

# Ashford ZED

## Environmental Statement Non-Technical Summary

Updated August 2006



**ZEDHOMES**

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## Updated Environmental Statement: Non-Technical Summary

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### Introduction

Zedhomes Limited is seeking to redevelop the former Powergen site at Gasworks Lane in Ashford. An outline planning application was submitted to Ashford Borough Council in October 2005. The proposals for the Development have now been revised following an extensive programme of public consultations. These included public meetings and design workshops held with key stakeholders.

The development has been the subject of an environmental impact assessment (EIA) under the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (England and Wales) Regulations, 1990. The findings of the EIA are reported in the form of an Environmental Statement (ES), which has been submitted in support of the application. An Updated ES has now been submitted to accompany the Revised Development Proposals

This document forms the Non-Technical Summary of the Updated ES.

### Scope of the Assessment

The EIA has addressed the following topics:

- townscape and views;
- transport.
- air quality;
- noise and vibration;
- archaeology;
- ecology;
- water resources and flood risk;
- ground contamination;
- effects on TV reception;
- microclimate;
- social and economic impact; and
- the implications of electromagnetic radiation from power transmission systems at the Site;

### Policy Context

The immediate policy context is provided by the Ashford Borough Local Plan (2000). However, this is in the process of being superseded by a Local Development Framework (LDF). Two key components of the LDF – the Greater Ashford Development Framework (GADF) Masterplan Report and the LDF core strategy preferred options report – were published in May 2005.

The LDF Preferred Options Report of the Town Centre Area Action Plan (TCAAP) was issued in April 2006 for public comment. The document highlights the fact that the Town Centre has a fundamental role to play in delivering the successful growth of Ashford and also that it represents the most sustainable location.

The emerging LDF reflects government aspirations for Ashford to become a regional growth centre over the next 25 years. The GADF sets out the framework for this growth, which is anticipated to

provide 31,000 new homes and 28,000 jobs. This would represent a “step-change” in the character of the town, including mixed, higher-density development and new infrastructure such as an east/west link road (Victoria Way).

These proposals are directly relevant to the application site, which is identified as a key town centre development area and lies on the route of Victoria Way. The ZEDhomes development aims to respond to, and to facilitate, the strategic objectives of the emerging LDF.

## **The Site and its Setting**

Figure 1 shows the planning application boundary plan. The site is approximately 4.2 hectares in area, and comprises two parcels of land lying to the west and east of Gasworks Lane. Most of the site was previously in industrial use, including the former Ashford power station. It comprises scrub and rough grassland, together with areas of hardstanding, some mature trees and a derelict building.

The site is adjoined to the north by a gasholder station and the main Ashford to London railway; to the south by the River Great Stour; to the east by a sub-station and pedestrian route (Jemmetts Path); and to the west by the Leacon Road industrial area. An overhead power line crosses the southern part of the site.

The surrounding area comprises a mix of residential areas, businesses, vacant sites, transport infrastructure and public open space. Leacon Road comprises a series of typical industrial units, and forms part of a larger area of business use extending to Chart Road.

Ashford town centre lies to the north of the railway. The inner ring road forms the southern edge of the historic centre, much of which is a Conservation Area. A footbridge connects the town centre with Jemmetts Path. Ashford’s international and domestic stations are located about 0.5km to the east.

The site lies within the floodplain of the Great Stour, although flooding risk is controlled by attenuation measures upstream. The river is designated a Site of Nature Conservation Interest, and supports protected species such as water vole. Beyond the river lies Victoria Park and Watercress Field, which are important areas of open space linked by the Stour Valley Walk. The built-up area of South Ashford lies to the south.

