



The TW15

Ashford Residents Association Newsletter

August 2025 – Second Edition

Welcome to the second edition of our Newsletter, a mid-meeting update designed to keep you informed on the matters that (hopefully) interest or concern the good people of Ashford. We have gathered key highlights, updates, and ongoing discussions to ensure everyone stays in the loop.

It may feel like we've been around longer, but we're approaching our six-month milestone. During this time, we've actively championed a range of issues and worked diligently to represent residents, sharing updates as regularly as possible.

We continue to grow in numbers. We have close to 200 individuals now receiving our emails and have slowly increased Social Media audiences with over 90 signed up to our "Facebook" group and over 50 on our "Next Door" group.

This growing interest affirms the belief of those who attended our formation meeting back in February, especially when questioned about the need for a Residents Group and our willingness to establish one.

What began as a spark of community spirit quickly grew into something bigger than anticipated. When our journey began with 53 residents at our first meeting in St. Matthew's Church, generously offered by Father Stuart. With cautious optimism, we spent four months preparing for the next. Just 40 minutes before it began, familiar faces brought relief, but even half an hour out, we still didn't know if the energy and turnout would match that inspiring start.

We ran a member's poll to identify what were your hot topics and we used that, and the issues raised at that first meeting, to shape an agenda that we felt would be of interest. We invited all Ashford Councillors (Spelthorne & Surrey) together with our MP (Lincoln Jopp) to join and support the meeting.

The reaction was incredible, and we remain humbled by the fact that we had over 125 people packing out St Mathews to listen to what everybody had to say.

At this point, on behalf of everyone involved with the Residents Association, I'd like to extend our heartfelt thanks to Father Stuart for kindly allowing us to use St Matthew's for our first two meetings. His support has been invaluable, and as a fellow resident, he is as much a stakeholder in our community as anyone who attended. Without his generosity, we simply wouldn't have been able to get started.

To this end we are pleased to confirm that our third meeting will be held on Saturday 27th September 10.00am to 12.00pm at the Salvation Army Church & Community Centre, 32 Woodthorpe Road, Ashford TW15 3JY.

The venue can accommodate up to 300 people, and while there's a chance attendance may dip, we felt it was important to plan for potential growth to ensure everyone's safety and comfort.

We are deeply grateful to the trustees of the Salvation Army Church, who have once again generously provided us with the use of their space free of charge. Their support is a meaningful endorsement of our efforts to build a stronger community in Ashford.

In appreciation, we kindly ask residents to consider making a donation to the charity as they leave the meeting as every contribution helps support their vital work.

There is more about the subject matter for our third meeting later in this Newsletter.

Review of the second Residents Meeting – 14th June 2025

Minutes & Actions have been posted to our website but for those who have not seen these here are the highlights of our last meeting.

The increased attendance I have already covered, but here I will additionally wish to thank all the Councillors who were good enough to spare yet more of their valuable time to attend, support & inform on the issues that concern us today. We do not take their efforts for granted, but we do hope that they see value in attending for the long term.

Many of you will know that we set up a Members Poll that we called "Have your Say" in the 5-6 weeks running up to the meeting. The response was again very high, and residents took time to add comments and submit questions that we then aggregated to send to Spelthorne BC and the Police prior to the meeting.

The Police then used those questions to shape their presentation on the day as one of our guest speakers.

The questions for the council were submitted for a collective response as part of the Spelthorne Partnership Assembly process, and we continue to await their response albeit a few of the issues have since progressed with the passage of time. We will however report back to residents once complete.

The summary of that Poll is as follows, and I don't think many will be surprised by the results: -



These top priorities underpinned our agenda for the meeting and our choice of presenters.

Lincoln Jopp, on his way to opening the Shepperton Fayre, was good enough to join us for our first half hour and offered his perspective on his first year as an MP. Key message here was if you want to contact him quickly then best to use his Facebook page.

