

Cllr Fletcher welcomed the members of public and Mr Richard Alderton, Director of Development at Ashford Borough Council to the meeting.

Richard Alderton explained that Ashford Borough Council was facing a challenging time with the need for so many new homes 300,000 new homes are required to be built each year from now until 2021 for the Country to be up to date with the housing crisis.

Other challenges facing Ashford Borough Council include:

Deficit Reduction – the Government gave grants to Local Councils which made up 40% of the Borough Council budget, these grants will be phased out completely by 2018 which has meant that the Council has had to look at alternative ways of raising funds, one of which is property development. Ashford Borough Council has done this through purchasing International House, Dover Place up to Kent Wool Growers, this is aimed to be mixed use and a commercial hub with aims towards long term growth. Also, Ashford Borough Council bought Park Mall, there are already less vacant outlets, the Love Ashford website and the Farmer's Market on a Sunday are 2 other innovative ways the Borough is encouraging use of the town centre.

BREXIT insecurity – confidence has been lost at present following the result of the referendum.

When Gerry Clarkson took over he had a vision of completing his Big 8 Projects. The Big 8 are:

1. The Commercial Quarter – Purchasing International House and the surrounding area.
2. Elwick Place – A Cinema complex opposite Debenhams with a cinema, a hotel and 7 restaurants. Plans for this are under-way.
3. Designed Outlet Expansion – McArthur Glen want the outlet to expand, which it will in to the coach park/turning area and will have additional buildings with green walls.
4. College Campus – The new College is being built, owned by Hadlow College it will open in September 2017.
5. Junction 10a – the plans for this have been submitted to the Planning Inspectorate by Highways England and will be available for the public to view as of next week. This is to be an accelerated consultation so should be begun in the autumn.
6. Jasmin Vardimon School of Dance have been using the unused part of the Stour Centre. They are now looking for new accommodation.
7. Chilmington Green – the plans for this area are a new Garden Town which will evolve in to a whole new community over the long term, houses for this will begin to be built in 2017.
8. The Station area – There has been a problem with signalling for the Eurostar as they have a new design of trains which means that the current signalling will not work with the new design of train. To upgrade the signals will cost £10million and this will take approximately 10-12 months. This is a huge challenge for Ashford Borough Council but so far half of the funds have been secured. The redevelopment of the Victoria Road area, this will house Aldi and a Curious Brewery and is also hoped to have a hotel and some residential development. There are to be 400 serviced apartments on Victoria Way. There are also plans for a Model Railway Centre at the old Newtown Railway Works.
All of this is in conjunction with the building works planned for Conningbrook Lakes with a pub/restaurant and hotel as well as sailing clubs etc.

Finberry is also planning to have a school, shop, some local employments and a community area.

Geoffrey Fletcher thanked Richard Alderton for a comprehensive talk. Questions raised were:

Are there any plans for additional secondary education sites?

There are plans for a secondary school to be built on the Chilmington site which will open in 3 years time. There are plans for 4 additional primary schools but, unfortunately KCC does the arithmetic and tells Ashford how many places at schools are required so Ashford Borough Council can only provide what they are asked to provide.

Can the Hospital cope with this level of expansion?

The Hospital has been approached and they feel they can manage the needs of this level of expansion.

Parking could be a problem with these additional builds, what are the Council planning to do about this?

There will be additional parking in Victoria Way, extra at the Cinema and an additional 800 spaces at the Outlet.

What is the aggregate figure for the no. of homes?

The housing basis worked upon his that the extra population/need for homes comes from the way we live our lives ie, people living for longer and additional homes needed for divorcing couples etc. The Borough Council works on a predict and provide process.

U19 and WE15 – has there been any reaction?

There has been no renewed statement of intent as far as WE15 is concerned.

Can an application be made outside of the Local Plan?

Ashford Borough Council will resist development on WE15. Any application can be made at any time and it would then be assessed against the Local Plan.

Why is there no green corridor protection for Mersham?

Green corridors are about protecting water courses and enhancing/protecting such areas, they are not designed for landscape protection.

The existing plan discourages building on green areas. Planning Policy does not protect in perpetuity. Protection of Mersham is a significant issue. Comments on the plan must be made by 10th August.

What about the production of a Neighbourhood Plan?

A Neighbourhood Plan can protect the assets of the neighbourhood but as yet their value is not proven.

What about Protecting Ancient Rural Villages?

A scientific reason is required for a village to be protected.

Lorries emissions with the truckstop etc are likely to be damaging air quality. Has an assessment been done?

Emissions are as yet unknown but an assessment on this has to be undertaken with regard to Junction 10a.