



# ASHFORD

**BUILDING A STRONGER FUTURE: TOGETHER**



PLACE BRAND STRATEGY PROPOSAL  
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Ashford is an excellently located town with fantastic transport links. This large town that outgrew its market history now sits on the verge between a town and a city, leaving its identity overshadowed. Currently holding a population of over 132,000 (*Office for National Statistics, 2022*), the Ashford brand needs more purpose as its lack of reputation is failing its residents, investors and tourists.

This strategy sets out a clear plan with achievable goals to revive Ashford's identity and give the town a new lease of life that keeps residents happy whilst attracting investors and tourists, putting Ashford back on the map.



# INTRODUCTION:





# A<sup>SH</sup>FORD



Named one of Kent's best places to live (Garrison, 2023), Ashford is known for its market and agricultural history and is a good town for families.

Ashford needs strong branding and is often known as a 'Commuter Town' due to its strong links to London. Currently, the town has no official branding and needs to have an identity.



# swot analysis

## S W O T

Ashford has a mixed-aged population with good transport links to the M20, London, Port of Dover and more. It offers a rural and urban setting with a mix of town and countryside. Ashford holds an internationally famous outlet which brings much tourism. The city has a large selection of stakeholders with good relationships. The town is a family town close to multiple cities with a vast gastronomy scene.

There is a lack of funding from the government, residents don't trust the council, the town's reputation is failing, and the infrastructure needs to be more vital to sustain the developments that have happened and need to happen. Essential provisions aren't being provided to residents, like doctor's appointments, residents are considering leaving, and they are often given false promises. The traffic management in the town is poor; crime is rising.

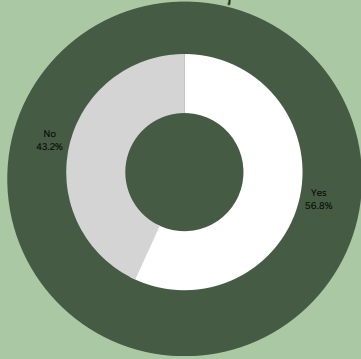
Due to businesses leaving, the town centre is blank and ready for a new beginning. There is still much space for development around the town. Residents, despite being unhappy, are loyal and don't want to leave despite feeling like they might have to. A mixed-age population means different sectors and businesses will succeed as there are multiple audiences. The town's location is attractive as it's near universities, m20, London, the Garden of England etc. There is already positive change.

The town's reputation is falling due to bad press and word of mouth. Local towns and cities like Maidstone and Canterbury provide a similar lifestyle and experiences with higher population growth. The cost of living crisis means that residents struggle to afford to live, and tourists need money to spend or move. Government pressures on health services and significant sectors ruin the quality of services, and lack of staffing means unemployment rates are high. Weather extremes can cause flooding/storms and damage the local area. Young people are leaving for higher education.



# challenges

With over 50% of residents considering moving out of the area, Ashford must implement a strategy that acknowledges and tries to fix the current and future challenges of the town. There is a lack of trust between councils and residents, and the town centre standard is affecting people's happiness



RESIDENT/VISITOR  
MIGRATION

Many young people are leaving the town to access higher education opportunities. Ashford needs to offer a USP to keep residents or tourists engaged and happy. Many places offer the same style of life and experiences. The cost of living crisis is affecting this majorly as the audience's disposable income is less, and their priorities may have changed.



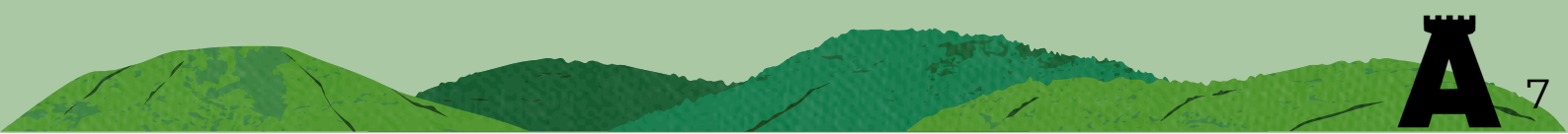
NO INVESTMENT / EXISTING  
BUSINESSES LEAVE TOWN  
CENTRE

Without town centre regeneration, there is no community hub. Businesses won't want to invest as they won't succeed. Current companies may leave due to low footfall and high rents. Lack of USP and high rents will also push investment elsewhere.



