

ASHFORD

Issue 12 | Spring 2021

FOR YOU

YOUR BOROUGH, YOUR MAGAZINE

A BRIGHTER TOMORROW

New hope for better days

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- VIP vineyard tour and overnight stay
- Bundle of goodies at The Beehive

FOCUS ON... ENVIRONMENT

INVESTING IN LEISURE



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Welcome



Looking back on my introduction to the Autumn 2020 edition I spoke about the likelihood of 'bumps in the road' as we try and get back towards normality during a pandemic which

has caused so much suffering and harm over the past year. Sad to say we are all still having to do our best in the face of another national lockdown which is proving a huge test for our residents, communities and businesses.

While mass vaccinations against COVID-19 offer us clear hope that we are on the home straight against this dreadful virus, we all need to adhere to the rules to keep each other safe, and to ensure that we emerge from this crisis as quickly as possible and stronger and more resilient than ever. This edition offers hope of better times ahead, as we focus on improving leisure and green spaces facilities across the borough, environmental campaigns to make our neighbourhoods a better place to live, and opportunities to learn new skills and forge new careers.

Despite the economic uncertainties created by the pandemic, we hear of bold moves to 'reset' Ashford's town centre, of new jobs created by the council as a result of our departure from the EU, and the welcome news that all the units at the council-owned Elwick Place development have been let, with a host of enterprising businesses set to open there later this year.

Finally, a staggering 745 entries were received for our two competitions in the winter edition as readers once again enjoyed engaging with the magazine.

Tracey Kerly

Tracey Kerly
Chief executive, Ashford Borough Council

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Get in touch!

To comment on this magazine, to tell us what you'd like to see more of and maybe to submit an article of your own:

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Write to: Ashford Borough Council, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford, Kent, TN23 1PL

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Find your borough councillor: www.ashford.gov.uk/councillors

Please note: For current information on the Civic Centre opening hours and face-to-face appointments please visit: www.ashford.gov.uk/contact-us/get-in-touch-another-way

Green light for town centre reset



You might have seen the news that exciting new plans for the future development of Ashford town centre have been agreed. They are part of the Ashford Recovery Plan which will be the council's road to economic recovery after coronavirus.

The Ashford Town Centre Reset focuses on the Bank Street and Elwick Road area and is designed to reset the town centre in light of the decline in retail which has been

accelerated by the pandemic. The flexible plans focus on several projects which will help revitalise the town centre, ensuring it remains relevant following new developments. The aim is to make Ashford a place to live, work, visit and invest in, enhancing and embracing the areas which give Ashford its character.

Key points include:

- improving the links between key destinations such as the station and Newtown Works to the town centre, making it easier to walk and cycle between them;
- encouraging independent retailers to the newly-revitalised area;
- ensuring that the increasing numbers of people living within the town centre have the infrastructure they need close to their homes;
- build on the community spirit within the town centre, as shown by the success of events like Snowdogs, Illuminities and Create festival;
- improving the gateways to the new high street – Elwick Road and Victoria Road.

While the document acknowledges projects which are underway, such as Vicarage Lane, it is also flexible so the council can support the town centre as appropriate as the rapid evolution takes place.

See the report at www.ashford.gov.uk/town-centre-reset

Census 2021

The survey, which takes place in March every 10 years, helps us to make decisions about the planning and funding of services in your area so it is vital that you take part. This year, you'll be able to fill in the survey online making it easy to have your say. Visit www.ashford.gov.uk/census

Elections 2021

Residents go to the polls on 6 May to cast their vote for our next Kent Police & Crime Commissioner and also in Kent County Council elections.

In addition to voting in person at a polling station, you can submit a postal vote or choose someone to vote for you in what's called a proxy vote. The deadline for applications for a postal vote is 20 April, and 27 April to apply for a proxy vote. Apply early please.

Visit www.ashford.gov.uk/ways-of-voting or email your name and address to vote@ashford.gov.uk if you require a paper form.

As a result of pandemic health and safety measures, you may not be able to vote at your usual polling station and you may have to travel further to vote in a polling station. It may also take longer to vote than usual.

Photo courtesy of BDP.



Bridgefield Park shines

The new playground at Bridgefield Park was named runner-up in the Street Design Awards 2020, which celebrate best practice in street design across the UK.

We worked with landscape architects BDP to develop the park, which brings together quality natural amenity and nature conservation spaces featuring wildflower meadows, natural grasslands to encourage ground nesting birds, circular walks with interpretation boards, community orchards, a leisure area with an Iron Age hill fort play area with a dry river-bed feature, a new footbridge for access and car parking.

Mayor's message

As my period in office draws to a close, it has been a privilege to serve the citizens of the borough as the Mayor of Ashford for the third time. I have had the honour to meet many outstanding members of our great community who have given their all in overcoming the challenges set by the pandemic. As we, hopefully, get the better of the virus, we can look forward to a brighter future and a normal life for everyone.

CLLr John Link, Mayor of Ashford



Lifeline upgrade

Ashford Lifeline is one of the first lifeline companies in the UK to invest in an advanced digital software system, guaranteed to future-proof the 24 hour personal security system for years to come. The council-run service is undertaking its biggest-ever system upgrade, designed to accommodate all the digital changes that are due to take place with telephone lines in coming years.

