

## case study 1

# Ashford Borough Council, Chilmington Green – establishing a community management organisation

Innovation topic: Long-term community stewardship of large-scale new development

### Summary

- The planned development of Chilmington Green includes a new community of up to 5,750 homes and associated infrastructure. A community management organisation is being established by Ashford Borough Council to enable residents to have a stake in the management of local assets and to generate added value in terms of the quality of the public realm, its maintenance, and community development.
- The community management organisation – Chilmington Green Community Trust – will be an inclusive stewardship body, and the intention is that it will develop into a charitable trust, eventually owning assets of more than £24 million, with an annual turnover likely to be around £3 million.
- A quality agreement has been established for Chilmington Green, which, together with a design code, will be an important means of establishing commitments from housebuilders and developers to work together to secure high-quality development.
- Capacity funding from the Department for Communities and Local Government has helped to resource the negotiation of complex land-ownership arrangements, viability issues and infrastructure delivery.
- A joint working protocol between Ashford Borough Council and Kent County Council is being developed to co-ordinate work across the two local authority tiers.

*'The ambition for quality has meant that the Council has had to provide significant resources to the planning and legal teams, as well as engage other departments such as cultural services, over a sustained period of time to ensure that the appropriate processes, safeguards and assurances are in place to deliver.'*

Tracey Kerly, Chief Executive, Ashford Borough Council

### Introduction

The town of Ashford in Kent has been a focus of housing expansion and infrastructure growth since the 1960s. It now offers international rail connectivity via High Speed One, and a journey time of just 38 minutes to Central London.<sup>16</sup>

Ashford Borough Council has set out in its Core Strategy ambitious targets for the growth of the borough – 31,000 new homes between 2001 and 2031, mostly concentrated within and surrounding Ashford. This has led to the planned

development of Chilmington Green to the south-west of Ashford.

As part of this new development, the Council has pioneered new ways of ensuring high-quality delivery and effective long-term stewardship, based on a strong, planning-led approach and requiring collaboration across sectors to overcome numerous and complex challenges. The Council's long-term corporate commitment to putting the new community at the heart of the development has created the framework for the community management organisation.

### Notes

<sup>16</sup> *The Five Year Corporate Plan: for Action, Aspiration and Achievement, 2015-2020*. Ashford Borough Council, Oct. 2015. <http://www.ashford.gov.uk/the-five-year-corporate-plan-for-aspiration-action-and-achievement-2015-2020>



Illustrative masterplan for Chilmington Green

**Housing and planning context**

The Core Strategy<sup>17</sup> selected two major new urban extensions as the most suitable approach to meet Ashford’s growth needs, following an options appraisal and consultation. An area action plan (AAP), required by the Core Strategy for all extension areas, was adopted for the

Chilmington Green extension in July 2013. As well as covering housing and employment, the AAP contains policies on community infrastructure, transportation investment and different character areas, and sets out an ambition to make Chilmington Green an exemplar development with a vision for a ‘truly sustainable new community’<sup>18</sup> built on Garden

**Notes**

17 Core Strategy. Ashford Borough Council, Jul. 2008. <http://www.ashford.gov.uk/core-strategy-2008>

18 Chilmington Green Area Action Plan. Ashford Borough Council, Jul. 2013. <http://www.ashford.gov.uk/chilmington-green-aap>

City principles. A resolution to approve an outline planning application for the entire Chilmington Green development was passed in October 2014, subject to a section 106 agreement and conditions. The initial section 106 agreement was signed and planning permission issued on 6 January 2017, with a further section 106 agreement in the pipeline in early 2017, intended to deliver in excess of £124 million of community and other infrastructure.

## How is it innovative?

Ashford's Corporate Plan<sup>19</sup> prioritises high-quality growth to attract investment, jobs and new residents. This has led to a quality agreement being established for Chilmington Green to underpin the content of development and design briefs for masterplans, as well as any layouts that subsequently emerge.

One of the key aims of the Chilmington Green AAP is to deliver a strong, engaged and sustainable community, and here local stewardship is seen as a key factor. A framework has been established so that Chilmington Green will benefit from a community management organisation. The trustees of the community management organisation will include, as equal partners:

- the developer team;
- representatives from relevant organisations; and
- resident representatives (increasing in number over time).

It will oversee financial and asset management and community development, and will be endowed with all the community assets of the development (except schools and roads), including open space and landscaping (roughly 50% of the development area), for which it may develop an in-house maintenance operation or commission a local company to manage on its behalf. The assets will also include play spaces, allotments, and a community hub building and a sports centre, which will be at the heart of a strategic park. Residents will be required to pay a service charge (estate rent charge), which will

vary depending on property size and which will contribute to meeting the costs of the management and maintenance of the community assets in the long term. Furthermore, to diversify the asset and income base the community management organisation will be endowed with up to 50,000 square feet of commercial property, which will also enable it to support local people wanting to set up their own business.

The Council has put significant focus on the need to prepare for the delivery of what will be the largest and longest-running project it has ever undertaken. The Council has committed funding to set up the community management organisation and has established a small delivery team in the belief that having this resource in place early will help to ensure that the development is of high quality with the community at its heart. A community development strategy has also been drafted, setting out what needs to be done, particularly in the first three years. To help collaboration across the two local authority tiers, a joint working protocol between Ashford Borough Council and Kent County Council is being developed, which will sit below the District Delivery Deal<sup>20</sup> and will be supported at the highest level in each authority.

## Lessons

The section 106 agreement for the Chilmington Green site was challenging to negotiate, owing to complex land ownership arrangements, viability issues and the delivery of infrastructure. As well as focusing on the design of the development, with a community management organisation team in place early in the process the Council was able to consider ongoing maintenance liabilities and how they could be funded right from the outset. This early work included highly detailed schedules within the section 106 agreement which specified how and when the community management organisation and community assets would be established, providing a clear approach for delivery. Consultation approaches and timeframes, design briefs and specifications for the facilities

## Notes

19 *The Five Year Corporate Plan: for Action, Aspiration and Achievement, 2015-2020*. Ashford Borough Council, Oct. 2015. <http://www.ashford.gov.uk/the-five-year-corporate-plan-for-aspiration-action-and-achievement-2015-2020>

20 The District Delivery Deal is an agreement between Ashford Borough Council and Kent County Council to work together to deliver better outcomes for residents and business in the borough and, by extension, Kent. The Deal has two main parts: a commitment to combine efforts on the delivery of the top eight strategic projects in the borough; and a commitment to improve the way the Councils work together

were set out, as well as the usual delivery triggers. Because the Council worked alongside the developers to set up the community management organisation, it was able to ensure that preparations for 'going live' were well resourced and timely.

An important lesson from Chilmington Green is that considerable commitment has been required from the developer consortium and the

Council to support this innovative approach. Challenges lie ahead, but with the principles and parameters set out through the quality agreement and through the framework for the development of the community management organisation, the groundwork has been prepared for the delivery of an innovative and exciting community that is seen as a desirable place in which to live.

## **Contacts**

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