SUSTAINABILITY

Ashford's plan must be sustainable and include options to improve the environment whilst building a solid future that will last generations. This includes working with and supporting businesses to commit to the carbon-neutral pledge and offering support



# residents



TRUST IN COUNCIL

A research survey was taken to understand what residents value and want from their town. Three significant problems highlighted in the study include a lack of trust between residents and local councils, the standard of the town centre and a lack of sustainable options, including transport, pollution, congestion and urban sprawl.



TOWN CENTER

It is essential to encourage loyal, happy residents to develop a town which is full of people proud to live somewhere there is change, "loyal residents feel that tourism benefits should outweigh the negative impacts", whereas "nonloyal residents were more concerned about the land value and traffic congestion" (Chen, 2000).

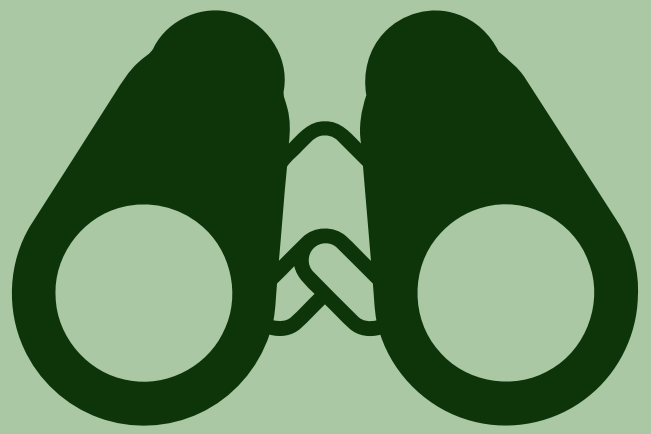


SUSTAINABILITY



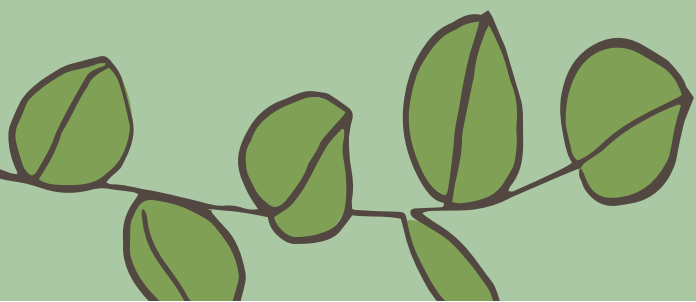
**STRATEGY:**





To develop Ashford into a stronger town with excellent relationships between councils and residents, creating a solid community facilitated by infrastructure that promotes growth, investment and sustainability. Offering something for families of all ages at every stage of their lives.

## **BUILDING A STRONGER FUTURE: TOGETHER**






# dichotomize strategy




## FACILITATE


INVESTMENT, GROWTH +  
SUSTAINABILITY



Work with stakeholders to create a sustainable space for investment




Rebuild infrastructure that is functional and suitable for the future




Improve access to more sustainable services

## CREATE

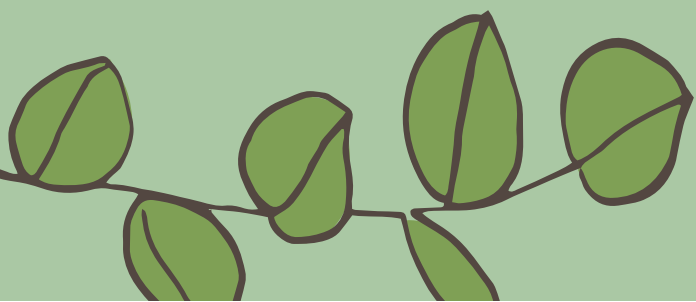
COMMUNITY + TRUST



Improve reputation, pride and happiness of residents and the town



Create a trusting community that works closely in two way communication with local councils and authorities



# NEW BRAND POSITION:



Ashford is a sustainable family town that boasts excellent transport links to the whole of the UK and internationally, with a strong community of loyal residents and a bustling community.

