

## Ashford Artist in Residence *Final Report*

### Introduction

In January 2003, I was contacted by the Cultural Services Department of Ashford Borough Council. I was already familiar with Ashford as, in the previous year, I had applied for and been awarded a small commission to develop proposals for a local heritage trail.

I had had an interesting experience. Armed with a fairly open brief, I had explored the town, meeting local people and had been guided around the dominant medieval and modernist architectural features by local history enthusiasts. I had spent time in the local library looking through the newspaper records of the campaigns to save cinemas and pubs from the brave concrete landscaping of the sixties and seventies. As I found myself marooned in traffic islands, signposted across and around what seemed like a village motorway, and bewildered by the scale of surface car-parking, I began to feel angry.

Ashford is beautiful. It has remarkable historic architecture within its centre, it is surrounded by hilly green countryside, has a rich farming and industrial heritage and is well connected by road and rail; to Europe, London and the rest of the country. So what has gone wrong? Ashford is not particularly poor and did not suffer the terrible destruction of the Second World War that was experienced by East London or the industrial purgatory of the North-East in the eighties and yet it appears shabby, desolate and unloved. Ashford has booming house prices, wealthy suburbs and massive inward investment and yet it seems to be decaying. Litter is caught by herris fencing, pedestrian signage is non-existent or misleading, street lamps and street furniture appeared to be generic, second rate and poorly maintained and it has a shopping centre which is just one of a mass-produced series of uninspired pseudo post-modern architectural insults which have been deposited across Britain, wherever a town is desperate enough for the commercial investment or a planning authority is sufficiently unambitious.

In Ashford you don't see coherence or vision in the landscape. You see the legacy of unfinished initiatives and apathy. The five-lane ring road forms a suture around the historic core, neatly isolating the central shopping area from its potential customers. As a side effect, the ring-road development of the sixties either directly or indirectly caused the destruction of the cultural heritage of Ashford's three historic cinemas. It broke the historic migratory routes and the architectural logic of Ashford's previous millennium of growth. Built as a kind of glorified slip road to the perpetually half-filled monolithic office development of Charter House, you can't help marvel at the faith, the elected members and planners must have had that this development would signal a new dawn for the town. You can hear the utopianism ringing in the deafening drone of the Elwick Road. 'Ashford will be the next Croydon', 'massive economic investment will only come to a new Ashford with modern infrastructure'. 'Ashford has to transform itself to avoid being left behind by its rivals in East Kent'.

The investment never followed. Charter House remains an arrogant, incongruous monument to the premature optimism and self-delusion of the councillors who sanctioned it. Out of scale, derivative and with limited architectural merit, it towers above the medieval and Victorian detail beneath. The ring-road was colonised by through-traffic, hungry for a way to avoid the commuting difficulties of this part of Britain. Ashford became its own bypass. Like a centrifuge, its efficiency at dealing with traffic meant that drivers are unexpectedly accelerated through the town and routed onto the rival commercial centres waiting for business. While winning the gratitude of the passing motorist, Ashford didn't market itself to this high-speed audience. The pollution, noise and fragmentation of the road had created a layer of urban scar tissue at its edges. Instead of forming boulevards or avenues, the ring road

appears to be constructed of grandiose service roads offering a view of the backs of buildings, derelict land or carparking - endless carparking.

As an outsider arriving by car, being accustomed to the stressful exhausting experience of traversing almost any part of Britain, Ashford is a surreal experience. While we curse the traffic jams and aggression of driving and parking in London, Sheffield or Glasgow, we are aware of the fact that, outside of an academic discussion, we would not want all of our complaints to be addressed. When we idly comment on tax, traffic wardens, or politicians - we may sometimes claim that we are persecuted, hindered or disappointed by them, but only a small minority of us wouldn't recognise that, although imperfect, the systems that regulate and moderate our behaviour actually improve the world that we live in. In Ashford it appears that the car lobby managed to win a fundamental argument and regulation of movement and capacity appears more directed at pedestrians and cyclists than the triumphant motorist.

In Ashford, as a pedestrian, the landscape appears to have been defined by the dreams of a car-driver, who lives 15 miles outside the town, is forced to work there and has had a few bad months of being late for the office due to congestion. It is an uncompromising, unashamed and irresponsible tribute to the worst excesses of the car lobby. Like a miniature 1970's Birmingham, the fast dual-carriages and roundabouts of Ashford served to mock its detail, heritage, culture and complexity.

