

ASHFORD PARISH COUNCIL

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Mr Graham Townsend
Strategic Development & Planning
North Devon Council
Lynton House
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EX31 1DG

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Dear Mr Townsend

Application for Neighbourhood Area Designation

Under the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012, Ashford Parish Council wishes to apply for Neighbourhood Area designation in order to begin developing a Neighbourhood Development Plan.

As required by Regulation 5, this application is accompanied by:

1. Description and map identifying the proposed designation area.
2. Explanation of why this parish is considered appropriate as a Neighbourhood Area.
3. Confirmation that the application is by a relevant body for the purposes of Section 61(G) of the 1990 Act.

Section 1

Ashford is on the north bank of the river Taw, about two miles west of Barnstaple and about three miles east of Braunton. Its southern boundary is the river Taw and the northern boundary is formed by the Pilton to Heanton Punchardon road. On the west a small brook divides Ashford from the Parish of Heanton Punchardon and on the east the boundary is roughly the line of the estate of Upcott House, Pilton.

The proposed Neighbourhood Area comprises the whole of the Parish of Ashford as outlined in red on the attached map. It does not include the hamlet of West Ashford, which is outside of the parish, or any part of the parishes of Heanton Punchardon, Marwood and Pilton West. See Appendix 1 for the map.

Section 2

History

Originally, Ashford was a Saxon settlement called 'Aiseforda' (as described in the Domesday Survey during the reign of Edward the Confessor (1042-1066)). The hedgerows on Ashford's Long Lane and Adder Lane are more than 800 years old, suggesting the route was once a drovers' trail. Strand Lane, the winding main route through Ashford was built in the 1700s but remains a single-track carriageway without lighting or footpaths, and with some old houses on the road edge.

Ashford was once part of Braunton Hundred and the Rural Deanery of Shirwell, but today it is part of the Barnstaple Synod and Archdeaconry. The original village church dated from the early 14th century, but the current Church of St Peter was rebuilt in 1854. The church is now a listed building in the centre of old Ashford, within the conservation area designated in 1976. The then local planning authority established the conservation area in order to protect Ashford's character as an old farming community with ancient hedgerows in the midst of green fields.

Community Identity

Ashford is one of the smallest rural parishes in the country, with about 113 dwellings over 359 acres. Despite (or perhaps because of!) its size, Ashford has an active community life that takes many forms – with religious, social, cultural and semi-sporting dimensions; and the wide range of groups both expresses and sustains the village's strong sense of identity.

In the centre of the village, the Anglican Church of St Peter holds weekly services on Sunday mornings and also observes the major festivals with evening services throughout the year. The church is open daily and is the collection point for the Food Bank. While St Peter's shares its clergy with St Mary's Church, in the larger parish of Pilton, the two congregations are distinct and worship typically at their own churches. The Ashford Church Hall functions, in effect, as the community centre or meeting place for most of the village's social activities – and the monthly 'Ashford News' section of the parish magazine brings the community together by regularly featuring the whole range of village activities.

Despite its small population, Ashford has a wide range of community groups, some of which have considerable continuity. For example, the 'Village Coffee Morning' has met monthly for over 40 years and the 'Ashford Ladies Group' has organised monthly outings, talks, activities and lunches for over 20 years. The 'Knitting and Crochet Circle' is also well-established and meets twice a month in the village. More recently formed are: the 'Ashford Gardening Group' (that organizes talks, visits and garden parties); the 'Ashford Literature and Arts Society' (a village-based network for sharing interests, recommendations, visits and events); and the 'Ashford Bike Club' (which offers social rides for new, returning, occasional and regular cyclists throughout the year).

Planning Context

Nearly all of Ashford's dwellings are clustered along Strand Lane and along short 'spur' lanes leading off. Outside the Conservation Area, housing is low density, mainly single properties set in large gardens.

The villagers want to protect and improve their limited local facilities. The church hall is small. There has never been a pub or shop, and the small post office closed in 1988. Virtually all the properties have private drainage, and only a few have mains gas. A limited bus service runs to Barnstaple five days a week, but most journeys are done by car. Because Strand Lane, the one route through the village, is a winding, narrow, single-track road without pavements or lighting, and with few passing places, there is much concern about the increasing level of traffic through the village. The traffic pressure is partly due to the increasing volume of traffic using Ashford as a short-cut between Barnstaple, Ilfracombe and Braunton, and a large static caravan park below the village on the A361 dual carriageway.

Ashford sits on a beautiful hillside overlooking the River Taw and surrounded by agricultural land and countryside. Part of the parish is adjacent to an SSSI area and the internationally recognised protected estuarine zone along the Taw. Residents value the quality of the landscape (river, river banks, the historic field pattern, hedgebanks, agricultural heritage and hillside) and wish to retain and enhance the area for future generations. Without resisting all development, many residents fear that indiscriminate 'ribbon development' within the Ashford parish boundary along the A361 (between Braunton and Barnstaple) would degrade Ashford's rural setting for residents and visitors alike.

While Ashford is small, it would benefit from having its own neighbourhood plan. The parish of Heanton Punchardon might seem an obvious partner for a joint plan, but in practice the parish council there is focused on preserving the parish's integrity and green spaces in the face of the 'single town' planning strategy for Braunton and Wrafton (to be developed mainly in the Wrafton/Chivenor area). Although the two parish councils have good relations, our enquiries have shown that Heanton Punchardon parish council has no interest in forming a neighbourhood planning partnership with Ashford, and it is already pursuing its own neighbourhood plan. In any case, Ashford believes that the challenges and issues it faces are different from those facing Heanton Punchardon and other bordering parishes.

Like Heanton Punchardon, Ashford residents wish to develop a sound and properly evidenced neighbourhood plan in order to protect the village's integrity as a rural settlement, while also recognising the importance of local housing and other needs. Many villagers are concerned that ad hoc housing and business planning applications, if dealt with on a 'stand-alone' basis, would progressively erode the heritage character of the area. They want to preserve and enhance Ashford on the basis of full proactive consultation with all the people and interests in the parish.

Section 3

Ashford Parish Council declares that it is a relevant body for the purposes of Section 61(G) of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990 (inserted by paragraph 2 of Schedule 9 to the Localism Act 2011).

Yours sincerely

Sue Squire .

Sue Squire
Parish Clerk
Ashford Parish Council