Work has started on a review of Ashford Borough Council’s local plan (previously called the Core Strategy). The plan needs to be based on estimates of the growth expected in the economy of the area and the number of new homes that will be needed.

The plan can then identify sufficient land to provide for these jobs and homes in the borough to 2030. This leaflet provides a brief summary of recent work exploring these key issues.

A more detailed working paper, along with the other reports mentioned in this leaflet can be found at www.ashford.gov.uk/consult and we would be pleased to receive any comments you may have on them.
Starting points
Targets for growth are no longer simply ‘handed down’ to local councils. The government has made it clear that local choices should guide future plans. The council’s response has been to emphasise that jobs growth and the economy come first. Only when we understand the economic potential of the borough will we test what level of housing growth will be needed to support this.

1) Do you support the use of a jobs-led approach to looking at the borough’s future growth needs?

If not, what approach would you like to see taken?

Jobs growth
As a first step the council called in experts GL Hearn to advise on the economic prospects for the borough to 2030. The full report produced by GL Hearn is available at www.ashford.gov.uk/consult.

Looking this far ahead is difficult at the best of times – it is obviously much harder with the economic uncertainty we face today. The expert advice suggested a range of options from the cautious to the more optimistic and suggested an average jobs growth of between 400 – 800 jobs a year to 2030 is realistic.

Over the last decade an average of 780 jobs a year were created in the borough although more recently, as the recession has bitten, the average has fallen to 200 new jobs a year.

2) What do you think the average number of jobs created in the borough each year to 2030 should be?
(Please mark the appropriate box)

-200 201-400 401-600 601-800 801+

The breakdown by sectors of employment in Ashford Borough can be seen below. There is a broad cross section of jobs with no overriding dependency on any sector, but with a stronger representation in transport and storage; construction; and retail, than the SE average.

3) Are there any sectors of the borough’s economy that you feel are likely to grow faster, or slower, than the average for South-East England?

Homes needed
So that we know how much land needs to be identified in a new local plan for development to 2030, we need to understand not just how many jobs to provide for but also how many homes will be needed.

To get to grips with this issue the council turned to the specialist unit at Kent County
Council that advises district councils around Kent. Using a widely used computer model, this work looked at the existing structure of the population and the way it is likely to change in future and then tested how different levels of jobs growth would impact on the number of new homes needed to 2030.

The report produced by Kent County Council is available at www.ashford.gov.uk/consult.

This work shows that changes in the existing population of the borough – in particular the fact that people are generally living longer is generating a need for substantial additional housing. The estimate is that about 350 new homes a year will be needed simply to cater for the changing needs of the current population.

In addition to this minimum need other people will continue to move into the area for many reasons, including; to take a job, to benefit from local house prices, to use the high speed rail link to commute, or to retire. The borough has had a net influx of people moving to the area for many years.

Based on the range of jobs growth predicted by GL Hearn (400 – 800 jobs a year) the work carried out by Kent County Council suggests that between 700 – 1,000 extra homes each year will be needed to 2030. To compare this with what has actually happened recently, over the last decade an average of 645 homes a year were built in the borough but this has fallen to 530 a year since the recession took hold in 2008.

Another interesting comparison is to take the ‘trend’ in the way the population has grown in the last 10 years and overlay the ways in which the population structure and the need for housing will change in the future – for example, as people live longer. On this basis the modelling suggests that 800 homes a year would be needed.

All these forecasts are only estimates and they must be treated as such. There are many factors that affect the number of jobs created in the borough and the homes needed and assumptions have to be made to carry out this sort of forecasting work.

These assumptions need to be tested fully – two in particular have been identified in the work so far.

4) Do you think the rate at which people moved to the borough to live in recent years, will decrease, remain similar, or increase in future?
Tell us your views

Commuting patterns into and out of the borough will affect the number of homes needed. Also the number of people who remain working as retirement age increases will increase the labour supply and affect the number of homes needed for new workers. The work carried out so far will need further testing and refinement.

5) Do you think residents of the borough will be more or less likely to work outside the borough in future?

6) What do you think will be the impacts on the need for jobs and homes in the borough as more people retire later, live in single-person households and live for longer?

Next steps

The responses we receive to this consultation will help to shape further work required. Once this has been done we anticipate the council being in a position early next year to agree the working targets needed for jobs and housing growth to 2030.

This will allow the next stages of the new local plan to be taken forward when proposals for where new development should be located will be discussed.

This work and the responses we receive to this consultation, will be written up and published. Everyone who responds at this stage will be kept informed of progress electronically and sent a copy of the final report.

We would be interested to hear from you either on the general issues raised in this summary, or your comments on the council’s working paper (and the background research on jobs and homes that supports it).

It would be especially helpful if you could answer the questions in this leaflet on the form enclosed or on the online portal.

Please visit www.ashford.gov.uk/consult for more information and to take part in our consultation online.

Alternatively you can send us your comments by email to planningpolicy@ashford.gov.uk, or by post to Jobs and Homes 2030 questionnaire, Planning Policy Team, Ashford Borough Council, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane TN23 1PL to reach us no later than 31st October 2012.

Call 01233 330229