As an outsider, when you visit Ashford, you get the sense that it is a town that has suffered a long period of decline or a lack of self-belief. Metaphorically unshaven, unwashed and lacking self-esteem, Ashford appears to have given up trying to compete as a Cultural Centre or a centre of commerce or industry. Instead it looks like a town of carpet-baggers waiting to make the huge real-estate profit that will be the inevitable dividend of the completion of the fast London to Europe rail-link. Ashfordians don't even appear to be good custodians of the town that will enrich them. While poor quality wooden fencing falls down next to surface car-parks, mediocre sculpture and generic design insult the landscape, and fountains are allowed to fail, Ashford's local government triumphantly announces that once-again it has achieved the lowest council tax in Kent.

As you hear the defensive tone of the councillors' newsletters and witness the proliferation of estate agents in the high-street, you begin to wonder why we should care about Ashford. My heritage trail had become a series of markers documenting the wanton demolition of Ashford's architectural and cultural landmarks.

However, in January 2003, I was invited back. Very surprised, I learned that Ashford Borough Council had successfully applied for what appeared to be a nearly unique scheme to embed an artist in the plans for Ashford's future development.

So why go back? I went back because I had a strong belief that my initial perception of the town was unfair. The experience of meeting with local historians, volunteers, artists and officers was of meeting with people who did care about Ashford's community, culture and identity. I had become angry, not because I had found a town full of people who didn't care about society, but because I had found a town which *did* appear to be populated with aware, curious and imaginative residents. But this town structurally appeared to have comprehensively failed to accommodate or represent their ambitions and talents.

As an outsider you might assume that Ashfordians have no interest in art, architecture, theatre, cinema. While this would be depressing, a worse context is revealed. As you spend time there, you realise that Ashford does have a soul and people want to have cultural activity, but they are continuously being under-estimated by their own representatives. What I had found during my brief exploration of Ashford's heritage was that I *like* Ashford. I like Ashford for its humility, and resilience. It has, in my subjective opinion, been the subject of

some of the most parochial and ill-informed social and planning decisions in the region and I am impressed by the optimism and the vision of the residents and officers who have stayed to see if better decisions may be made in the future.

So I arrived cynical and expectant in equal measure to begin a period of eighteen months embedded within local government and the mysterious process of urban masterplanning. The term ‘embedded’ has particular connotations since The First Gulf War. Being supported and allowed access to an organisation (whether the US military or a local planning department) does offer a seductive privilege of access to debate, information and processes, but also raises interesting moral dilemmas.

There is some risk in appointing an artist to a public process such as this. Firstly we are essentially lay-people, with varying degrees of curiosity and prior knowledge. We are not architects or urban designers. As politicians may make poor curators, so artists might make poor policy makers. We may not have had access to this kind of activity before and could easily find ourselves over-awed, confused or even overly reverent of the existing procedures and processes. One of the problems of being an outsider is that it is difficult to feel that you have enough contextual knowledge. How can we challenge what appears a weak decision, if we don’t know where discretion can be legally exercised? How can we try to influence the allocation of funds if we don’t understand the regulations governing how money is bid for and spent? To be listened to takes time. Without qualifications or a statutory role, any influence has to be demanded and earned. Any assertion offers the risk of embarrassing exposure of ignorance and requires extensive background knowledge. The danger is that while we may sustain this level of responsibility for short-term adrenalin fuelled arguments, if resistance is encountered, we may not have the intellectual resources to argue against it. Like the embedded reporters of The First Gulf War, we could lay ourselves open to accusations of an abdication of professional independence and critical rigour.

So I arrived in Ashford anxious to contribute to a searching and discursive period. I was hopeful that I could maintain a critical and constructive stance and fearful that I might merely offer some extra validity to empty plans and promises. I was there to contribute to the development of a strategic 35 year framework for growth of housing, jobs and infrastructure. My job-description was yet to be written and I only owned one suit.

### **Summary of Experience**

I was given the title ‘Artist in Residence to the Masterplan’. I became quite fond of this title for its specific yet misleading description of my role. I was managed and supported by the Cultural Services Officers and an inspirational urban designer from the Planning Department. In a way, one of the strengths of this residency was that the specific role, responsibilities and outcomes were not specified in advance. While this left my position open to risk of inactivity or lack of direction, it also allowed for an exploratory response to the complexity of local government decision-making. It was originally envisaged that I would be primarily involved in certain core activities:

1. Identifying opportunities within the proposed development for the commissioning of artwork
2. Supporting community consultation

In the first few months we identified these activities as priorities and some of the more strategic and less tangible aspirations were seen as secondary or subsequent tasks.