Existing customers don't have to take any action. Once the system is installed we will contact you to re-programme your unit. It will take some time to get around to all our customers, so please bear with us. When we make the changes, your Lifeline will continue to work in the normal way throughout the upgrade, so we're still available anytime at the push of a button.

Visit www.ashford.gov.uk/lifeline or email lifeline@ashford.gov.uk or call 01233 642095.

"Fantastic" new Tenterden health centre

Outstanding collaborative work with NHS Property Services, Tenterden Social Hub and the local Primary Care Network will soon come to fruition. Ivy Court surgery is vacating East Cross Clinic to move to new premises next door.

The building will be reconfigured to provide a community café and charity shop. It will offer a range of other services and activities which will support mental and physical health as well as education. "It's fantastic support for services which have been highlighted as essential throughout the pandemic and will continue to be in demand for years to come," said Spencer Goddard, CEO of Tenterden Social Hub.



E-newsletter sign-up

Want all the latest council news delivered straight to your inbox? In 2018 we asked how you wanted to receive our news and the resounding answer was by email – and now our mailing list is live! If you'd like updates on news, events, safety information and other exclusives, then click the 'Sign up to Council News' button on the Contact Us page of our main website: www.ashford.gov.uk/sign-up

Council runs port health facility



The council is recruiting around 130 staff as we prepare to provide a port health service at the Sevington Inland Border Facility (IBF). The site provides the customs and transit checks required for hauliers following Brexit. At 93 hectares, Sevington is one of the biggest facilities in the UK, with the council playing a vital role in making a success of our new trading arrangements with the EU.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has given £14m to local authorities across England to help them maintain the UK's high standards on imported animal products. Across the country, more than 500 new port health roles are being created to facilitate the new checks on imports of animal products from the EU from April 2021, with £8.8m invested in Ashford Borough Council and Dover District Council.

Our service will be introduced in a phased approach, with

documentary checks starting 1 April and physical checks three months later.

We will undertake checks on imports of products of animal origin (POAO), high-risk food not of animal origin (HRFNAO) and animal by-products (animal products not for human consumption) imported from the EU. The new facility will operate 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. It's estimated that around 124,000 checks a year will be carried out.

Around 130 staff are being recruited, with new roles in IT, legal, administration and HR as well as managerial and technical and environmental positions. The council has been recruiting local people where possible. A new facility has been constructed on site.

To find out about current opportunities visit www.ashford.gov.uk/working-for-us.

New Ashford Leisure Trust Fund

The Kent Community Foundation has announced that the Ashford Leisure Trust Fund is open for applications from charitable projects which deliver healthy recreational activities for people living in the borough. The Fund will award grants of up to £10,000 to support sports clubs, community groups or charities that offer indoor or outdoor activities that increase physical well-being and bring people together in positive community-based activities.

To find out more email natalie@kentcf.org.uk or visit www.kentcf.org.uk/funding

Elwick Place fully let

The council has announced that every unit at its multi-million pound Elwick Place cinema, hotel and leisure complex in Ashford town centre is now let. In addition to the Picturehouse cinema and Travelodge hotel, the centre is home to popular food outlet Macknade, which will soon be expanding into a second unit, and a Snap Fitness gym. Contracts have been signed for the remaining units and more details will soon be announced about the exciting businesses who are preparing to open at Elwick Place. Visit www.elwickplace.com.



Green shoots of new community



With families moving into the homes being built and a brand new primary school due to open this year, *Ashford For You* looks at how Chilmington Green is coming to life.....

Chilmington Green is a new community in the south of Ashford which will see up to 5,750 homes, a district centre and community infrastructure created over the next 25-30 years. This will eventually see over 1,000 jobs created and around £125m spent on local amenities including:

- A secondary school
- Four primary schools
- Shops
- Health and community facilities
- Sports and leisure facilities
- Significant areas of public open space



Facts and figures

1,000
Jobs created

6,666
Trees to be planted

£125_m
Spent on local amenities

Photo courtesy of BDW

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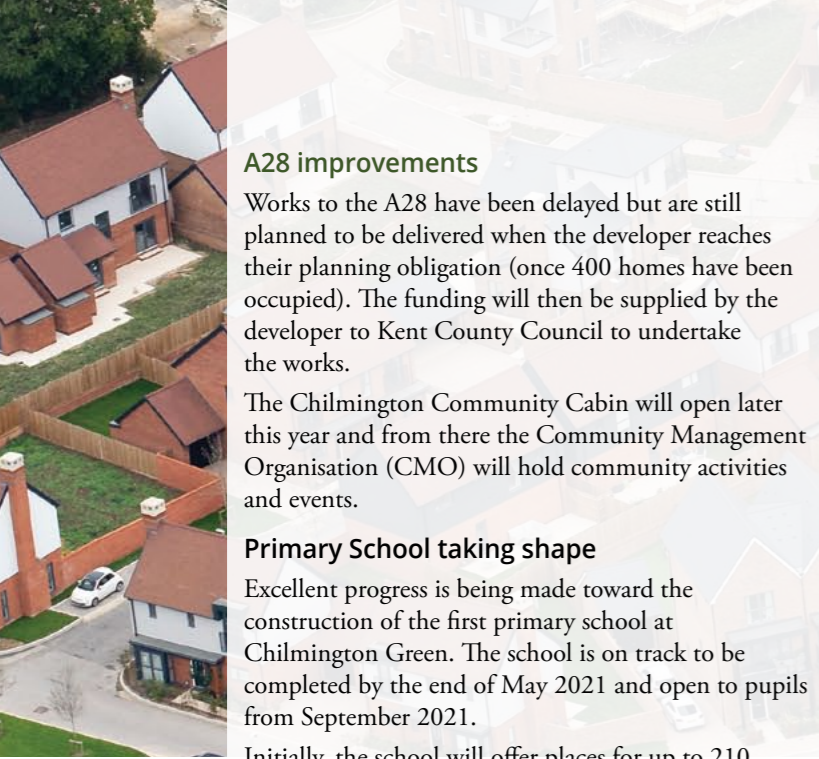