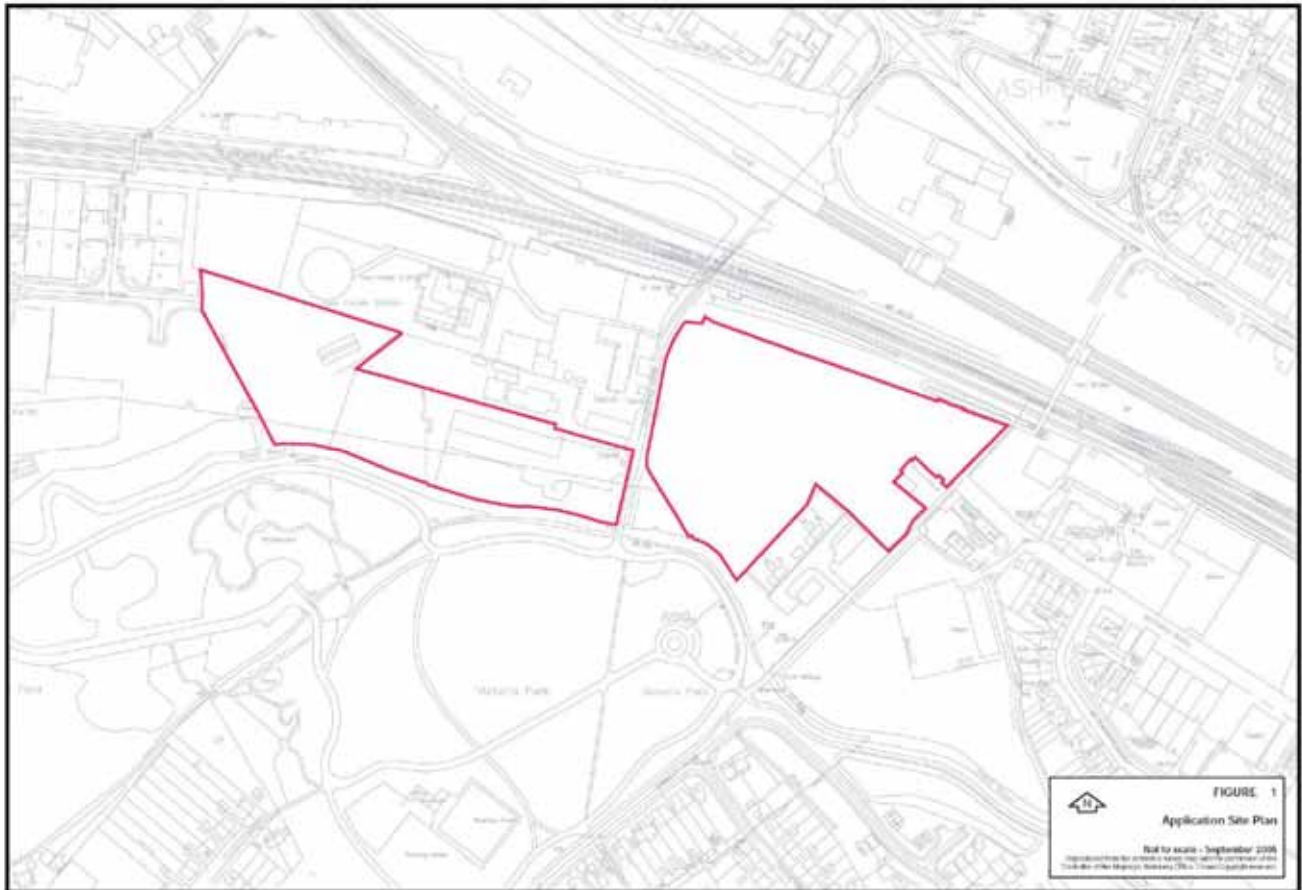
To the east of the site, the Victoria Road area comprises a mix of residential uses, commercial and vacant sites, and community facilities (a primary school). The GADF envisages that this area will change substantially, partly to accommodate Victoria Way. A planning application by English Partnerships, for mixed-use development on the eastern part of this area, anticipates these changes.

## **The Proposed Development**

The proposals envisage a mixed-use development of 1002 apartments and almost 8,220m<sup>2</sup> of other uses, including retail, leisure and food/drink outlets, an environmental learning institute and service infrastructure. Parking will be provided for up to 1,214 cars, including 500 public spaces required by the Borough Council to serve the town centre.

A corridor of undeveloped land will be left through the centre of the site for future construction (by others) of Victoria Way. The Development will extend no closer to the Great Stour than 8m, as required by the Environment Agency.

The Development will be formed from a northern area to the north of the proposed Victoria Way. In this area taller buildings are proposed. These will be of between 8 and 11 storeys above a 6 m high podium, which will provide retail space.



Effectively the buildings will be between 10 and 13 storeys high above ground level. The tallest “landmark” building is proposed for the eastern end of the site, closest to the town centre.

To the south of Victoria Way the proposed buildings would be of 4-6 storey height, set within landscaped pedestrian spaces.

The current proposals reflect the need to accommodate the Borough Council’s requirements for town centre parking, to optimise the regeneration potential of the site, and to facilitate the strategic objectives of the GADF. They have been significantly modified, however, in response to the public consultation exercise and in co-operation with Ashford Borough Council.

Vehicular access will be provided initially from Victoria Road and Leacon Road. However, the development will be accessed directly from Victoria Way once this is completed.