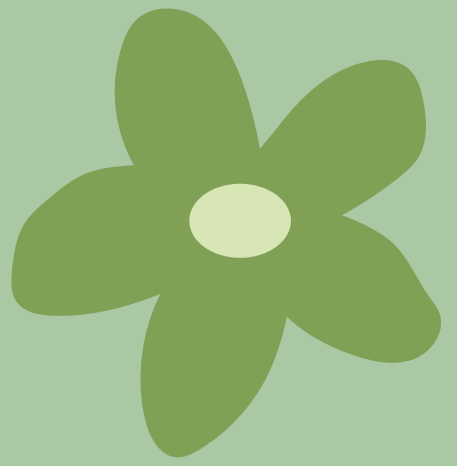




# STAGE 1: FACILITATE



# facilitate



Stage 1 of the strategy is facilitate. Sectioned into three, this strategy aims to develop investment, encourage growth and improve sustainability within the town. We will work closely with all stakeholders throughout different sectors and industries to achieve our goals. We will use their relationships to create positive change that benefits residents, tourists and the economy. Once the visual identities (page 27-31) have been released, facilitate will be announced and will run for 1 to 3 years with regular adjustments.



# Investment



## **A** BUILDING A STRONGER FUTURE: THROUGH INVESTMENT

Step 1 of facilitate is to build a stronger future through investment. This includes collaborating with councils, stakeholders and investors, including AshfordFOUR, who are working on similar projects.

We will work together to create digital and print business brochures that will be shared with potential investors and across social media/websites to encourage investment in the town (especially in the town centre). These brochures will detail the benefits of investing in the town and focus on lowering rents in the town centre, international and national links and the new USP of the town - experience. This part of the strategy will run for three years but will have a significant push in the first year.



# Investment





# growth



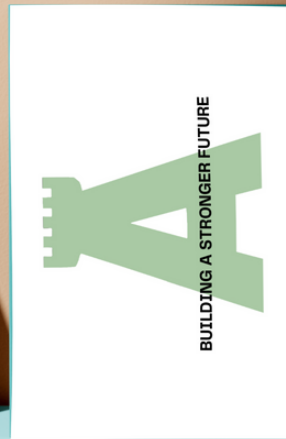
## **A** BUILDING A STRONGER FUTURE: THROUGH GROWTH

Step 2 of facilitate is to build a stronger future through growth. This includes collaborations between residents, councils and stakeholders about changes to the town through the investment stage of facilitate.

This stage includes social media content and business cards left in local businesses like takeaway and retail stores encouraging residents to vote/share their opinions on potential changes and investments. The growth stage of this strategy includes working with councils to encourage residents to have access to more information about regeneration efforts, traffic management strategies and more. This stage of the strategy will begin in year two once changes have begun to be made.



# growth



# sustainability



## **A** BUILDING A STRONGER FUTURE: THROUGH SUSTAINABILITY

Step 3 of facilitate is to build a stronger future through sustainability. This strategy section is designed to improve access to environmentally friendly options for all.

This step includes a social media PR campaign advertising new e-scooters and bikes across the town. This campaign will consist of out-of-home advertising and a social media campaign with content on how to reduce your carbon footprint and where to make sustainable choices whilst encouraging locals to walk or ride, lessening the number of cars on the road.





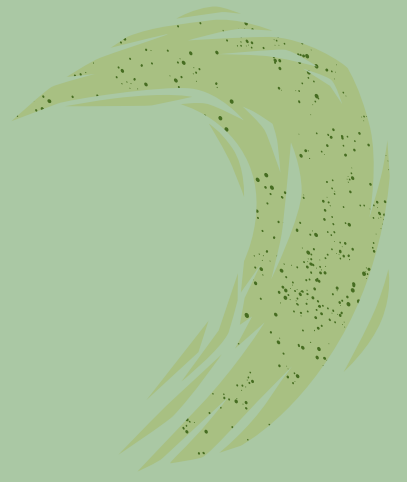
# sustainability





# STAGE 2: CREATE





Stage 2 of the strategy is create. Sectioned into two campaigns, this strategy aims to develop community and trust through a happier and more honest future. These campaigns aim to improve the pride and happiness of residents whilst creating community tourists want to be part of and bridging the gap between councils and locals. These campaigns will run for 1 to 3 years with regular adjustments, launched alongside the facilitate campaigns (pages 14-20) after the visual identities (pages 27-31) are released.