Competition winners

A staggering 745 entries were received for our competitions in the winter edition. Sophie Morris won £250 worth of vouchers to shop in store or online at Made in Ashford, while John West and Heather Butler each won a Kentish Wine Box supplied by Macknade. Congratulations to our winners and thanks to everyone who took part. See page 22 for our latest fantastic competitions.

MACKNADE
FOOD, FAMILY AND FRIENDS SINCE 1847





A28 improvements

Works to the A28 have been delayed but are still planned to be delivered when the developer reaches their planning obligation (once 400 homes have been occupied). The funding will then be supplied by the developer to Kent County Council to undertake the works.

The Chilmington Community Cabin will open later this year and from there the Community Management Organisation (CMO) will hold community activities and events.

Primary School taking shape

Excellent progress is being made toward the construction of the first primary school at Chilmington Green. The school is on track to be completed by the end of May 2021 and open to pupils from September 2021.

Initially, the school will offer places for up to 210 primary aged pupils (4-11 years old), a nursery and a specialist resource for pupils who have an Education Health Care Plan for Autistic Spectrum Disorder.

The school has sufficient space to offer 420 primary school places in total and will have:

- 14 classrooms
- A library
- A nurture room
- A large nursery space with a sleep room and offices
- The specialist resource room for pupils with ASD
- Staff offices and a training room
- A kitchen
- A large hall
- A multi-use games area
- A sports field
- The hall and the sports field available to hire by the community.



Photo courtesy of BDW



Branching out

6,666 trees are coming to Chilmington Green following a successful bid to the Forestry Commission's Urban Tree Challenge.

The initial tranche of trees were planted late last year in an area currently referred to as Discovery Park, close to the new community being created there.

The local community will be involved in the tree planting project to encourage a greater sense of local ownership, (once COVID-19 restrictions allow).

Creating a vision for a Garden Community

Chilmington Green is part of the wider South of Ashford Garden Community, which also includes the site areas known as Court Lodge and Kingsnorth Green developments.

These latter two sites are currently at the planning consideration stage. A Vision & Strategy setting out how these three major combined developments will come together, has been endorsed by partners and adopted by the council.



For more information

The Primary School visit
www.chilmingtongreen.kent.sch.uk

Chilmington Green & the wider SAGC:
www.ashford.gov.uk/sagc

Chilmington Management Organisation (CMO)
www.cmo.org.uk



House building, buying and selling remains open during lockdown

THE HAMLET
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4 and 5 bed houses from £545,000 to £789,000

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The Hamlet

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Visit jarvishomes.com or contact us on 01233 630999

The Hamlet

This leafy oasis by Jarvis Homes includes 99 luxury homes surrounded by countryside but near to the conveniences of modern life.

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The Hamlet is a mix of 2, 3, 4 and 5 bed houses.

What VERA did next

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Ashford Borough Council launched its Voluntary Emergency Response Appeal (VERA) to help with the borough's response to and recovery from the pandemic.

Thanks to contributions from residents and businesses £10,205 was raised and shared between three local organisations who have been supplying food and essentials to those most in need during the height of the crisis; Ashford Vineyard Foodbank, Bright City Church Foodbank and Repton Community Trust's People's Pantry.

We caught up with these fantastic organisations to find out how they've been spending the funds to support our vulnerable communities...



Repton Community Trust's People's Pantry

Beth Rice, Executive Director at Repton Community Trust, said: "As the pandemic has evolved, so has the Trust's approach to supporting people through our community-led foodbank 'The People's Pantry'. With support from VERA funding, the team developed online ordering and can now offer 24-hour access to food through a unique locker system placed outside Repton Connect Community Centre.

"The Trust also recognises how vital it is to support people's mental wellbeing and have been distributing Wellbeing, Recovery and Activity Parcels (W-raps) and art packs along with their food orders. A new team of volunteer drivers also continue to deliver food and essential items to people all over Ashford.

"Ashford Holiday kitchen, a group of organisations working together to provide food and activities to children, young people and families in school holidays, has now found a new home within Repton Community Trust.

"The Trust also recognise how vital it is to support people's mental wellbeing..."

This will enable the organisations involved to work under one umbrella with the common goal of ending hunger and isolation for families in Ashford."

