away free to combat on street crime and pick pocketing
- ✓ The Police are committed to liaison with schools and work through their Youth Crime Reduction Officer
- ✓ Summer scheme – a partnership project between Community Safety Unit and Kent Fire and Rescue Service who part funded two week scheme at Towers School



### Graffiti vandalism

- *The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005* contains a range of measures that the government hopes will improve the quality of the local environment by giving Local Authorities and the Environment Agency additional powers to deal with fly tipping, litter, nuisance alleys (affecting anti-social behaviour), fly posting and graffiti, abandoned and nuisance vehicles, dog offences, noise and other issues affecting the local environment.



### Litter in Ashford Town Centre

## 5. Improved Leisure Facilities

**'I think (sports) should be free for people under 16 as we are trying to join in and get healthy and we shouldn't have to pay.'** age 13

**'More people knowing about what activities there are, not just some crappy poster on a tiny notice board in some area of town no one walks past.'** Age 14

### What Matters findings

- Arts and leisure activities take place principally at school or college
- Sports takes place mainly at the Stour Centre, then schools followed by Tenterden Leisure Centre and parks and open spaces
- 18% can't get to where activities are taking place
- Cost and lack of publicity are factors for low levels of participation
- For 17% there is no opportunity to do the sport they want
- For 14% the cost of participating in arts activities is too high

### Young people want

- A larger, modern sports centre including better swimming pool and a gym for teenagers
- A wide range of sport and recreational activities including ice skating, swimming, martial arts and gymnastics
- A theatre and better facilities for doing arts
- A wide range of arts and cultural activities including dance, theatre and music gigs
- Cheaper and more exciting activities
- To know what is about and more choice

Leisure activities and facilities for local young residents play a large part in providing a high quality of life. Access to culture, community activities, shopping facilities, sport and leisure all come high on local young people's list of things to do. Sport can be used to reduce health inequalities. Art activities can be used to improve the qualities of life, social and creative thinking. Cultural activities can be used as a diversionary tactic to combat anti-social behaviour and is an important aspect in the pathway from adolescence to adulthood. We must not forget though, that many cultural activities are undertaken because they are fun and enjoyable rather than good for us or the communities in which we live.

We need to provide leisure facilities both now and in the future that meet these local youth needs and contribute to make Ashford a more colourful, social and pleasant place to live for young people.

It has long been accepted that Ashford has a dearth of leisure cultural facilities for young people. The role of Cultural Services has for a long time taken a back seat to the high profile services of crime, education, social services, social inclusion and regeneration. This is changing particularly in Ashford where the intrinsic role of cultural facilities are helping to deliver the sustainable communities agenda. We have a long way to go to provide access to a wide range of cultural activities for the wider youth population particularly in the arts and creative activity.

*What Matters* highlights areas where it is most important to deliver improvement for leisure facilities. This priority for better places to participate has challenging areas including the need for better promotion of what's on, the cost of participation and physical access. Existing and new facilities must embrace these issues and particularly engage with young people about what's on and what should be provided.

Many schools provide activity out of hours activities and allow community groups to use their space. There is an expectation from young people that after school activity should grow.

Ashford has a unique opportunity to ensure new facilities meet and exceed expectation given its growth agenda. As such it is crucial that agencies work together to build an identity and culture for the borough which is unique and that meets local need.

. . . leisure facilities that encourage an active lifestyle.

## Key Challenges for Action

### 1. New facilities

Although there seems to be a significant indifference to sport and the arts, when asked what could be done to improve sports in the Ashford Borough a large number of thoughtful responses were received. Many wanted a larger modern sports centre, a theatre and an ice rink. We need to work with developers, the commercial sector and landowners to plan new facilities.

### 2. Widening access

Again *What Matters* highlighted a repeated concern that young people just don't know what is out there. Better marketing is required. Cost was also a barrier to accessing leisure. We need to work with existing providers of entertainment facilities to identify where cost reductions might be made for young people and link this with potential transport providers, particularly for those young people who do not use existing facilities eg young women, young people with disabilities.

### 3. More choice

A range of activities is required in order to drive up sport, art and active recreation amongst young people. Innovative ways to attract young people to participate in a wider experience of activity need to be sought. They must demonstrate sustainability and be demand led.

## Current work

- ✓ Ashford Youth Forum are:
  - working with the Stour Centre to include a teen area in the gym as part of the phase 1 refurbishment;
  - negotiated half price membership to the Stour Centre for their members;
  - looking to justify the demand for an ice-skating rink
- ✓ Scoping for an indoor skate park in the borough
- ✓ A new page on [www.ashford.gov.uk](http://www.ashford.gov.uk) signposts sporting activities and clubs



Ashford Skate Park

- In the last decade we have seen an improvement of leisure and sports facilities through the fruition of the cinema, bowling alley, SK8side, skate/BMX park and McArthur Glen shopping outlet, as well as the current improvements to the Stour Centre. Cultural Projects have put forward Ashford as a potential area for pilot of the governments' opportunity card – an outcome of the Youth Matters Green Paper to help young people access these facilities.
- The Christchurch Youth Centre is developing a programme of sporting, creative and personal development activities specifically for teenagers.

# Section 3: What we need to do

## Implementation plan

1. Local young people will continue to help drive action. The *What Matters in Action* implementation plan identifies a range of projects designed to meet their needs.
2. A coordinator will be required to help deliver the implementation plan on behalf of the LSP. Project managers from a range of agencies and organisation will need to drive individual projects.
3. Funding for each project will be identified within the implementation plan. The financial implications should not be seen as a cost, but as an investment in the shortcomings in local provision.
4. Pooling of budgets and joint working will allow for efficiencies to be made.
5. Quick wins are included in the implementation plan but a number of initiatives will help launch the strategy. They include an information card attached to a shorter version of this strategy targeted at local young people.
6. This leaflet and What Matters card will aim to encourage local young residents to feed back on the strategy and plan of action.