After a good start, proposing and securing the commission of a new works by the artists Toby Patterson for a leisure development and Simeon Nelson for public realm project, this approach appeared to be well conceived. I also gave talks at local artists’ groups, gave

interviews to the press and tried to contribute to a range of consultation events. I began to feel more confident and better aware of the scale of the proposals and their complexity. I made a point of attending the unwieldy, and at times unfathomable, planning meetings of the GADF (Greater Ashford Development Framework) team. I gradually picked up the acronyms and began to get a sense of the momentum and the differing interest groups involved in the discussion.

It became obvious that the lack of public art, contemporary design or architecture in the environment of Ashford town centre was not a careless omission, but was a symptom of systemic fears and assumptions. Culture, art and design had become so poorly represented in Ashford that any attempt to reintroduce this kind of activity was without visible precedent and fell outside the recent experience of many of the elected members. Nobody seemed to know if the public would care if a theatre was reinstated or if there would be an outcry if the council appeared to be investing tax-payers money in public sculpture. It wasn't that there was a negative feeling toward the arts from the design team, but more that, in the absence of any strong lobby in its favour, it was being discretely avoided as an issue. In this climate, individual initiatives would be vulnerable to compromise and failure. Without the protection of a strategic commissioning plan, each opportunity would have to offer a kind of universal response to Ashford. Any new artistic intervention would be so conspicuous that it would have to please the vast majority of the voting public or the activity could be disowned and discontinued. Despite the mantra of 'culture leading investment' everyone seemed sympathetic to public art etc., but quite hopeful that they would not be in the unfortunate position of having to back one of the first projects. While the argument appeared to have been won with regard to the value of investment in sport, the case for art, design and culture was either less well articulated or being skilfully avoided.

At one of the early Ashford's Future GADF meetings, I was shocked to see an early draft for the masterplan which contained only glancing references to culture, art and commissioning and yet appeared to be assuming a legitimacy to lever in national funding. There were many structural problems, but most influential was a lack of high-level representation for art within the development team. While environmental issues were being championed, there was no key advocate for the visual or performing arts in position to influence the tone and mandate of the emerging policy documents.

As the fragility of early commission opportunities became apparent through the delays, caution and the suspicion displayed by many involved from maintenance officers to elected members, it became obvious that, if Ashford was going to be in a position to begin to repopulate its barren public realm with bespoke, imaginative interventions, a philosophical change would have to be argued for and confirmed in the emerging policy documents. Without this public commitment and mandate, my initial aspirations to search for opportunistic commissioning opportunities could only lead to the most conservative and compromised responses.

Essentially, by half way through the residency, the emphasis of my work had changed from the consultation, commissioning and community roles to advocacy for more amorphous, but potentially influential strategic policy decisions.

It was acknowledged by those who professed to have an interest in the support of Ashford's artistic identity that there was an embedded suspicion of cultural investment from some of the dominant voices amongst the elected members. (The Leader of the council frequently stated that he wasn't against art as long as it didn't cost the council anything). The conventional wisdom, during the first half of my residency, was that more could be achieved by quietly seeking to support public art by disguising the initiative within a larger and more functional scheme (the refurbishment of a council building / the replacement of streetlighting etc). This appeared to be offering us some encouraging results, but more difficult decisions – such as

the long-term maintenance responsibilities of the council - continually caused well-developed projects to stall.

Without any political mandate or senior authority, art could only appear when convenient for all concerned.

I began to feel quite strongly that my approach was both flawed and disingenuous. As time passed, we won the argument to have a chapter of the masterplan devoted to culture, the public realm strategy and discussions around a new strategic tariff supported public art commissioning and possible percent for art schemes. The documents now talked optimistically about culture leading economic growth and the transformational qualities of public art and community activities. As the obligatory pavement café stock photographs were inserted into the documents and people started talking about Ashford's future being a bit trendy as well as economically and environmentally sound, then glaring discrepancies between rhetoric and reality were revealed. The commitments to cultural facilities were still being made late and after they could have dominated the development of an identity for areas, wayfinding and amenity within the town.

