

ASHFORD RING ROAD

BREAKING BOUNDARIES

Lead Artists' Brief

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¹ From 'A Dramatised Discourse on Collaboration' – Kathryn Gustafson, Pippo Lionni & Ian Ritchie, 'Context & Collaboration', Birmingham 1990

ASHFORD RING ROAD BREAKING BOUNDARIES - LEAD ARTISTS' BRIEF

'.....roads no longer merely lead to places, they are places.....'

1 Introduction

1.1 Ashford has been identified within the Office of the Deputy Prime Ministers (OPDM) Sustainable Communities Plan as one of the major growth areas in the South East. The plan is for a growth of around 31,000 homes and 28,000 jobs by 2031, particularly by diversifying the employment base and by redeveloping the town centre.

1.2 Ashford town centre and its historic medieval core are segregated from the wider town by an all encompassing ring road. Whilst facilitating the effective flow of traffic around the town centre it has created a physical and psychological barrier divorcing the heart of the town from its surrounding environs.

'The ring road presents an example of urban engineering that has ignored the richness of the urban fabric and has segregated the town centre from its context. The scale and quality of the road discourages pedestrian movement and has disrupted the old links that connected the various parts of the town.'

1.3 The deficiencies of the town centre have been acknowledged. The need to adopt an innovative approach to securing a high quality public realm is also understood as the means by which to achieve the necessary transformation and as a prerequisite of future sustainable development. A policy of 'mend before extend' has been adopted.

2 Background

2.1 The Ring Road

2.1.1 The Ring Road has been identified as a priority for town centre public realm improvement and consultants have been appointed to bring forward detailed design proposals. This is a transformational project which will convert the ring road from one way working to two way urban streets that balance the needs of all road users and accommodate a range of activities. The scheme will be delivered through an investment of some £10m including major funding from the DfT/ODPM Community Infrastructure Fund.

2.1.2 Recent experiments in Europe and the UK have found that removing the traditional separation between traffic and people in urban areas can make streets safer and less congested. Removing standard kerbs, barriers, highway signs and road markings forces motorists to use eye contact with other road users and pedestrians, for which they need to be travelling at less than around 30km/h. This results in slower, more careful traffic, increased safety for cyclists and pedestrians and a more attractive urban environment in which local architecture and culture prevails over standard traffic infrastructure.

2.1.3 The challenge of the ring road project is to radically transform the environment surrounding the centre of Ashford to allow the town centre to

'breathe', to re-introduce 'streets for people' and, through the adoption of 'shared space', enable essential car access to and around the town centre.

- 2.1.4 It is self-evident that the ring road is a significant and high profile element of Ashford's public realm network. It is therefore an objective of this design programme that the design of the new 'ring road streets' should be approached from the perspective of urban design rather than highway and traffic engineering.

2.2 The Role of the Artist

- 2.2.1 In December 2004 Arts and Culture were identified as key priorities within the planned growth of Ashford and in July 2005 The Ashford Town Centre Public Realm Strategy (to be adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance), acknowledged that,

'The bold and successful commissioning of high-quality art and design within the public realm is essential for the strategic economic and cultural growth of Ashford.'

This approach recognises the important role that artists can have in making places that are enjoyable, stimulating, diverse and attractive. The contribution of artists, whether through 'process' or 'product', can raise public awareness of and aspirations for public space and can significantly enhance the creation of a sense of place.

The Strategy reflects the ambition of the Town Charter which states that,

'All Developments will integrate good quality design, local culture and public art from the start and throughout the process of renewal.'

- 2.2.2 As a product of this far reaching statement is the understanding that within all major projects the commissioning and integration of the work and contribution of artists will be considered from the outset and addressed within the design brief.
- 2.2.3 In particular it is recognised that the challenge is to incorporate opportunities for genuine innovation, collaboration and enhancement of design proposals. The process and outputs of collaboration will vary from scheme to scheme however such collaboration must seek to facilitate a genuine dialogue between the architectural, environmental and engineering teams and the artist(s).
- 2.2.4 Artists are now to be appointed to work collaboratively with the design teams engaged to develop detailed proposals for the transformation of Ashford's ring road. It is intended that an artist will be appointed with each of the two design teams and that a third artist will be appointed to consider the use of light across the whole scheme.
- 2.2.5 The Lead Artists, as appropriate, will be asked to advise on opportunities for other artists including the formulation of briefs and recommending particular artists to carry out specific aspects of commission work.

3 Design Principles

3.1 The objective of this project is to design and construct various component parts of the ring road as specified by the client, and the lower part of Bank Street, as a series of 'quality streets' in accordance with the Public Realm Strategy and the evolving Public Art Strategy.