We followed this with a presentation from Simon Lowe, who is the lead on an initiative, proposed by Spelthorne BC and commissioned by Surrey CC, to look at ways as to how to potentially reconfigure the Church Road high street to improve the attractiveness of this principal shopping area.

The initiative has in fact been going 3-4 years already and involved an initial consultation with over 1000 Ashford residents via both Market Research on the street as well as online polls with QR codes posted to lampposts and indeed even on the floor.

This was essentially an update, but I suspect for many this was new news. Aesthetically the graphics and plans look positive, but we are now at a stage where it expected that in September this programme will move to a Public Consultation where we will again get an opportunity to comment on those proposals.

What I will say is that there is no guarantee that these proposals will ultimately get commissioned & / or funded as there are several similar initiatives across the County and there isn't an infinite pot to pull from. It is also possible that the Local Government Reorganisation process will play a part on what stays and what falls by the wayside, but we shouldn't dwell on what we can't do and instead we are represented on the working group and will continue to work with Simon and his team to progress this as far as possible.

Simon was followed by Police Sargeant Thea Jackson who was good enough to attend with our PCSO Ruby Payne to present what was a very uplifting overview of what she and the rest of team were doing to address the many concerns of Ashford residents.

To be honest Thea stole the show. We were keen that Residents had access to our key police contacts, but we were similarly concerned that it could become something of a baying crowd which would be unproductive. Instead, we were presented with an honest appraisal of where

the Police stand as well as several initiatives that are specific to Ashford that has seen Surrey Police Force release more budget for.

The comments made here were further reinforced at the Spelthorne Partnership Assembly meeting a week or so later, where Inspector Matt Walton presented a PowerPoint presentation covering the same overview for Spelthorne, but it was clear in this presentation that Ashford was being prioritised for more funding and more focused strategies to try and turn the tide as regards crime in the area.

That presentation has since been made available on our website and is worth a look.

We have invited the Police team (and they have accepted) to come to our third meeting to attend as both interested parties but to also provide us with any updates on those initiatives.

The reaction to the event and the content has been positive and on the day, we felt that attendees got a lot from the meeting, which was extremely rewarding from the Management Committees perspective, so thank you to all that attended.

So, what has happened since?

1) Changing the Committee

As a committee we have been juggling a lot. The group is growing and the amount of content that we are trying to bring to members is also seemingly growing as the Website will provide testimony to.

As a Management Committee of three, we felt we still had control, but we were increasingly aware that to develop the Association further we needed to recruit more likeminded people to increase the size of the Committee.

We reached out to some key people who had caught our eye in our engagements since our formation and sought to recruit them to the Committee.

None of those approached turned us down! - which was amazing - and so I am incredibly pleased to announce that the following Residents have agreed to join the Committee.

- Jenny Frost
- Linda Lawrie
- Philomena Meddelton
- Sally Nash-Pawson
- Nik Urquhart

At this time, as a technicality, they have been co-opted as Associate Committee Members pending ratification at our next members meeting to change our Constitution to increase the number of Committee Members to 9 from 6.

Having this wider capacity will allow us to get into greater depth on some of our issues and develop an element of expertise on certain topics.

It will also give us a much bigger team to continue our quest to widen our membership as much as is practicable, and to focus on attracting membership across the wider community within TW15 as well as broaden the age demographic of our membership.

Representing the Residents

Spelthorne Partnership Assembly (SPA)

The original SPA Meeting was postponed due to the Ward Election in Ashford.

On this matter, our sincere congratulations go out to Residents Association member Greg Neall on his election to the Ashford Town Ward. Greg is also a highly active member of the Community Business organisation Ashfordwide and indeed attended our second meeting as a Resident.

Greg will now need to move to the Councillor benches at our next meeting 😊

The rearranged SPA meeting was very lively and highly informative. I have already spoken about Inspector Matt Walton's presentation where it was almost embarrassing as to how much resource had been freed up to support him in Ashford. Not sure how all the other Spelthorne RAs viewed it but went down well with us!