I started to feel aggrieved again. While I had been complicit in supporting the development of artist's commissions from indirect funding (for example, the allocated production budget of a street-resurfacing engineering project, formed the basis for an Simeon Nelson's *Flume* commission) I started to feel that Ashford should now have to demonstrate a greater level of courage if it was to continue seeking national funding, recognition and acclaim.

### **Key Achievements**

The residency did involve contributions to certain achievements. Early wins were articulated through a bespoke lighting commission for public footpath, an artist commission for a façade of a major new council run facility and an artist commission for the surface artwork across the first major street renewal project. There were other opportunities, which were promised and failed to materialise, and there were schemes, which were developed without cultural or artistic contributions. The legacy of the early win projects is greater than their physical contribution to the landscape of Ashford. We won seemingly petty internal battles with the legal department to issue contracts, which offered protection to artists and their copyright (as well as simply mitigating the council's perceived risk). We managed to gain official approval to commission and install the first non-standard items of lighting and street-furniture in living-memory of most of the officers, and more importantly, managed to set a precedent for establishing mechanisms by which the maintenance department was able to adopt the responsibility for bespoke items through a broader understanding of whole-life costing and shared value. These small initiatives served to demonstrate, negotiate and challenge the fundamental obstacles that had historically stalled cultural commissioning within the town centre. A full list of outcomes and achievements has been listed in the matrix compiled by the Cultural Services Department of Ashford Borough Council at the end of this document. By the time the residency was over, we had won a legally-binding percent for art commitment valued at £15million, a CABE Space bursary to bring in additional outside lobbyists to support our fragile initiatives and the agreement in principle to establish a strategic commissioning plan to share budgets and invest in public art to complement courageous plans to downgrade and dismantle the iconic Ashford ring-road.

## **Lessons Learned.**

### *On masterplanning.*

At the end of the process I felt that I had been privileged to have been allowed to witness an aspect of social transformation that we are all part of at some point in our lives. Whether it is the positioning of a pedestrian crossing on our route to school, the enforcement of parking controls, the permission for a neighbour's extension or a local pub's conversion to luxury flats, planning departments and local government make subtle, incremental and occasionally transformational changes to our lives. I had seen the levels of traffic, the house prices, street-crime and the number of jobs in my area as a contextual 'wild-track' - the background hum to a personal journey through life.

Most of us never get to be politicians or designers of our built environment, its parameters or aspirations. We inhabit the landscape and the buildings that we are given. We may improvise, subvert, modify and re-evaluate our surroundings but in only exceptional cases will we have the opportunity to ask that our perception serves to shape them. In my brief stay with Ashford, I met people who had trained their whole lives for this opportunity; people who had assumed the a role without any evidence of qualification and those for whom this level of power had become a normal and routine component of their working-lives. I began to see myself as a 'lay-person' who would normally be subject to the decisions made within this mechanism being allowed access to the process within the meeting-rooms, corridors and offices. I was enthralled by the potential for change and appalled by the intervention of political manoeuvring.

The experience of witnessing and being generously allowed access to discussion and criticism of the evolution of a comprehensive plan for urban growth was powerful and formative. I continue to be amazed by the courage and the responsibility of the individuals and organisations, which engage with this task. Masterplanning appeared to be a process that is self-critical and evolving. Masterplanning, as an idea, appeared to offer the best possible mechanism for considered, coherent and informed decision-making. It supports contextual understanding, collaborative practice, knowledge sharing and strategic planning. I was impressed by the abilities and strengths of the individuals involved. My independence offered me a space position to critically view some of the elements of the process.

Since the completion of my residency with Ashford, I have had time to reflect on the experience and felt that there were certain key areas I believe to be flawed in the process. This became more obvious to me as I travelled to Shanghai and saw parallel areas of concern. I concede that my observations are entirely subjective, but I hope that some of them may be recognised as relevant for future discussion within similar processes.

## **Conclusions**

### *Satellite View*

One of the most striking aspects of planning is the shift of view achieved to enable the process. While most of the residents of a town will spend the vast majority of their lives experiencing their landscape from the first-person view of facades, vistas and structures, the masterplanning process necessitates elevating the viewpoint to the satellite perspective. Viewing a town or city from above enables the appreciation and development of a form of plan geometry, which becomes extremely powerful in terms of attempting to find coherence, logic and justification for developments at ground level.