3.2 The designed scheme will be in accordance with the following principles:

- A high quality public realm scheme of new streets in accordance with the Public Real Strategy
- A truly integrated scheme bridging the gap between engineering and art
- A scheme that satisfactorily meets the minimum traffic needs of the area
- A scheme that adheres to the principles of 'shared space' wherever possible
- A scheme that reduces traffic speed and encourages free movement for all users
- A high quality scheme that will be a nationally recognised exemplar for the integration of public art within the process of designing and delivering a new public realm
- A scheme that seamlessly integrates with its surroundings

3.3 The Public Realm Strategy has outlined a clear set of principles which provide a clear vision for Ashford's future and which will apply to all aspects of this programme. These are:

3.3.1 Accessible

All users should be taken into account for all public realm schemes. Physical barriers to movement, and those requiring people to deviate from their natural desire lines, should be minimised or removed. The needs of those with disabilities, young children, and the elderly shall be included and considered in the early stages of the design process, not as an after thought.

3.3.2 Comfortable

People should feel safe and comfortable when walking, cycling or gathering in Ashford's public spaces.

3.3.3 Appropriately furnished

The design and choice of materials should be informed by the context of the project. The identification and application of an agreed palette of materials and use of guidelines will assist coherence and legibility.....special treatments for spaces and routes using different materials and street furniture be limited to a small number of carefully selected locations...

3.3.4 Durable

....material choice shall reflect the local climate and projected use patterns.....The vision for Ashford's public realm is to use robust materials that weather well, minimise maintenance costs and at the same time improve the overall quality of the public realm.

3.3.5 Clutter-free

Physical and visual clutter from signage, street furniture, and excessive variations in surface materials is a major factor in unattractive street environments as well as hindering movement. A significant quantity of clutter can be removed or minimised through early consideration in the design process.

3.3.6 Encourage use and activity

The public realm needs to facilitate public life through enabling a great variety of activities to take place and respond to different daily and seasonal needs as well as catering for all members of the community.

3.3.7 Well maintained

Environments that are well cared for are usually successful. The encouragement of involvement from a number of stakeholders such as community groups or local businesses, in addition to the local council can help to maintain the interest and investment necessary to ensure public spaces are well maintained.

3.3.8 A Sense of Place

The design of the public realm is seen as a series of CONNECTIONS which will help to establish a clear, unique and recognisable identity.

PHYSICAL AND VISUAL CONNECTIONS

A legible, logical public realm which gives expression to the hierarchy of routes and spaces established in the Area Action Plan

INTERPERSONAL CONNECTIONS

An inclusive public realm which promotes use and engenders interaction and respect amongst users

ENVIRONMENTAL CONNECTIONS

A public realm which emphasises local natural characteristics, the distinctive landform and hydrological patterns, to celebrate water and Ashford's intimate and historical relationship with its rivers.

CULTURAL CONNECTIONS

A public realm which respects and enhances the existing sense of history, culture and traditions yet provides a canvas for the best of contemporary cultural expression.

4 Outline Site Description

- 4.1 The following outlines the nature of each new street component of the ring road, moving round the ring road from the junction of West Street and Elwick Street in an anti-clockwise direction.

4.2 Elwick Road (West Street to Station Road)

Characterised as the 'Civic Spine' of the town centre Elwick Road will have the key function of linking the station area with the proposed 'Discovery Square' at the intersection with Bank Street. It is part of the mixed use 'Learning and Living Quarter' with mixed ground floor uses including retail, and a high quality surface material will reflect the significance of the street. 'Discovery Square' will be a major public space along the street fronted by the Discovery Centre and the County Square retail extension as key architectural forms. With peak hour traffic flows of around 8-900 vehicles the street is conceived as a two-way tree lined 'shared space' with a carriageway width of 6m.

4.3 Station Road (Elwick Road to Mace Lane)

Characterised as 'the new 21st Century High Street' Station Road is envisaged with retail frontages at ground floor level and office and residential accommodation above – a busy main shopping and commercial street. Passing between several Quarters the tree lined street would have wide uncluttered footways with sufficient space for café style tables and chairs long the building frontages.

Note this section is excluded from the current capital programme

4.4 Somerset Road (Mace Lane to New Street)

Part of the 'Residential Transition (North)' Quarter of the town where there is a need to improve the relationship between the town centre and the established housing areas. Currently there is a poor pedestrian environment and the transition area is blighted by the impact of the ring road. The vision is to develop a quality urban edge with strong building lines and activity uses along the street. Primary public spaces are identified at North Street and at New Street and the street is conceived as 2 x 6m carriageways incorporating principles of 'shared space' where possible. It is envisaged that Edinburgh Road will be incorporated into the new street.