To find out more call: **01233 808023**
email: **info@reptonct.uk**
or visit: **www.reptonct.uk/peoples-pantry**



Ashford Vineyard Foodbank

Renee Aird, Compassion Projects Manager at Ashford Vineyard, said: "Since March, Ashford Vineyard Compassion has given out over 2,000 frozen meals, food parcels, fresh food boxes, and art/activity packs for children to over 550 families across Ashford.

"The VERA funding and food stock have been vital in enabling us to provide everyday essentials to those in need. We are excited about launching our new project, Renew, which has a vision to ensure that all families have the food and provisions they need.

"In addition to everyday essentials, families will find a new vision for themselves, which is one of abundance – abundance of food and finance, which ultimately leads to a lasting stability. We desire to see families thrive and believe for the absolute best for themselves and their future generations."

To find out more visit **www.ashfordvineyard.org/compassion.**

If you want to register or make a referral you can email **compassion@ashfordvineyard.org** or call **01233 331919.**



Bright City Church Foodbank

Ian Fowkes, Pastor at Bright City Church, said: "Difficult times can sometimes bring out the best in people and communities and I've been amazed at how members of Ashford town have come together to do what they can for those in need during this pandemic. Here at Bright City Church foodbank our team have been blown away by the generosity of individuals, businesses and other groups who have donated food items and other essentials which we have distributed to those who are struggling.

"We are so grateful for the generous funds given by VERA and other funders which have enabled us to support 154 households and families with weekly food parcels throughout the pandemic. At Christmas every household received a hamper and we gave out 70 individually packed home-cooked Christmas dinners and 50 family portions.

"We are now partnering with Ashford Together and Ashford Borough Council to provide a twice weekly Covid Hardship Clinic where those finding themselves in extreme need during this time can be helped to access advice and practical support.

"The clinic runs out of The Beacon Centre which is next door to Bright City Church in Ashford town centre and is open on Tuesday mornings 9am-12pm and Friday afternoons 1pm-4pm. Call **01233 667565** to book an appointment."

To find out more email **info@brightcitychurchuk.com** or visit **www.brightcitychurchuk.com/community-action**



At your leisure



How the Jasmin Vardimon Dance Academy will look

Several cultural facilities across the borough are expanding or seeing improvements this year. We look at how the council is investing in leisure...

Stour Centre makeover starts to take shape

A £7.5m investment including refurbishment of the gym and a new soft play and clip and climb centre at the Stour Centre will be completed this summer.

The revamp includes upgraded water features in the pool and improved pool showers. For fitness customers the gym will be extended with brand new equipment and there will be an additional exercise studio and new changing rooms.

A new fitness suite at the Julie Rose Stadium is also planned while both reception areas and the catering offer will be improved with the introduction of Costa Coffee.

The major refurbishment will significantly improve the leisure and fitness offer in Ashford. Works began in June 2020 with the reopening planned for June 2021.

The council has secured a £1.45m Government grant to replace the ageing power plant at the Stour Centre, with a state-of-the-art system which will slash running costs, cut carbon emissions by 45% and provide a boost to our ambitious carbon neutral pledge.

Singleton Environment Centre grows

The Singleton Environment Centre is being expanded with a fully accessible, flexible two storey container building and viewing platform, sitting alongside the original centre which opened in 2012.

The building will allow the expansion of the range of activities provided such as Ashford Green Gym, Repair Café, health walks around Ashford Community Woodland and children's workshops. The centre also includes the popular Footprints Café.

The extension was funded with developer contributions set aside to provide a community centre for the residents of Brisley Farm. The project has been managed by Great Chart with Singleton Parish Council and the operator Singleton Spaces.

Raising the roof in Tenterden

Tenterden Leisure Centre is also having some improvements, with a new roof and pool air handling unit planned this year. The works are likely to take around 4-5 months and the centre will remain in use while they take place.

Quick step forward on dance academy

A major new arts hub for the county, providing a long-term base for internationally renowned dance company Jasmin Vardimon will open next Spring. Work on building the Creative Laboratory and 29 light industrial units in Javelin Way started in January.

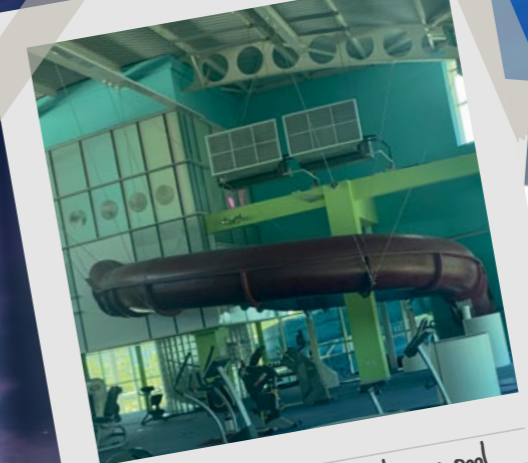
The new building will include space for the creation of the company's touring productions, rehearsals, training, educational and community classes, plus incubator space for small creative businesses.

Jasmin and her company have played a vital role in raising the creative and cultural profile and their new home, funded by the Arts Council England, KCC and ABC, will enable them to expand their connection with the local community and support emerging talent.