ZEDhomes are committed to delivering projects to the highest environmental standard, and the development incorporates a number of unique features. Energy will be provided by a combined-heat-and-power (CHP) plant fuelled by biomass (woodchips). Wastewater will be treated on-site, with recycling of “grey water” and minimal discharge to the public sewer.

Construction will be phased over a seven-year period, with completion assumed for mid-2013. The main point of access will be via Leacon Road, although some access will be necessary from Victoria Road during the earlier phases.

## The Predicted Effects and Proposed Mitigation

The predicted environmental effects are summarised below for each of the assessment topics. Where significant adverse effects may occur, the measures proposed to mitigate these are described.

## Townscape and Views

The site currently contributes little to the amenity of the town, and on close inspection is visibly degraded. The site is not subject to any townscape designation. The nearest such designations are the Ashford Conservation Area, which lies about 150m to the north; and the Hubert Fountain, within Victoria Park, which is Grade II listed. Figure 2 shows a view of the Revised Development from this location.

The development will have a significant impact on the character of the site. In the short-term, this impact will have both positive and negative aspects; whilst undesirable features such as the overhead power line will be removed, much of the existing vegetation within the site will need to be cleared. The new buildings will be prominent, particularly the taller building on the north - eastern part of the site. Over time, however, this prominence will decrease, as landscaping matures and as other sites close to the town centre are redeveloped.

Impacts on the setting of the town centre, the Victoria Road area, Victoria Park and the adjoining section of the river corridor are considered to be significant. Impacts on the setting of the Conservation Area and the Hubert Fountain may also be significant. Aspects of this impact will be beneficial, notably the opportunity to screen views of the gasholder and to replace what is currently a derelict site with buildings of demonstrable quality.

The development will affect a wide range of views, with a potentially high degree of impact within a radius of about 500m from the site. Where such views are important to receptors such as local residents, this impact may give rise to significant effects; notably in relation to parts of South Ashford and the Victoria Road area, and to users of Victoria Park and nearby pedestrian routes.



**Figure 2: View of the Revised Ashford ZED Development from Victoria Park**

## Transport

During periods of peak construction activity, the works are estimated to generate up to about 110 vehicle movements per day. Most of this traffic will use Leacon Road. Since adequate capacity exists at the relevant junctions, the impact on the highway network would not be significant.

The impact of the completed development on the performance of road junctions has been modelled. The assessment shows that in almost all cases, junctions tested would perform satisfactorily. In the case of Beaver Bridge, it is anticipated that design revisions will be required to optimise junction efficiency and performance.

The site is well located in relation to the use of non-car modes, notably due to its proximity to the railway stations and the town centre. The development will exploit this location by facilitating pedestrian access through the site, linking existing routes such as Jemmetts Path and the Gasworks Lane bridge. Bus stops on the future Victoria Way will further increase access to public transport. A Green Travel Plan will be developed as part of the management strategy for the site. In total, these measures will ensure that the development achieves a high degree of sustainability in transport terms.

## Air Quality

Air quality in the vicinity of the site is typical of an urban area but meets Government Air Quality Objectives by a comfortable margin. However, no part of the borough has been designated an Air Quality Management Area even at the main monitoring site next to A292. As a result, no part of the borough has been designated an Air Quality Management Area.

Emissions from plant and vehicles during the construction phase are not anticipated to be significant. Fugitive dust emissions could occur during activities such as demolition and earthworks, and are considered to represent a moderate level of environmental risk to the surrounding area. However, this risk would be minimised through the adoption of routine dust control measures. These measures will include the removal of asbestos cement cladding by licensed contractors.

The assessment of future air quality, following completion of the proposed development has considered the development on its own, as well as the situation that would pertain with the implementation of the GADF. The results show that air quality would be maintained within the Government's future Air Quality Objectives for 2010 with the Ashford ZED development completed, and taking additional account of the effects of the implementation of the GADF. Therefore the effects of the Ashford ZED development on air quality will be insignificant.

## Noise and Vibration

The noise climate of the site is influenced mainly by passing trains, distant traffic and "mains hum" from the sub-station. The current absence of noise-generating activities within the site is anomalous for an urban location.

Construction impacts have been assessed in relation to a proposed threshold based on accepted practice. During the demolition phase, average noise levels would not exceed this threshold. However, exceedances could occur from time to time at some locations, such as residential properties in Hillbrow Road and Godinton Road. With the adoption of best practicable means to control noise emissions, it is predicted that impacts would be reduced to below the threshold.