This is an obvious observation. Of course maps and plans are essential to all aspects of planning, however I began to believe that the priority of this viewpoint over others may have

some limiting effect on design decisions. I found myself naturally drawn to the elegance of the Masterplanning Consultants' proposals for grand landscape designs, geometrically identifiable road and route patterns and iconic shapes on maps. However, as the process continued, I began to feel uneasy with the comfort of these solutions and the simplicity with which they became mantras for progressive development. The 'Learning Link', 'Discovery Way' and even the 'Great Banana' appeared to be offered as solutions rather than starting points. For me, the power of these map-based concepts is artificially amplified due to their novelty. In the vast majority of situations, planners and designers simply do not have the transformational power to impose structures on the landscape whose beauty and clarity are best viewed from the air. Routes and structures measured in kilometers and connections between multiple communities and facilities are generally thought of as pre-existing or perhaps evolving parts of our context. We thank the Romans for their road-mapping, Pilgrims for their migratory routes and Victorians for their definition of parks and suburban terraces, but rarely assume that the urbanised landscape will accommodate new ideas of this grand scale. These macro designs are powerful and important. They support coherence, which although often beyond our perception at ground-level, may serve to offer cultural and social connections, support environmental protection, land management and economic sharing and migration of wealth. However, alone, they remain abstracted ideas. They do not automatically address issues that evolutionary routes may have been refined and amended thousands of times to accommodate. Ashford fragmented its historic trade routes with the implementation of the ring road. The ring road offered a plan aesthetic and logic, but the scheme's poor relationship to the historic structure of the town and the existing behaviour of its residents caused alienation, economic stagnation, and aesthetic damage. It is not that I believe that the masterplan consultants were proposing ideas that would replicate the mistakes of previous planning decisions, it was more that I was surprised that we were still designing communities and habitats through the implementation of macro structures. I had assumed and hoped that incremental advances in behavioural analysis by spatial consultants such as 'Space Syntax' might have reflected a broader re-evaluation of urban design. This is a point that I will return to in conclusion, but, in essence, my concern was that reliance on the plan-view was a potential symptom of a process that had not adequately challenged its own methods despite its widespread implementation. On a practical level it also supported a distance between the criticisms and comments from general public and the solutions being offered. The experiential response of residents remain articulated through a different language and visual description from the planned future scenario. In a way, this makes direct criticism and dialogue between the two groups difficult and potentially inconclusive.

### *Territorial Complexity*

Ashford was the simplest of the four ODPM (Offices of the Deputy Prime Minister) growth areas, but it was still led by a fascinating and challenging family of independent agencies and organisations including: national – ODPM, EP, regional – SEEDA, KCC and local – Ashford's Future, ABC. These were complimented by consultative relationships with national and regional agencies, - DCMS, GOSE, ACE, CABE, EA, SHA, DFHES and informed by local and county, community organisations – Local Health Authority, Local Education Authority, Volunteer Associations, Local History Associations, Churches Together and numerous other groups and interested individuals.

This collaborative scenario offers incredible resources in terms of funding, knowledge, expertise and awareness. The difficulty is that each organisation remains independent. Within some organisations, departments and interest groups also remain separate.

*Ashford's Future* was setup to address this complexity and deliver, with a clear voice, the result of a managed consensus, which could enfranchise, and benefit from, its diverse membership. In practice, *Ashford's Future* is not a fully empowered development agency.

All proposals generated through its work must be subject to the scrutiny of the planning authority and the elected local government.

I found the complexity bewildering at first and problematic later. The advantages are that representation is wide and that the debate, to some extent, reflects the pluralistic nature of the community it serves. The disadvantages are that information is not always shared, agendas conflict, cliques can form and agencies can be ostracised.

This sounds melodramatic, but to some extent this was true. The placing of development agency, government office, arts council, county council, local council and community group representatives around a table did not automatically produce a committee that was more than the sum of its parts. The problem was that organisations' responsibilities overlap and agendas conflict. Despite the fact that virtually all people involved were ultimately working for the same employer (ie UK government/taxpayer), there did not always appear to be a simple method to define boundaries of responsibility or hierarchy of experience. I became concerned that expertise may sometimes be overlooked and decisions might not always benefit from the aggregate wisdom available.