4.5 West Street (New Street to Elwick Road)

This street has similar problems to be addressed as for Somerset Road, but it is envisaged as having the narrower carriageway width of 6m, as for Elwick Road, and again providing a 'residential transition' using 'shared space' principles.

5 Outline appraisal of Public Art opportunities

5.1 RKL Consultants have identified a number of generic opportunities which the Lead Artists may wish to explore through their collaborative work with the Design Teams. These include;

- Quality and character of spatial form, finish and experiences
- Gateways – to emphasise points of arrival/departure and providing connections between the town centre and its surrounding environs

- Landmarks – providing focal points, aiding orientation and signifying links to the wider surrounding landscape
- Linear/Serial Works – to identify and articulate pedestrian transit routes and to encourage movement through and across the new spaces
- Public Spaces/Pocket Parks – to create atmosphere, sensory delight and secure spaces for social engagement, rest and play
- Street Furniture – to encourage humanity, imagination and environmental sensitivity in the high quality design of essential utilities in the street scene
- Lighting – to create a unique night time presence throughout the entire length of the ring road and responsive to the character areas which it links
- Temporary Events & Installations – opportunities for temporary interventions during construction phase to engage people in the process of renewal and subsequently celebrate ‘ownership’ and ‘occupancy’ of the new space
- Community collaboration – engagement with a wider, neighbourhood, audience in the design process for discreet spaces

6 Design Management

- 6.1 The Client for the Design Programme is the Kent County Council Regeneration and Projects Division, acting through its Project Manager.
- 6.2 RKL Consultants have been engaged by Kent County Council to assist in the development and implementation of public art programme as an integrated component of the ring road scheme and concurrently to bring forward a Public Art Strategy for Ashford.
- 6.3 The ring road project will be progressed through an ‘Integrated Design Team’ (IDT) comprising the following key disciplines;
- Engineering/Audit
 - Traffic Planning
 - Urban Design
 - Landscape Architecture
 - Art
 - (Architectural input when necessary)
- 6.4 The IDT will be led by Jacobs Babbie (Maidstone) who will be responsible for delivering the scheme to time and to budget. They are mindful of the integrated nature of the design programme and process objectives and are charged with ensuring that each of the disciplines within the IDT has a fair opportunity to input their expertise and ideas into the design process – *everyone should feel valued in this process.*
- 6.5 Two design teams have been appointed to work on discreet sections of the ring road;

Jacobs Babtie
Whitelaw Turkington

Elwick Road – Wellesley Road
Church Road – Elwick Road

- 6.6 The IDT is supported and advised by a ‘Champions Group’ who are also responsible for ensuring that the design proposals, and the scheme itself, meet the design principles and deliver a step change in Ashford’s public realm. Liaison with the Champions Group will be through the Council’s Project Manager and the JBM Project Director.

7 Outline Design Programme

- 7.1 The outline programme for the work of the IDT and contractor is;

Initial design concepts	Late Jan
Lead Artists’ input commence	February
Member Briefing/Seminar	9 March 2006
Public Exhibition/Information	late March
Draft Members report (approvals)	8 th June 06
Production information	by end June
Members approval	30 th June 06
Designs completed	early August
Costings secured	early September
Site works commence	October 06
Site works complete	March 08

8 Artists’ Appointments

- 8.1 **x** artists will be invited to consider this brief and invited to meet with the Integrated Design Team to give a short presentation on their practice and to discuss with them their initial response to the brief and the site. It is the intention to select one artist per design team to work collaboratively with them in developing detailed design proposals in response to the brief. A third artist will be appointed to work across both Design Teams on a creative lighting strategy for the ring road.
- 8.2 In selecting the Artist the following criteria will be considered
- 8.2.1 Quality of work as a practising professional artist
- 8.2.2 Experience of working to commission for public spaces
- 8.2.3 Experience of working with collaboratively with other design professionals including architects, landscape architects, urban designers and engineers

- 8.2.4 Response to the brief and understanding of the site, its future form and function
- 8.2.5 Appreciation of the principles of 'Shared Space' and an interest in exploring these both through their own practice as an artist and in collaboration with others
- 8.2.6 Ability to provide the services described in Appendix 2
- 8.2.7 Capacity to undertake the work in the available schedule

9 The Commission

- 9.1 The Commission will be carried out in two stages, although in reality it is expected that Stage 1 (Design Proposals) will effectively flow directly into Stage 2 (Project Delivery)
- 9.2 Appointed Artists will work collaboratively with the Design Teams to bring forward Detailed Design Proposals Proposal/s.
- 9.2.3 The engagement of the Lead Artists through the Project Delivery Stage will be dependant on the nature of their involvement in realising the detail of proposals