## BUILDING A **HAPPIER** FUTURE: TOGETHER

Campaign 1 of the create strategy will encourage people to love where they live—sharing what makes them happy about their town. We will run a social media campaign encouraging locals to share their most joyful moments/places for others to try alongside community events. Successful community events in the past have included the Dogs and Baubles Festivals. Therefore we will use the successes of these festivals to create events that will engage residents in the same manner. We will work closely with stakeholders Love and Experience Ashford to promote these events alongside the local press. Three events spanning one year will focus on three improvements locals want to see: Leisure, Sport, and Entertainment. We will work closely with stakeholders in these industries to create events like - trial football, hockey or golf lessons when signing up, free use of the stour centre, a music festival in victoria park, and trails in green spaces.





community quiz



sports event



music festival



## **A** BUILDING AN **HONEST** FUTURE: TOGETHER

Campaign 2 of the create strategy will focus on bridging the gap between councils and residents to develop an honest community that feels like they are represented fairly and listened to. With only 20% of residents completing the last satisfaction survey, we aim to double this number within one year through council-led community events in spaces that they are hoping for investment in, like the Odeon complex, creating an email marketing strategy to publish all changes happening in the town in a fun, accessible format, supporting to update council websites regularly and improving social media strategy. This campaign will use local press to highlight the positive changes and encourage press like KentOnlineNews to become a more vital stakeholder in the town.