This was followed by a conversation regarding the existing Staines Business Investment District (BID) and the ongoing process to potentially set one up in Ashford. Lack of Business financial commitment seems to be an issue at this time, but the promoters are continuing to work to try and find a way to make some form of BID possible and we will update as we receive same.

The real meat of the meeting however – and I am not sure it was meant to be - was the topic of HMOs.

Harry Boparai had somewhat loaded the audience with a few very aggrieved Spelthorne residents who were suffering terribly from their experiences of either the building of these accommodations or were living next to one.

Residents were regularly talking of losing money on their own properties being sited next door to an HMO and it was common to hear that Residents immediate responses to an HMO being built was to place their homes on the market and expecting their property values to reduce.

The whole planning approval process is a mess, and whilst Section 4 amendments to the HMO legislation in Spelthorne will take effect from August for three wards the rest of the borough will be February next year. These changes will allow some constraints to be applied but they will not see HMOs banned outright.

The discussion became quite heated, reflecting the national significance of the issue. Given its growing relevance in Ashford, we've chosen to make HMOs the central focus of our next meeting in September.

We will cover: -

- What is an HMO?
- Different types of HMO
- How many HMOs are registered in Ashford?
- How many unregistered HMOs exist in Ashford?
- Planning Process
- Council use of HMOs
- Section 4 – What is it / what is it not?
- Banning of HMOs (probably more like why they can't be banned)

- What can we do to hold Builders to account?
- What can we do regarding holding Landlords to account?

I think it is important that we have an honest and balanced debate on this topic, especially as there are a number of HMOs still yet to be built but where building applications are approved trying to get ahead of the Section 4 timeline.

Ashford Stakeholder Working Group

There have been no further meetings for this group since the last meeting and there is no planned date for the next meeting as the Surrey team pull together the pre public consultation packs that are due in September.

We will of course report back with any developments.

Barclays Bank Premises – Application for Gaming Licence

We finally received confirmation from the Council on 31st July that the owners of the site have now formally submitted the correct documents and the process of consultation has now commenced.

We officially have until 27th August to submit representations.

Nik Urquhart is leading on this for the Residents Association, and he has pulled together a series of templated letters and emails that residents should look to make use of, and these can be found on our website. <https://ashfordra.co.uk/barclays-bank>

It is important that anyone looking to make representation focuses exclusively on the key areas that may influence the consultation. Nik's templates have been specifically created to cover these key areas.

As I say the process starts now and we need your help to load as many representations as possible to try and impact this process so please act now.

Working with other Groups

Neighbourhood Watch Groups

With our expanded teams we have acquired committee members actively involved in various Neighbourhood Watch Groups (NHW) across Ashford, and we are looking to try and build a channel where all NHW groups in TW15 have a working relationship with ourselves.

This will be a developing initiative, and we will keep you updated.

Other Residents Associations

I was recently invited to speak with a new group looking to set up a Residents Association in the Staines Railway area. Like us there was a RA previously in existence, but it petered out, but I met three Staines Residents together with Cllr Sexton to discuss what we had done so far and provide some insight as to lessons learned.

This RA group were looking to have their initial meeting the same day as ours, but they have kindly agreed to move their meeting to the 20th September so that Councillors are free to then attend both their & our meetings.

I have cordially invited these residents to attend our next meeting should they think it would be of benefit and then they can get a feel of where we are at.

Anything New?

Here is a list of topics that we have started to actively show an interest in: -

HMOs

This would appear to be a significant issue in Spelthorne, and we are duly represented therefore in Ashford.

These are an exhausting nightmare for a number of residents, but we just don't know how many are affected, so we are keen to become specialists in this field and to try and support with information anyone blighted by this.

Stanwell Hotel

As I am sure many of you have become aware, the Government – without consultation with the Council – has decided to move out established refugee families in this hotel, in preference of filling the hotel with Single Male Immigrants who presumably are awaiting Home Office processing.