I felt that there was a real need for agencies to behave differently when working in collaboration with others. The normal and understandable defensive posture necessary to assert, and retain, personal and factional territories, appeared inexcusable within a collaborative development. To its credit, Ashford managed to assemble strong working relationships between agencies and departments. However, frequently the necessary level of shared identity appeared to not have been achieved. Agencies with adjacent freehold land interests would find themselves developing independent and incongruous art initiatives. Design standards and aspirations would vary and budgets would remain separate. I began to feel that, without agencies demonstrating the ability to delegate responsibility (and even the budgets) for aspects of their projects to partner organisations, efficient and coherent strategic implementation of the masterplan principles might be difficult to achieve. The competition and rivalry between departments became more problematic within Ashford Borough Council. At times, it appeared that planning and cultural services were not collaborating fully. The maintenance department presented potential obstacles and the legal department was sometimes cited as causing problems rather than using their excellent capacity to find solutions.

### *Consultation*

Consultation was an integral part of the development of Ashford's masterplan. It was recognised as necessary and championed by the Urban design team from the planning department and supported by Cultural Services as well as many other agencies and individuals. With a great deal of energy and initiative the Urban Design team worked to develop interesting and accessible means to present ongoing work to the public. I had the opportunity to be involved in some of these events from an early point in my residency and found them extremely useful in beginning to understand some of the contextual issues. On reflection, I believe that the consultation process, and its role within planning and masterplanning schemes, is vitally important. I think there is potential to learn from the successes and failings of Ashford's work and to consider ways in which this dialogue could be more meaningfully integrated within the decision-making process.

I think that in many contexts, there are currently real gaps in communication between the represented public and their politicians, planners, masterplanners and consultants. Attempts at consultation have been well-intentioned and sometimes innovative, but in many cases have failed in their objective as the consulted have had little contact with the preliminary process and feel that 'options' offered are pre-defined and do not reflect their own detailed understanding of their environments. Consultation on major schemes is often legally required,



but how the information is solicited and what action may be taken on the basis of the information collated is often ill-defined and difficult to track.

It seemed odd that while the principal masterplanners were present at some of the events, they were absent from some of the more grass-roots and open-ended activities. Often mediated and collated responses were fed back to the design team, rather than the complexity of the actual discussion. At times, I felt unsure as to the level of impact the public voices were having. It is not that I am sure that they were not listened too, but more that it was not obvious how the responses and ideas that came from shopping centres and church halls were integrated into the reports which were being refined by highly paid agencies working in offices away from the town that they were engaged with.

I believe that masterplanning would benefit greatly from any activities, which demonstrate greater transparency and support a higher level of scrutiny. City councils, development agencies and architects will continue to reshape the environment of citizens based on assumptions of public behaviour, aspirations and anxieties and I think that a range of devices could be developed and prototyped which by design could better expose poor assumptions and reward intelligent and sensitive analysis.

### *Risk*

I left Ashford feeling fatigued. The journey to Shanghai to observe, rather than participate, offered a welcome new perspective from which to try to gain some contextual understanding for the processes and debates that I had become immersed in and frustrated by. In China, with freehold land-ownership monopolised by central government and local accountability apparently optional for decision makers, planning occurred a great deal faster. However there were interesting parallels that I hadn't expected. I had travelled five thousand miles to view a contrasting set of initiatives and philosophical approaches. The surprising aspect of my time in China was not the novelty of alternate ideas, but the remarkable similarity of approach. I found that within the centrally planned, non-accountable development processes employed to create capitalist cities for the world's next superpower, remarkably similar consultants and experts were present. British engineers, architects and planners that I had seen offer bespoke solutions to Ashford and other regional towns, were licensing the same methodology and similar solutions to unrelated communities. Even the stock images that had informed the supposedly unique view of future Ashford were being offered by parallel highly-paid consultants in China. Gradually, I began to see nuances behind the simple parallels, however the recognition of the potential for the packaging and language of masterplanning to be generally peddled and applied, made me question the level of faith that I had found myself automatically placing in the inherent expertise of the wide-array of consultants involved in Ashford's Future.

There were moments of genuine innovation within the process, but I felt strongly that fatigue, client caution and complexity also lead to some stock and superficial solutions being incorporated into the strategic plans. I left feeling comforted by the confidence that thirty-five year plans are never realised as they were initially drafted. As with all cities throughout history, the paper plans will be revised, critiqued, abandoned and superceded by subsequent generations through the iterative debates and resilient desire to amend and compensate for the errors in the flawed assumptions of previous experts, planners and politicians.