Average and maximum noise levels from the construction works themselves would generally fall below the threshold. However, these works will be spread over a relatively long period, and some exceedances may occur; for example, at receptors in Godinton Road during piling work on the western part of the site. During work on the eastern part of the site, internal noise levels at Victoria Road school may on occasion exceed accepted criteria for classrooms with open windows. These impacts are generally amenable to mitigation through appropriate management – for example, the timing of noisy work to avoid sensitive periods – so that significant effects would be avoided.

The use of quieter piling methods to create foundations would ensure that vibration levels will remain below accepted thresholds at nearby properties. However, if percussion piling were to be used, the thresholds could be exceeded at properties in Hillbrow Road. Such impacts would be avoided by adopting alternative piling methods.

Operational traffic generated by the development will result in insignificant changes in noise levels on the road network around the development.

Noise from fixed sources within the completed development (e.g. the CHP plant or leisure facilities) would be controlled by adopting accepted criteria, which would be met by incorporating noise insulation into building and plant design, or through selection of inherently quieter equipment.

## Ecology

The site comprises a range of habitats, including scrub, grassland, trees and tall herbaceous vegetation. These habitats are not designated, are in large part typical of vacant sites, and are of no more than local importance. Most of these habitats would be lost during the construction phase. This is not considered to be significant, and opportunities will be sought to create replacement habitat (e.g. reedbeds) as part of the landscape strategy for the site.

The existing habitats are likely to provide nesting sites for a range of bird species. Potential impacts on nesting birds would be avoided by ensuring that site clearance takes place outside the breeding season.

There is no evidence for the presence of badgers on the site. Although bats have been observed within the site, the trees and derelict building do not provide optimum roosting opportunities. A pre-construction survey will be carried out, on the basis of which appropriate mitigation will be adopted, as necessary, to ensure that significant effects on bats are avoided.

There are no records of great crested newts within a 500m radius of the site, and the survey suggests that this species is unlikely to be present.

Water voles are known to be present along the section of the Great Stour adjoining the site, and would be disturbed during the construction phase. The potential significance of this impact would be mitigated by prior survey, by maintaining a watching brief and/or by temporarily translocating these animals.

White-clawed crayfish are also recorded within the Great Stour. The proposals do not envisage any direct physical changes to the river. Potential effects on this species would be avoided by adopting appropriate controls to ensure that contamination of the river does not occur.

Reptiles (common lizard, slow-worm and grass snake) are known to be present on the site, probably in substantial numbers. These species would be permanently displaced by the development, which would amount to a significant effect. A translocation programme will be

agreed with relevant parties, taking account of the need to address this issue within the Borough as a whole. Should we say with appropriate licences and secured by planning condition.

## **Water Resources and Flood Risk**

The site lies within the floodplain of the Great Stour, as defined by the 1 in 100 year flood probability. By placing most of the proposed floorspace at and above ground level, the design will ensure that occupants of the site are not exposed to an unacceptable level of risk. At the same time, loss of flood storage capacity will be minimised, such that flooding risk elsewhere within the floodplain will not increase.

During the construction phase, the Great Stour is potentially at risk from any pollution incidents or from siltation due to surface runoff. In view of the ecological status of the river (ranked as “excellent” in 2002), such a risk is significant. However, the adoption of appropriate mitigation, such as temporary site drainage and a pollution control plan, would ensure that this risk is minimised.

The development is likely to result in an increase in stormwater runoff from the site. This increase will be managed through measures such as the use of “green” roofs. Peak flows will be collected in storage tanks, for discharge to the river at a rate agreed with the Environment Agency. These measures will ensure that significant effects due to runoff are avoided.

Southern Water is being consulted regarding any constraints on foul drainage. With on-site treatment of sewage, and recycling of grey water, the development is not expected to have a significant impact on treatment or sewer capacity.

## **Ground Contamination**

Site investigations have confirmed that parts of the site are significantly contaminated. This is due to the presence of heavy metals and organic compounds, generally within the upper half metre of soil. Contamination was also observed in groundwater at some locations.

Monitoring of ground gas has revealed no evidence of methane and only slightly elevated levels of carbon dioxide. The latter are consistent with natural emissions from floodplain environments, but are sufficient to require protection measures to be incorporated into the proposed buildings.

The main receptors potentially at risk from ground contamination are the Great Stour, construction workers and future occupants of the site. Groundwater is not considered to be sensitive, and is confined to a minor aquifer within alluvial deposits, overlying Weald Clay, which is a non-aquifer. The site is not located within a Source Protection Zone.