This whole process has several dynamics – all of which are a concern to both Stanwell Residents and the wider Spelthorne Community.

I attended a peaceful demonstration at the hotel on 31st July, and I'd like to commend all the organisers for ensuring the event remained calm and respectful. As a result, the proposed changes have now been paused pending further investigation. My understanding is that the Council met with a Home Office representative on 1st August to raise their concerns, although there is currently no assurance that the decision will be reversed.

This situation could continue to evolve in various directions. If such changes can be implemented in Stanwell without consultation, it raises concerns about where else across the borough they might follow. We'll keep you updated as developments unfold.

SEND – Surrey County Council.

The provision of Special Educational Needs & Disabilities support by County Councils is covered by the Children's Act of 2004 and its successor from 2014. Surrey County Council have the worst record in the country for declining parent applications for support, that are eventually overturned at formal appeal – over 90%.

Surrey CC have tried to baffle their residents with claims of success in this area that is simply not borne out by the statistics and the facts. We have a high number of families in TW15 that are battling to work with this system which is unnecessary but ultimately completely soul destroying for all those involved.

We can't change the law, but we can seek to connect families to help share the burden of the whole process and act as a hub for that purpose.

What next?

Broadening the Membership Base

As we have already alluded to, within the Committee we are investing heavily in time and effort in getting more residents engaged to sign up to the Association, either via Facebook, Next Door or the Website or indeed any combination of the three.

What we do need is those of you receiving this Newsletter to act as our evangelists, and to reach out to your families, neighbours, friends and encourage them to join the quest.

The reality is that Apathy has become the biggest killer of Community enthusiasm. We are all guilty of wanting to know everything but not wanting to contribute – this is not sustainable. If we don't fight against the demise of Ashford, then the only thing that is inevitable is that demise.

It's as simple as that.

So please – spread the word. The pace of signups over the last week would suggest we are on to something with this Association, but we need to maintain momentum, and that comes from you.

Moving to a Membership Model

Residents Associations must fund themselves.

We were unsuccessful in securing funding from the Councils CIL Fund, and thus far our startup costs have come from the residual monies that were held within the last Residents Group. We have been awarded some small seed funding from the "Better Neighbourhoods" Fund supported by two Councillors, Paul Woodward & Greg Neall, for which we are most grateful, but these will not cover our full costs (and to be fair nor should they).

The Committee are members like everyone else, and there is an expectation that Residents Associations should cover their running costs (on a not-for-profit basis) from members contributions.

All our content on the Website is currently free to view. We continue to debate how best to create a member only area where all the new content will be accessed.

In line with other Spelthorne based Residents Associations, we have set an annual membership fee at £5 per postal address / family.

Our membership payment facility is now live on the website, along with a separate option for those who wish to support the organisation through additional donations. Payments can be made via PayPal or credit card. <https://ashfordra.co.uk/membership>

Our main expenses include hall hire (which unfortunately can't remain free indefinitely), IT services, website hosting, Microsoft email subscriptions, and printing. Without consistent funding, these costs become unsustainable. A committed membership base is essential to keeping the Association running.

Thankfully we are already seeing new joiners sign up and volunteer payments which are gratefully received.

Upcoming Events

Spelthorne Partnership Assembly

This is on Monday 1st September at the Council Offices between 6.00pm to 8.30pm. If you have any questions that you want us to submit on anything Ashford, we will collate and submit to the Council for consideration. We will be attending as the RA and will report back post this meeting. Please email any questions to Lisa Stonehouse @ L.Stonehouse@spelthorne.gov.uk

Ashford Stakeholder Working Group

We await details as to the next meeting.

Ashford Residents Association Meeting

As above – this will take place on Saturday the 27th of September at the Salvation Army & Community Centre, 32 Woodthorpe Road, Ashford from 10.00am – 12.00pm.

The full agenda will be distributed before the meeting and minutes will follow.

Thanks for your ongoing support & Best Regards

JD

John Dickens
Chair