*This report was never published and represented a personal attempt to rationalise my experience, written in 2006, before the delivery of the Masterplan had begun. The text represents a subjective cathartic attempt to consider an immersive and exploratory residency. The names of many individuals and organisations have been removed to protect the innocent.*

Greater Ashford Development Framework / Ashford Town Centre  
Masterplanning Artist in Residence

## ACTION/OUTCOMES SPREAD SHEET 2004/05

### Strategic Aim

*To assist in the enhancement of a distinct cultural identity for Ashford  
and to ensure that the cultural identity of Ashford is reflected in a creative way  
through the Ashford Town Centre masterplanning process.*

The following table presents compiled outputs of Artist involvement in strategic planning process, recordable at date of Arts Council activity report, 20<sup>th</sup> January 2006.

Achievements and activities identified by Christine Fuller, Ashford Borough Council,  
Cultural Services, for final report to Arts Council England at the conclusion of the Artist  
Residency.

<i>Action</i>	<i>Output</i>
<p>To work strategically across developments and organisations to ensure that new and existing artwork reflects a coherent and complimentary strategy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with legal and maintenance departments to develop frameworks for contracts and appointment processes of artists</li> <li>• Involvement and sitting on Community Infrastructure Group</li> <li>• Presenting to the early Cultural Consortium Group on the key issues for integrating art into the growth agenda</li> <li>• Drew up original terms of reference for the art and architecture group.</li> <li>• Continued development of Ashford's Art, Architecture and Public Realm Steering Group and attended meetings with Chair and Champion.</li> <li>• Commissioned Cultural Chapter for GADF master plan and helped develop content with consultants.</li> <li>• Advised on Public Realm Strategy, and wrote Public Art Strategy</li> <li>• Member of the ring road champions group and commissioning of an arts consultant and public art strategy for the project</li> <li>• Liaise with 'CABE space' and awarded consultancy support to the award of £5k</li> <li>• Approach Channel Corridor for funding support for Public Realm and Public Art Consultancy</li> <li>• Further shaping of the Art and Architecture group, its membership, responsibilities and positioning</li> <li>• David's supporting strategic documents into policy i.e. Public Art Chapter and Cultural Chapter for core strategy.</li> </ul>

<p>To initiate meetings with key Officers on new developments to ensure art is considered at the forefront (e.g Stour Centre, Bank Street, County Square) and assist with the brief and commissioning process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developed a detailed proposal for the hoardings project.</li> <li>• Site specific talks to developing hoardings (ING) and persuading members of regional agencies to bring them in.</li> <li>• Shaped and developed workshop events for initial hoardings proposal with KIAD and Lille students. Judged art/architecture competition with Piers Gough.</li> <li>• Developed original proposal of the Discovery Centre ‘Art Plus 06’ application.</li> <li>• Raised profile of cultural projects to key organisations, namely SEEDA, EP, KCC &amp; Ashford’s Future Core Delivery Team</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Commissions:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inception of art involvement in Singleton Environment Centre and a shortlist of potential artists.</li> <li>• Securing funding, developing commissions for the lighting project between the Station and Stour Centre.</li> <li>• Advised the project team on the mechanism to commission artwork throughout the process of the Ring Road project.</li> <li>• Wrote the brief, selected and commissioned the artist to work in collaborative team with landscape architect and engineers for Bank Street.</li> <li>• Agreement from Alan Baxter Assoc to factor in the funding of artwork in major proposals.</li> <li>• KCC now leading on a integrated design team for the Ring road and with secured funding from AIF commissioning a Public Art Consultant for the Town Centre</li> <li>• Appointment of the artist pending architectural development of the project for the Discovery Centre.</li> <li>• Involved in appointment of the architects, worked with architects from appointment to advise on incorporation of visual art venue, art community representation and public art commissioning of the Discovery Centre.</li> <li>• Proposed and supported the establishment Art and Architecture Group steering group.</li> <li>• Selected artist and commissioned embedded artwork within the development of the Stour Centre.</li> </ul>
<p>To work with developers/architects to identify proposals for art (temporary and permanent) and cultural activity within the public realm, identifying key sites and areas for consideration.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Met with prospective and confirmed developers and architects for town centre schemes to discuss collaborative approach with artists.</li> <li>• Involved in discussions and developed briefs for projects and involved in negotiations pre-planning application</li> <li>• Commitment form Alan Baxter Assoc and KCC to fund artistic value of 5% for art. Collective agreement between SEEDA and KCC to pool budgets and collaborate on artistic commissions.</li> <li>• Meetings with SEEDA &amp; English Partnerships</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Commissions:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Station Road</li> <li>• Debenhams/County Square – Actively involved in securing developments to secure public realm of Bank Street phase 2 and discovery square</li> <li>• Stour Centre</li> </ul>