update website



council led events



new stakeholder

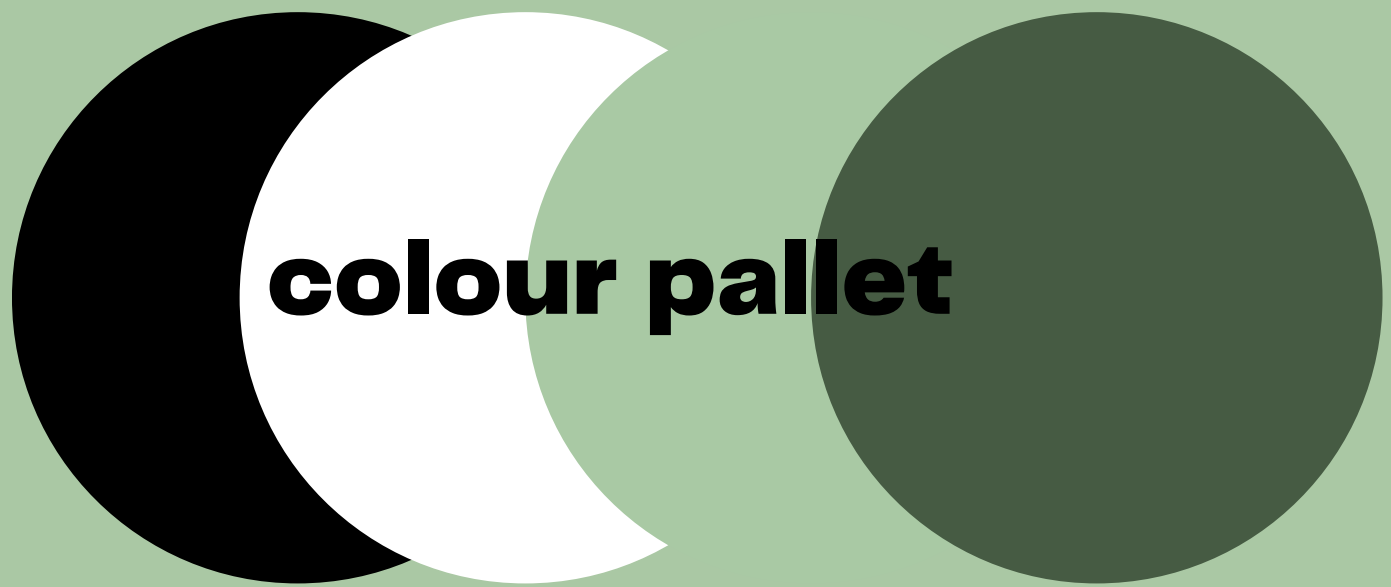




# **VISUAL IDENTITY**



# branding



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## fonts

**TELEGRAPH MEDIUM WITH  
SPLICE**

**telegraph medium**

**telegraph**

Montserrat







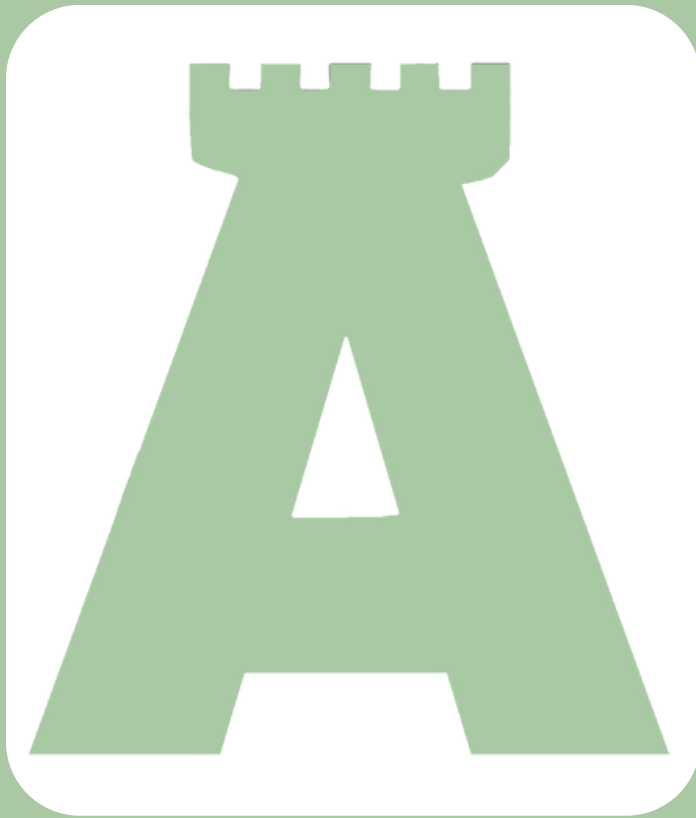
Ashford currently has no visual identity. Therefore, when designing a logo, it was essential to keep it simple. Simply the name of the town with the addition of a castle upon the A allows it to be easily recognisable; it fits in with stakeholder logos and adds a simple nod to the town's history. The logo's simplicity allows it to be used on all documents and official branding easily whilst also being accessible to residents, including children who may want to copy it or colour it in.



The first step of the place brand strategy will be to announce and release a new identity for the town through the press and out-of-home branding, including on traffic signs, billboards, bus stops, and around the town centre and outlet. Copies of the logo will be given to schools to allow children to play a part in adopting the new identity. This will provide residents with a sense of belonging and pride that has been missing.



# variations



# mock-ups



# EVALUATION:

For Ashford to become a sustainable family town with a strong community, it is essential to follow this place branding strategy. To evaluate the town's success, some short-term indicators can be managed to see if Ashford is beginning to show changes in resident satisfaction and sustainability, such as resident surveys, use of e-scooters and bikes, traffic levels, social media engagement and more. However, the best way to evaluate the success of this ongoing strategy is to look at population growth, migration statistics, and pollution trends in the coming years.



# CONCLUSION:

Ashford is currently a town with huge potential lacking reputation, trust and loyalty. With a firm place brand strategy, Ashford can retain its place as an upcoming town. Loyal residents who have lived in the town since its market days lack faith and will migrate to local towns, and Ashford will lose its population to competitors. Despite its potential, the town's excellent location is currently the only thing keeping it afloat. If executed correctly, this place brand strategy will engage residents, drive population growth across all sectors and give Ashford more than a commuter town identity that benefits residents, tourists and the economy whilst driving sustainability and becoming a leader amongst the competition.



# REFERENCES:

Chen, J. S., 2000. An Investigation of Urban Residents' Loyalty to Tourism. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 24(1), pp. 5-19.

Garrison, K., 2023. Best Places to Live in Kent. [Online]  
Available at: <https://www.othingstodo.com/kent/best-places-to-live-in-kent>

Office for National Statistics, 2022. How the population changed in Ashford: Census 2021. [Online]

Available at:  
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censuspopulationchange/E07000105/>