10 Fees, Expenses & Payments

- 10.1 The Artists' will be contracted directly by Kent County Council and will be required to submit invoice accounts directly to KCC for payment, following KCC agreement to a fixed price contract on the basis of the Brief. KCC will have the option of seeking Jacobs Babtie Maidstone agreement of the submitted invoices.
- 10.2 Artists should allow for up to one meeting a month with the Champions Group and at least one meeting a month of the IDT over and above the meetings that they will programme with the respective Design Teams.
- 10.2 Fees in relation to this brief have been calculated on the basis of the Artist providing not less than **x** days consultancy services over **y** months.
- 10.3 A Fee of **TO BE INSERTED** is offered and in addition an allowance for expenses of **TO BE INSERTED**.

APPENDIX 2

SERVICES TO BE PROVIDED

- 1 The services to be provided in the preparation of design proposals by the artist working in collaboration with the ring road design teams in a timely manner will include;
 - 1.1 provision of design proposals
 - 1.2 provision of information to discuss design proposals with, and incorporate input of, other parties
 - 1.3 provision of information to the Client and his consultants for the preparation of an approximation of construction or fabrication costs, identifying both on-site and off-site costs
 - 1.4 preparation of technical information, presentation drawings and maquettes
 - 1.5 submission of outline design proposals and cost estimates for approval by the Council
- 2 The services to be provided in the preparation of detailed designs by the artist in a timely manner will include;
 - 2.1 detailed development of the scheme for commissioned work from approved Design Proposals
 - 2.2 provision of information to discuss detailed proposals with and incorporate input of other parties including the Commissioner and his consultants into the scheme for the commissioned work
 - 2.3 provision of detailed cost estimates and the provision of suppliers' quotations
 - 2.4 preparation of cost estimates for on and off-site operations
 - 2.5 preparation of timetable for fabrication and construction
 - 2.6 provision of adequate information to enable the Commissioner and other parties to consult with planning, building control, fire, environmental and other statutory undertakers
 - 2.7 preparation of revisions to Detail Design Proposals for commissioned work to deal with requirements of planning authorities within the scope and schedule of this agreement
 - 2.8 carry out special constructional/fabrication research including design and testing of prototypes, mock-ups etc.
 - 2.9 preparation of, and/or the supply of adequate information to enable others to prepare, production drawings and specifications

- 2.10 provision of information for the preparation of bills of quantities and/or schedules of work
- 2.11 provision of production information
- 2.12 provision of information required to ensure compliance with the health and safety plans
- 2.13 attendance at meetings with the Commissioner as required to review progress
- 2.14 provision of advice on future maintenance and cleaning requirements in respect of the Detail Design Proposals when executed
- 2.15 advise on the need for and scope of consultant's services and conditions of their appointment
- 2.16 assist the Commissioner in the public presentation and promotion of the Design Proposals.

APPENDIX 3

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTATION

- 1 Ashford Town Centre Public Realm Strategy (Draft July 05)
- 2 Ashford Town Centre Development Framework (Draft March 05) – disc
- 3 Highway Boundary Plan (Jacobs Babbie drg no 017791/SK/020) – disc
- 4 Greater Ashford Development Framework (Final Report April 05) – disc
- 5 Transforming the Ring Road (Jacobs Babbie presentation 15.10.05) – disc

APPENDIX 4

KEY CONTACTS

Chairman of Champions Group

Richard Stubbings, Kent County Council,

Project Manager

John Farmer/John Calder, Kent County Council,

Project Director

Elaine Lawford, Jacobs Babbie,

Public Art Consultants

Graham Roberts, RKL Consultants,

Andrew Knight, RKL Consultants,

APPENDIX 5

Commandments of Collaboration

In 1990 Public Art Commissions Agency organised an International Public Art Symposium which took place in Birmingham on the theme of 'Context and Collaboration'. It concluded with a memorable presentation by Kathryn Gustafson, Pippo Lionni and Ian Ritchie which they entitled, 'A Dramatised Discourse on Collaboration'. It concluded with a reflection on their 'commandments of collaboration'

- There has to be a moral commitment
- You have to have no preconceived idea and be open to almost anything
- You really have to listen and you have to interrupt, and be ready to be interrupted
- The ideas you have are shared, no one can claim them afterwards
- We're not competing with each other, we're just trying to make something new
- There is time together, synthetic time, and then there's reflective time when we work apart
- Each situation is unique
- The relationship is about contact
- There should be defined rules
- The participants are all supposed to be equal, there are no bosses
- You have to respect the common concept as being more important than what you could have conceived by yourself