<p>To work with Urban Initiatives to ensure artwork is to be integrated within the Ashford Town Centre Development Framework.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Worked with this key masterplanning organisations to integrate public arts across the scheme, and lobbied for ‘Culture’ to be embedded within their documents.</li> <li>• Identified the Ring Road project given that the master planning was in early days as a clear public art opportunity.</li> <li>• Realisation that Culture was under represented in the master planning process.</li> </ul>
<p>To contribute to appropriate Key Design workshops and stakeholder forums to stimulate creative debate particularly concerning the cultural agenda and the role of artists.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involved in early consultation and workshops i.e. secondary school workshops, county square, Centre Piece, Place Check workshop, Julie Rose Stadium exhibition.</li> <li>• Engaging stakeholders in the process including:</li> <li>• Presentation at AGM of Ashford Visual Artists. Regular meetings with key AVA members and represented their views.</li> <li>• Presented to the Town Centre Partnership.</li> <li>• Discussions with Ashford Federation of the Arts; Presentations to other stakeholder groups i.e. Stour Valley Arts; Channel Corridor; Preliminary Discovery Centre scoping meetings etc</li> <li>• External presentations which addressed the role of the artist and encourage people to consider what is happening in Ashford i.e. Lecture to Arts Council (SE) in Winchester for Arts at the Centre.</li> <li>• Conference paper for ‘close proximity’ NAN event</li> <li>• Conference Paper for Creative Clusters in Belfast</li> <li>• Fringe event speaker for ACE/ODPM at Excel Centre – Thames Gateway</li> <li>• Article for Arts Professional</li> <li>• Article for AN web</li> <li>• Lecture programme and lecture case studies for KIAD Architecture students</li> </ul>
<p>To advise on the creation of interesting and relevant information and events that is accessible and engages the wider community in the development of the town.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assistance with ‘place check’ audit and producing a ‘place check’ leaflet</li> <li>• Heavily involved with Centrepiece Consultation event with ABC – Created an interactive touch screen display.</li> <li>• Collaborated on County Square Shopping Centre consultation event</li> <li>• Julie Rose Stadium event: presented projected animations as a component to the exhibition display on the BDP town centre plan</li> </ul>
<p>To revisit the design of the listening posts and the proposed sites to ensure their appropriateness given the redevelopment planned around the town centre.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreement by Landscape Architects Whitelaw Turkinton and Alan Baxter Assoc to integrate the listening post scheme within confirmed public landscape projects</li> </ul>
<p>To promote and identify models and templates of good practice to assist developers, architects and planners in future collaborations and commissions with artists.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Site visits to Milton Keynes to meet with their resident artist, and assess their strengths and weaknesses, and what areas of good practice we can use.</li> <li>• Pursued other links within Kent i.e. KIAD.</li> <li>• Artist’s involvement in all schemes specified in architect/client brief (and set the precedent as usual practice).</li> <li>• Collected a library of case studies</li> </ul>

<p>To promote and advise on guidelines for a future ‘percent for art’ commissioning policy by Ashford Borough Council, partner organisations and private developers within significant refurbishment, redevelopment and new build projects.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secured Turner and Townsend agreement for 1% for public art in all predictive costs (calculated at a minimum of £15m). See above.</li> </ul>
<p>To assist with the development of a developer/commissioner resource pack. Including contracts, advice documents, database links, example documentation and examples of wide range of possible public realm cultural activity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advisory leaflet drawn up</li> <li>• Reference materials and details of advisory orgs have been collated</li> <li>• Image reproduction rights have been sought and granted</li> <li>• Case studies identified and research in relation to engineering, transport, landscape and architectural projects</li> <li>• Contracts and definitions of processes and rationale have been drafted.</li> </ul>
<p>Produce a presentation at each quarterly management meeting that outlines action and progress, which will culminate in a final report.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good communication when met to clarify and reposition work and agree focus for residency and to identify outputs (as above)</li> <li>• Discussion on final format agreed to include a discursive text from David with joint authorship and a set of thematic issue based pull outs and developer and stakeholder pack which will be added to as developments progress.</li> </ul>