

Ashford Business Improvement District

BID Ballot 2026

Summary of consultation and engagement

Background

Ashford is an important district centre within the Borough of Spelthorne, with a diverse mix of independent businesses, national operators, professional services, cafés, restaurants and community facilities. The proposed Ashford Business Improvement District (BID) will provide a business-led and business-funded mechanism through which local businesses can work collectively to strengthen the town centre.

The proposed BID will operate for five years from 1 April 2027 to 31 March 2032. Its programme is focused on four priorities: a connected Ashford, a safer Ashford, stronger business performance and an enhanced town centre environment. The proposal will be developed and refined through consultation with businesses before the ballot, ensuring that the final Business Plan reflects local priorities and provides a clear basis on which eligible businesses can make an informed decision.

Business consultation and engagement

A structured consultation and engagement programme will be undertaken before the ballot. The programme will be open and inclusive, giving eligible businesses and their representatives a range of opportunities to understand the proposal, comment on the emerging priorities and discuss how the BID would operate. Activity will include:

- Building on the BID feasibility work undertaken during 2025 and reviewing the issues and priorities identified by Ashford businesses;
- Offering every eligible business the opportunity to engage through direct visits, one-to-one conversations, telephone calls or online meetings;
- Distributing clear material explaining the proposed BID area, emerging priorities and indicative levy arrangements;
- Using questionnaires, meetings and drop-in sessions to gather feedback, test the proposal and answer questions;
- Providing electronic updates and accessible online information, including key documents, frequently asked questions and ballot details;
- Engaging with businesses of different sizes and sectors to ensure that the proposal reflects the diversity of the Ashford business community;
- Working with Spelthorne Borough Council and relevant partners to verify eligible hereditaments, ratepayers, authorised voters and decision-makers;
- Recording and reviewing feedback so that the final priorities, projects, levy arrangements and governance proposals are informed by business views;

- Sharing the draft and final Business Plan with eligible businesses and providing further opportunities to discuss its content before voting begins.

How consultation will shape the proposal

Feedback received through the consultation programme will be reviewed by the BID development team and steering group. Where appropriate, it will be used to refine the proposed projects, delivery priorities, levy rules, governance arrangements and communications. The purpose will be to ensure that the final Business Plan is practical, affordable and focused on activity that businesses consider important to Ashford's future.

Businesses will be kept informed of the emerging position and will be able to raise questions throughout the consultation period. The final Business Plan will explain the commitments to be delivered during the five-year term, how the levy will be calculated and managed, and how the BID will remain accountable to the businesses that fund it.

Final pre-ballot activity

Before the ballot opens, the following final engagement and administrative activity will be undertaken:

- The final Business Plan will be presented and made available to all eligible businesses and voters;
- Eligible businesses will receive a clear invitation to meet the BID team or request further information about the proposal;
- The voter list and named decision-makers will be checked with Spelthorne Borough Council and its appointed ballot provider, and businesses will be advised of proxy arrangements where necessary;
- The formal Notice of Ballot will be issued in accordance with the Business Improvement District regulations;
- Communications will remind businesses that the ballot must achieve both a majority by number and a majority by aggregate rateable value among those voting.

Ballot timetable

The Ashford BID ballot will be administered independently by the Returning Officer for Spelthorne Borough Council, supported by the Council's electoral services team and its appointed ballot provider. Ballot papers are scheduled to be issued on Wednesday 18 November 2026. Completed postal votes must be received by 5.00pm on Friday 18 December 2026, and the result is scheduled to be announced on Monday 21 December 2026.

During the ballot period, all eligible businesses will continue to have access to the final Business Plan and will be able to contact the BID development team with questions. Factual reminders will be issued to support participation and ensure that authorised voters understand how and when to return their ballot papers.

The consultation programme will ensure that every eligible business has a reasonable opportunity to understand, influence and make an informed decision on the proposed Ashford Business Improvement District before the ballot closes on 18 December 2026.