Changing places at Waterside

Construction on new facilities at Waterside Sports and Children's Centre is also underway with local company Lancaster Building due to finish the works this summer.

There will be a new lobby area, four football changing rooms, an officials' changing room and a fully accessible changing room and toilet as well as a social area and a kitchen.



Stour Centre gym and leisure pool



More fun for young ones in the leisure pool



New Stour Centre café area



Singleton Environment Centre expansion



New look Stour Centre reception



Turf turning for Waterside changing facilities

For more information visit:

www.thestourcentre.co.uk

www.jasminvardimon.com

www.singletonenvironmentcentre.org.uk

www.tenterdenleisure.com or bit.ly/TLeisureCentre

Leaving litter behind

The past year has proven how vital our local green spaces are to us. It's now more important than ever before that we keep these places clean and safe for everyone to enjoy. Find out more about what we're doing to achieve this and find out how you can help us.



Flytipping

Flytipping has increased over the last year and not only does it look horrible but it is also bad for the environment. One thing that is on the rise is residents leaving bags/boxes/general household waste next to a litter bin. Excess waste that won't fit in your bin can be taken to the Household Waste and Recycling Centre, it's still open and you can book a slot online.

We have also noticed an increase in builders' waste being flytipped. If you are considering having work done on your house this year don't forget to double check the following things before your builder disposes of the waste:

- Do they have a waste carriers' licence?

- Where are they going to dispose of the items?

- Can they provide you with an invoice or receipt?

If you don't and they flytip your waste then you could end up with a £400 fine!



Who let the dogs out?

Following the success of the 'Do It for Your Dog' campaign last year we're turning our attention to your dog's behaviour in cemeteries. We're sure you'll agree with us that cemeteries are not the place to let your dogs run free so we'll be launching a campaign to remind people to pick up after their pooch and keep them on the leash when walking in the cemetery.

Litter Heroes

In the upcoming weeks we will be asking what you the residents think is the biggest problem with litter is in Ashford.

- Where is there an issue with litter?
- What do you consider the worst form of litter?

This information will help us shape our up and coming spring litter campaign.

Are you a #LitterHero?

Please keep up to date with our advice and guidance on litter picking during the pandemic as this is regularly updated in line with government recommendations. This guidance can be found at www.ashford.gov.uk/things-to-do/volunteering/community-litter-pick/



Lavender

Calling all Gardeners

Spring is a wonderful season where you get time to repair the damage caused during the wet winter season and see your garden coming back to life. Check out these tips from Aspire Landscape Management to make this year's garden the best one yet.

Gardening tips for March

March is a great month to start sowing hardy annuals such as cornflowers and poppies to create a wildflower meadow in your garden. This is not only pleasing to look at it also benefits the wildlife.

If you have grass in your garden, now is the time to give it some attention. Early spring is a good time to over seed any areas that may have been damaged in the winter and apply a spring fertiliser.



Encouraging wildlife

- Thinking of planting new borders? Start by digging the soil, adding more amounts of oxygen and making the soil free so it is not compacted. Add a good layer of compost and wait for the worms to do their job for a month, then plant away.

- If you have already created a spot to welcome birds, it is a great time to refresh your feeders. Wash and dry the feeders in a thorough manner before you refill them again.

- Bare soil is a magnet for cats. If you have a vegetable patch or an area of soil you've recently dug over, it can feel like all the nearby cats are making a beeline for it. Prickly evergreen clippings, such as holly and conifers, could be the solution. Lay them across the surface of bare soil, to encourage cats to go elsewhere.

- Install a water butt and start collecting rainwater and make the most of the seasonal rainfall.

- If you have lots of woody branches and stems, you can use them to make wildlife habitats, which can benefit a whole host of creatures. Bringing wildlife into the garden is a great way to add interest and can help to provide organic pest control—for example, beetles eat slugs.



For more tips and to find out more about what Aspire do visit their new website www.Aspirelm.co.uk

Want to save a trip to a tip and have more time to spend working on your garden?

It's never been quicker or easier to sign-up to our garden waste service. When you sign up you can opt in to receive our exclusive newsletter full of hints, tips and offers.

Sign up now – www.ashford.gov.uk/garden-waste

Ashford in Bloom 2021



Ashford in Bloom is back, bigger and better than ever before. We've expanded the categories to make it even easier for everyone to take part! We're looking for creative gardens that have made the most of what they have. Find out more about our new and improved categories below.

Best front or back garden

Are you green fingered? Is your garden your pride and joy? Do you have fantastic flowerbeds? Perhaps the design of your garden is particularly striking or maybe you've made some interesting plant choices. Perhaps we'll be amazed by how well you've maintained a space. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder so we're not looking for one set idea but we are looking for a garden that makes an impact - whatever that impact may be.



Most environmentally friendly garden

Is your garden a haven for wildlife? Have you found a way to reduce the amount of water you use? Do you love upcycling? Then this is the category for you. The council is looking for gardens that look beautiful while helping save the planet. Perhaps you've planted wildflowers to encourage butterflies and bees, maybe you have a bug hotel for all the creepy crawlies to enjoy. Maybe you've turned trash into treasure by upcycling something that was due to be thrown away. Whatever you're doing to improve your little corner of the planet we want to know about it.