An outline remediation strategy has been developed, and will be agreed with parties such as the Environment Agency. It is likely to include targeted excavation of contaminated soil (for disposal to an appropriately licensed landfill), in-situ treatment of groundwater and general removal of surface soils, followed by stabilisation/solidification of residual material and controlled backfilling. Such measures will ensure that the risk of significant effects arising from contamination will be minimised.

## **TV Reception**

A study has been carried out to see how the development might affect TV reception from the main transmitters for the main non-digital terrestrial TV broadcasts at Dover for BBC1, BBC2, ITV and Channel 4, and Croydon and for Channel 5. The assessment shows that a small number of properties might be slightly affected near Chart Road at Viburnum Close. Mitigation will be achieved by redirecting aerials, if necessary, to appropriate local relay stations. It is of course possible that some properties already receive signals from these alternative locations, in which case the effect of the development would not be significant.

## Microclimate

Taller buildings may cause accelerated wind speeds in some locations on site close to the tall building. The effects of the Revised Ashford ZED Development on local winds have been investigated using wind tunnel tests. Importantly, the development is not predicted to have any adverse impact on locations away from the site boundary that are used by the general public. However, on-site certain areas would require mitigation, in the form of screens, canopies or landscaping to reduce the impact of wind, especially when the wind is blowing strongly from the south west – the prevailing winds – or the north.

The effect of the development on daylight and sunlight amenity to surrounding properties will be insignificant. Overshadowing will similarly not be significant. In respect of the daylight and sunlight amenity of future residents, tests undertaken indicate that nationally accepted guidelines developed by the Building Research Establishment would be met so long as appropriate design measures are taken to ensure that balconies are not included in areas, such as internal courtyards that would have less daylight.

## Archaeology

A desktop study and watching brief during ground investigation work have indicated that the site is of limited archaeological potential. Its location within the floodplain suggests that it would not have been an optimum location for settlement. Any remaining evidence within the previously developed parts of the site is likely to have been damaged.

A substantial degree of disturbance will occur during construction. Prior to this, a targeted field evaluation is proposed within the previously undeveloped parts of the site, in order to confirm the presence of any archaeological interest. Appropriate mitigation will be applied, as necessary, on the basis of this evaluation. In addition, a watching brief will be adopted during the groundworks phase. These measures will ensure that significant effects on archaeology will be avoided.

## Electromagnetic Radiation

The site is close to several sources of electromagnetic radiation, notably the sub-station and the railway. An electromagnetic field (EMF) survey has confirmed that exposure levels are well below the recommended UK and European limits for health and safety, and for electronic equipment malfunction. Therefore, the development will not expose residents and users of the site to unacceptable levels of electro-magnetic radiation; on the contrary, replacement of overhead power lines with underground cables will reduce these levels.

## Socio-Economics

The construction works will generate local employment for about 130 jobs (full-time equivalent), of which about 85 are estimated to be created in Ashford. The completed development would accommodate over 400 jobs, of which about 330 would be local, with a further 28 jobs created by the development indirectly.

The population of the development will inevitably include children, and this will create some demand for school places in the local area. The number of primary school children is estimated at 70 and that of secondary school children at 50. This number can be accommodated in existing schools presently, based on their current capacities and rolls. However, it is known that other developments may also take up part of this capacity. The development includes an educational facility for further education, for which there is a rapidly expanding demand in Ashford. This will therefore contribute beneficially to the provision of this expanding area of education in Ashford.

The population of the development will require a single additional GP, which could be provided on site or at any one of the 10 surgeries within 1.6 kilometres (1 mile) of the site.

## Residual and Cumulative Effects

With the adoption of the proposed mitigation, residual effects relating to the following topics are unlikely to be significant:

- construction dust;
- archaeology;
- electromagnetic radiation;
- TV reception;
- water resources and flood risk;
- ground contamination; and
- construction noise and vibration.

The effects on reptiles and water voles have the potential to remain significant. This reflects the degree of disturbance involved and the conservation status of these species, even though proven mitigation techniques will be adopted. Effects on townscape and visual amenity are also considered to remain significant, as are the long-term, beneficial effects on employment and community amenity.

The effects relating to wind and daylight amenity to future residents will require further consideration in terms of detailed design of mitigation measures, when further detailed planning applications are made for particular buildings or groups of buildings.

Some resources and groups of receptors will experience several phases or sources of impact. These include the Great Stour, residents of the Victoria Road and South Ashford areas, and users of Victoria Park, Jemmetts Path and local roads.

Where practicable, the assessment has taken account of the combined effects of this development with other proposals in the area. The most relevant of these is the English Partnerships scheme, the traffic from which has been incorporated into the future baseline flows used for this assessment.



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