## Monitoring and Review

7. The Ashford Partnership is responsible for the monitoring and evaluation of this strategy and its associated Implementation Plan.
8. The strategy will be reviewed on a six monthly basis from its launch in January 2006 – in June and December.
9. The review in December will constitute an annual performance review and the outcomes and results will be reported directly back to the LSP.
10. Progress will be celebrated once a year at the *What Matters* Youth Conference.
11. The strategy will be the subject of a major three-year review – work will begin at that point to revise the strategy document and set action for the next three years.
12. The LSP recognises that effective monitoring can only be achieved through the setting of a range of both quantitative and qualitative performance indicators.
13. Realistic achievable targets are included in the implementation plan.
14. The revised Quality of Life indicators help to paint a picture of life in a local area. Produced by the Audit Commission, they allow a bringing together of robust, accurate data for each area to enable local comparisons.
15. New indicators allow measurement of several areas that are highlighted in this strategy (community safety, culture and leisure, community cohesion and involvement). Consideration is given in the plan as to whether these indicators are used as a measure of success.
16. Year 1 of the implementation plan will be used to establish a baseline performance standards against which meaningful quality of life targets will be set in future years.
17. We must be mindful that throughout the three years of the strategy, agenda's may change and need to be reviewed. Further consultation may bring forward further concerns that will mean a review of the implementation plan.
18. A degree of flexibility must therefore be built in to ensure we constantly address the current needs of local young people.

## DRAFT

### Youth Charter.....our agreement on working together

The Ashford Partnership is committed to making a positive difference to the quality of local young people's lives – it is committed to **'What Matters'**. The Youth Strategy is founded on the views of local young people. The Ashford Partnership supports Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child that says:

**'When an adult makes a decision that affects a child in any way, the child has the right to give an opinion that will be considered by the adult'.**

The UN considers a 'child' to mean anyone up to the age of 18 years. (The UNCRC created in 1989, ratified by UK government in 1991)

#### **The Ashford Partnership will:**

- Advise on and support the delivery of the *What Matters in Action* implementation plan
- Involve young people in all decisions that affect them
- Communicate with young people clearly and appropriately
- Listen to young people's views, opinions and complaints on *What Matters in Action* and highlight the positive contribution that young people make to Ashford
- Treat young people equally and with respect

#### **Local young residents will:**

- Play an active and positive role in decision making whenever possible
- Tell us their views and opinions on local services
- Get involved in the projects within *What Matters in Action* at all stages
- Respect the various responsibilities, roles and ways of working in different agencies and services
- Behave in a reasonable manner, respecting each other, partners and their property

# Related research

## Overarching Strategies

- Youth Matters 2005 – green paper; DfES
- Community Strategy, 2004-2014; Ashford Local Strategic Partnership
- Ashford's Future GADF
- Ashford Preventative Strategy – Ashford Children's and Young People's Consortium
- Every Child Matters; 2003; DfES
- The Five Wise Warriors; Report on Consultation With Young People in Kent 2005
- Buckinghamshire Youth Strategy 2004-2007; Buckinghamshire Strategic Partnership

## Getting to Places

- National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal
- Making the Connection: Final Report on Transport and Social Exclusion (OPDM Social Exclusion Unit)
- Kent – The Next Four Years (Kent County Council)
- The Rural Connections – achieving social inclusion through transport schemes (Countryside Agency; 2005)
- Local Transport Plan – A Transport Strategy for Kent; KCC

## Having Things to Do

- Families, children and young people – key issues; Ben Page & Emma Wallace; March 2004; Mori
- Working with Young People Pack – Ashford Borough Council (via goashford.com)
- Brief for OMAI community research 2004 Ashford Borough Council
- 'Move it' – A Framework for Action on Physical Activity in the South East - GOSE and Sport England 2004

## Having a say

- Participation in our Village; National Children's Bureau & Forum for Rural Children and Young People; 2005
- Remixing Citizenship – Democracy and Young People's Use of the Internet; May 2005; Stephen Coleman; Carnegie YPI

## Safe and Clean Streets

- Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 (DEFRA)
- Ashford Borough Crime Prevention Strategy 2005-2008
- How to Improve Residential Areas; 2005; ODPM

## Improved leisure Facilities

- Culture at the Heart of Ashford's Future (GADF 2004)
- Cultural Strategy – ABC 2002 - 2005
- Leisure Contexts in Adolescence and their Effects on Adult Outcomes; July 2005; F. Feinstein, J Bynner, K Duckworth, P. iii

# With special thanks to.....

The following organisations for their valuable comments, advice and support in developing projects to deliver on the needs of local young people:

- Ashford Police & Community Safety Unit
- KCC Social Services, Children and Families Unit
- KCC Youth & Community
- Kent Highways
- Ashford YMCA
- Connexions Kent & Medway
- Ashford Citizens Advice Bureau
- KCC Sports Development Unit
- KCC Community Wardens Team
- GOSE

## Responses to the Strategy

Thank you for taking the time to read the strategy.

Comments on the youth strategy can be fed back to:

SallyAnne Logan  
Cultural and Youth Projects Leader  
Ashford Borough Council  
Civic Centre  
Tannery Lane  
Ashford  
Kent  
01233 330 293  
[Sallyanne.logan@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:Sallyanne.logan@ashford.gov.uk)

Further copies can be downloaded at [www.goashford.com/downloads](http://www.goashford.com/downloads)