Best communal garden

Have you worked on a garden as part of a group or community project? Have your gardens become a hub for the community, a source of local pride? Have they spawned wider projects? Have they brought the community closer together?

Perhaps your communal garden provides a space of relaxation or maybe it provides fresh fruit and veg for the community to enjoy. Or maybe it's beautiful to look at while offering a place to get together and socialise with your neighbours. We're looking for gardens that not only look beautiful but serve a beautiful purpose.



Best Balcony

Do you have a beautiful balcony that is the envy of your neighbours, have you created a green oasis in the sky? Have you used innovative ways to showcase your space? Even better have you created a place where butterflies and bees can thrive that reduces your carbon footprint? If you've created a beautiful balcony you need to enter this category.

Best window box

Not all of us have gardens or the time to cultivate them so this category is for people whose green fingers have not been restricted by a small space. If you have a wonderful window box we want to hear from you. Let us know all about the reasons behind your planting choices.

Best indoor garden

Have you discovered an innovative way of bringing the outdoors in? Not everyone has a garden or balcony or room for a window box so we want to know what you've done to add green in your indoor space. Maybe you're a houseplant fanatic or you nurture an indoor herb garden, no matter how small we want to know you haven't let the lack of an outdoor space hamper your green fingered endeavours.

Best Young Gardener U-14

More young people than ever before are expressing interest in their outdoor spaces - if you know a young person who has the magic touch when it comes to gardening we want to hear all about it. Have they found innovative sustainable ways to garden? Perhaps they're a dab hand at turning something old into something wonderful. We'd love to hear all about their endeavours no matter how big or small. After all we all have to start somewhere!



How to enter

You can email your entry to ashfordinbloom@ashford.gov.uk

Please put the category you'd like to enter in the subject line and include

- Pictures of your space
- A few lines about your space

Deadline for entries is 4th July



Hello Murals brightened up the park building with a selfie wall.



Get involved at Victoria Park despite restrictions

Work on the National Lottery Heritage Fund project to revitalise Victoria Park is continuing, with the team hoping to be able to get out and meet some of the community when coronavirus restrictions lift. Even with social distancing and restrictions still in place you can get involved.

There is currently a virtual volunteer programme and in-park roles with Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership available. Email victoria.fannon@ashford.gov.uk or see the website for more. More volunteering roles will be available later in the summer, so keep checking to see if there's something that catches your eye.

If you've been walking in the park for your daily exercise, you might have spotted the mural on the main building. Two local artists, Hello Murals, were appointed to create a piece of public art to engage and inspire the local community. This is the first stage in developing the arts offering within the park, which will include an extension of the sculpture trail, more mural opportunities, musical features and creative workshops. If you take a stag selfie, don't forget to tag the park on social media.

Park and Write

The project team were really impressed with the entries to the story writing competition last year. There will be another opportunity for you to get your creative juices flowing later in the year, so keep your eyes open. You can check out the winning entries on the park YouTube channel.

VP Youth council

Young people are encouraged to join the Victoria Park Youth Council to have their say on the project. Anyone aged 12-25 is invited to get involved, particularly if you have an interest in social media, art, play, fitness, and vehicles such as scooters, skateboards, rollerskates and bikes. It's a great opportunity to build experience for your CV, with opportunities to develop skills in communication, decision making, working with others and in the community, and it could help with awards programmes such as Duke of Edinburgh Award. Contact Nicola Priest on Nicola.priest@ashford.gov.uk.

The team is working hard on lots of other exciting plans and opportunities for 2021, keep following our social media for more details.



For more information on the project and upcoming events visit www.ashford.gov.uk/victoria-park or Follow on Twitter @VictoriaParkABC, Facebook @VictoriaParkABC and Instagram @VictoriaParkAshford, @victoriaparkashford or search for Victoria Park Ashford on YouTube.

Dahlia spells independent living



The council is moving away from traditional sheltered housing provision, giving older residents more choice, flexibility and variety of independent living options...

Ask people what sheltered housing means to them and you might get responses like: "it's for old people", "it's a nursing home", or even "it's god's waiting room". Probe further and you might get "old people sat in chairs around the side of a communal lounge", or "not somewhere I'd like to live".

Ashford Borough Council is shaking up these old-fashioned perceptions and has consulted with residents and staff on adopting a new model of housing provision for older folk. As a result, a new brand has been created that sums up this fresh approach to independent living in the 21st century – Dahlia, which stands for Desirable Affordable Housing Linking Independence (and) Age.

Catalyst for change

The catalyst for change has largely been Britain's ageing population, which has driven a national focus on housing provision for this sector. Nowhere is this more evident than in the borough of Ashford, where in just two years' time it is expected that nearly a quarter of all residents will be aged 65 or over. This means that we must prepare for the needs of that ageing population by ensuring they are in the right sized homes for their needs.

A review of the service was therefore needed. The council runs housing schemes across the borough and it started by asking residents for their opinion. This was very well received – tea, cake and lots of constructive chat with a very positive vibe about what they wanted.

Experienced housing professionals within the council were also consulted and the review covered all areas of the sheltered housing service, from support plans to lifelines and activities. The consultation helped to underline the

fact that one size does not fit all and that we need to provide people with choice as well as flexibility.

The council is looking to offer a variety of living options, from community bungalows to independent communal living. Some will be in urban areas, while others will have more rural settings. All will be self-contained and provide comfortable, lifetime homes for affordable rent for older people.

Living more independently

The council is preparing for the needs of an ageing population by building and remodelling accommodation for older people to live more independently in homes that are the right size for their needs.

This change of approach ties in with the council's multi-million pound modernisation plan for its old sheltered housing schemes, where is it building and remodelling accommodation for older people to live more independently in homes that are the right size for their needs. The first to be delivered – Farrow Court in South Ashford – is an enhanced independent living scheme which has won an armful of awards. Danemore in Tenterden provides rural communal living for 34 residents and hit the headlines last February when it was opened by HRH The Princess Royal.

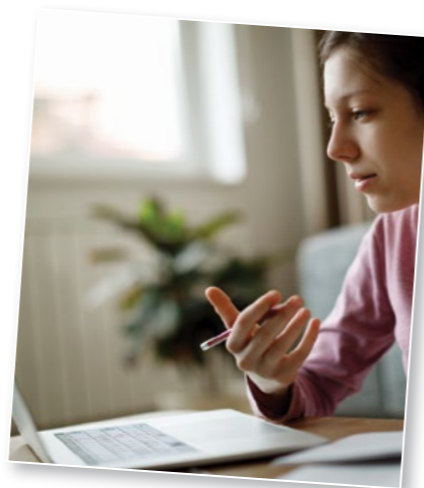
The council has thanked housekeepers for helping to keep residents safe during the pandemic, and also thanked residents for adhering to the rules.

For more information visit www.ashford.gov.uk/independent-living-schemes



Pathway to a new future

During these challenging times many people are considering volunteering to learn new skills and develop retraining pathways to a new career. We spoke to Beth Peal, Chief Executive at Ashford Volunteer Centre, about the opportunities they provide...



Q Many people are struggling with job losses so how can the Ashford Volunteer Centre help residents?

Beth We can help find volunteer placements and opportunities and assist people to connect with their communities. Often this is a time of isolation, with people feeling like they are disconnected and helping people is a good way to support your community. It also gives that person a positive feeling and benefits their wellbeing in knowing that they are helping other people to get connected. One great course offered is the 'Match Your Skills With Volunteering'.

Q Tell us more about this course, specifically what skills you can develop?

Beth It's offered via Kent Adult Education and is part of the Response programme. They are a good way of finding out about volunteering and discovering what you can do to help people and how you can join in with your local community groups. Volunteering can show vital skills that employers want – like having a can-do attitude, being reliable, being positive about the skills you can offer and understanding the importance of teamwork.

Volunteering is about 'What can you do to help people?' and people connecting with their local community groups. At a time when things are difficult, volunteering is a great way of bringing people safely together and helps people learn vital communication skills. You don't have to be on your own either, as family members can do it together.

If you want to improve your digital skills this course can help, as it's about working with others and problem solving. We've previously had volunteers ask us for help in connecting them with someone who can design websites so we aim to support everyone with their individual requests. The first stage is to ask our volunteers what they're good at, what interests them and go from there to connect them to groups.

Q The Skills for Volunteers Course on your website seems beneficial too. What can you tell us about this?

Beth These are online educational courses that are being run for adults to develop their volunteering skills. We target those who need extra help in deciding what they want to do and finding out a bit more about what volunteering opportunities suit them. Groups that take part also have the chance to bounce ideas off each other. It's a cracking course, run by a great tutor, which is fun and is a great way to promote your self-esteem and wellbeing.

Q Is there a cost involved with both services? How far do residents need to travel?

Beth There are no costs involved. However people do have to meet the Response criteria – if you are interested in the course contact the Volunteer Centre and if you don't fit the course criteria we will connect you with another opportunity or contact to help you progress towards volunteering.

Research shows that the biggest barrier to volunteering is time and people's perception of time. Some people think volunteering is required every week but this isn't the case. If you want to volunteer for an hour, we can connect you to groups with flexibility in mind. People are busy, or may be on furlough and simply have a couple of months where they can help. That's where we come in.

Q Are these services still available for enrolment during the pandemic?

Beth Courses are still running. Both courses are available online. Just get in touch, we will send you a link to fill out a form and we'll make it happen. We are here for residents whenever they need us, just get in touch.

Q Do you have any examples of residents visiting AVC and then getting into employment as a direct result of skills picked up?

Beth We connect people with volunteering opportunities and our courses are seen as a stepping stone into employment. Volunteers have told us that our courses have helped with their wellbeing and has made them realise that they *can* do this and make a difference, or have something to give to the community.

Q Any new initiatives on the horizon that will strengthen volunteering opportunities?

Beth We have been encouraging people to take part in Kent Community Foundation's Knock and Check campaign, and with volunteering opportunities during lockdown either being available very locally or even from home, there's no need to travel very far. Residents have stepped up during the pandemic and are making a real difference.

Over the last year, we have had over 500 people volunteer through our services to help them connect to 120 community organisations. With 40 years of experience, the Ashford Volunteer Centre is here to help everyone, including those in rural areas.

Contact

Visit ashfordvc.org.uk, phone 01233 665535 or email contact@ashfordvc.org.uk

Volunteer Centre
Ashford

Ashford Advice – here to help

The last year has been hard for everyone so if you need free, confidential and impartial advice, Ashford Advice can help. They have specialist advisors in housing, debt, employment and welfare benefits, and they can also help you access solicitors for family or immigration matters.

If the pandemic means finances are tight, the advisors can help you apply for benefits, manage your debts and prioritise payments.

Call **01233 626185**, Monday to Saturday 8.30am to 5pm, or email ashfordadvice@gmail.com, or visit www.ashfordadvice.org

Ashford Advice
the charity for your community

Win a bumper bundle of goodies

Win 6 months of free coffee (limited to 1 per day, starting when our doors reopen), a one hour coaching session with our resident Beehive Empowerment Coach Mrs BIG (find her on Instagram @_MrsBig or Facebook: @MrsBelieveInspireGrow), and a Big Beehive Bundle.

The bundle includes a Beehive tote bag, your choice of 2 vinyl stickers, a pocket mirror and an A6 original encouragement print. A prize worth over £450!

The Beehive is a second-hand women's clothing boutique and cafe in the heart of Ashford, but it is not just any shop. At the core of The Beehive is a place where women who can't afford clothing are referred by local services to access clothes for free. We can't wait to reopen our doors in our new location at 1-3 North Street!

For more information about who we are and what we do, check out www.beehiveashford.com or find us on social media (FB/Instagram): @BeehiveAshford.



WIN COUNTRY INN BREAK & WINERY TOUR & TASTING



We've teamed up with the folks at Balfour Hospitality to offer you an overnight at their recently refurbished country inn, The Woolpack in Tenterden High Street. Plus, a full Estate Tour and Tasting at our Balfour Winery at Hush Heath Estate. The prize is suitable for 2 adults and includes an evening meal at The Woolpack up to the value of £80.

The Woolpack is a C15th inn in the heart of the county, making a perfect base from which to explore the Kent countryside. The Woolly, as it's known, is the local hub for lovers of great food and drink. Open 7 days a week for breakfast, lunch or dinner serving locally sourced seasonal food, it has 7 individually-designed bedrooms.

Set within the rolling hills of Kent, The Balfour Winery located at the Hush Heath Estate began with a simple love of wine, a handful of vineyards and the will to push boundaries. With the success of their first wine, Balfour Brut Rosé, they turned their passion into a family business. Today, they offer an exceptional guest experience across 400-acres of Kent countryside, from expert-led winery tours and guided wine tastings, to stunning vineyard walks and nature trails.

Visit hushheath.com and thewoolly.com



To enter your name in our prize draws either:

- * Email the editorial team at competition@ashford.gov.uk – put either Hush Heath or The Beehive Competition Entry in the subject heading and include your full name, postal address and email. Please include a contact phone number.
 - * Send a postcard or sealed envelope with your name, address, email and contact phone number to: *Ashford For You* magazine, Communications, Ashford Borough Council, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford TN23 1PL. Write Hush Heath or The Beehive Competition Entry on the card.
- We will contact each winner to request consent to provide your contact details to Hush Heath or The Beehive to enable you to claim your prize.

Terms & conditions: 1. The competition is open to UK residents aged 18 years or older except employees of the Promoter, their families, agents or any third party associated with the competition. 2. The closing date of the competitions is **5pm on Monday 5 April 2021**. Entries received after this time will not be included. The prizes are non-transferable and non-refundable. There are no cash alternatives. 3. By accepting the prize you also agree to be bound by standard terms and conditions specified by the prize providers. Only one entry per person. Editor's decision is final.

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To arrange a virtual tour or one-to-one video chat, please call **01233 884359** or email nicola.young@careuk.com

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careuk.com/montfort-manor

*Seven days' written notice required.



Keep Ashford Talking

- Are you experiencing problems with your neighbours over anti-social behaviour, noise or boundary issues?
- Are you struggling to come to an agreement over child access?
- Are there intergenerational issues in your family that are causing endless arguments and stress?



The Ashford Mediation Service (AMS) is a free service available to all residents of Ashford borough experiencing conflict and we're here to help.

AMS doesn't 'take sides'. We work with all parties in dispute to help both 'sides' reach a solution that works for everyone. AMS facilitates and manages the conversations to help you reach a mutually beneficial conclusion.

We also offer other, very useful services, including our 'Listening Ear' and 'Keep in Touch' services where we are happy to work with individuals if the other party in dispute is not quite ready to get involved in mediation.

Our trained volunteer mediators can work with you and the other party in a way that is convenient to you. That could be over a technology platform such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom or Skype or face-to-face if you feel comfortable meeting up.

Whatever your issues, we can either help you with our mediation service or signpost you to another community service who can help you.

You can call us at **07845 914838** or drop us an email at info@ashfordmediation.co.uk.

Should you require further information, visit our website: www.ashfordmediation.co.uk



WE LOOK FORWARD
TO SEEING YOU...

Soon

We know you've all missed popping into your favourite stores during lockdown and can't wait to do it again!

With one-way and social distancing measures in place, we aim to make your visit a safe and pleasant one when you return.

Please check out our website and social media posts for updates



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