

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

LEISURE and ARTS ADVISORY BOARD

14 January 2008

Report of the Director of Planning, Transport and Leisure and the Cabinet Members for Leisure, Youth and Arts and Planning and Transportation

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken by the Cabinet Member)

1 OPEN SPACE STRATEGY

Summary

This report advises on the development of an Open Space Strategy (OSS) for Tonbridge & Malling and brings forward a proposed programme of consultation.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 The Managing Development and the Environment DPD (MDEDPD) which will form part of the Council's Local Development Framework (LDF) will include, inter alia, policies and proposals for the protection, enhancement and provision of open space. Government Guidance on how to plan for open space, sport and recreation provision is included in Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (PPG17). To comply with PPG 17 the MDEDPD needs to be informed by the preparation of an **Open Space Strategy (OSS)** which is based on a robust assessment of need and an audit of existing open spaces. A diagrammatic summary of how the OSS fits within the LDF is shown on page 4 of the draft OSS circulated separately within these papers. Members will note that the Council's already adopted Playing Pitch Strategy and Local Play Strategy have been taken into account, and now form an integral part of, the proposed Open Space Strategy.

1.2 Role/Aims of the OSS

1.2.1 The draft OSS, circulated separately with these papers, has been prepared in accordance with the Government's Companion Guide to PPG 17. It is an overarching document that covers all open spaces, sport and recreation facilities including playing pitches and children's and young people's play areas. It also covers in passing those facilities which require large bulky buildings intended to generate high levels of use including swimming pools, sports halls, and leisure centres. The published version of the OSS will be a colour document incorporating a range of maps.

1.2.2 The OSS has a much wider role than simply informing the preparation of the LDF. It will help the Council deliver its corporate priorities, particularly in relation to healthy living, crime reduction, young people and achieving a better street scene and open space environment. It will provide clear objectives and direction to assist the Council to meet local needs and aspirations and it will enable the Council to meet Central Government's requirements and priorities. A strategic framework for the provision, management and maintenance of open space ensures a planned approach of targeted actions will be implemented in a prioritised order within available resources.

1.2.3 The OSS therefore has a number of roles which include:

- assisting the Council in delivering its corporate priorities
- establishing local quantitative, qualitative and accessibility standards for future open space provision in the Borough
- providing the evidence base for the formulation of policies and proposals
- providing the evidence base for the rationalisation of open space provision
- informing relevant projects in the capital plan
- providing the evidence base for bids for grant monies and other external funding
- forming the basis for calculating developer contributions for new/improved provision of open space.
- informing the review of the Borough Leisure and Arts Strategy
- assessing applications for grants from parish councils for improvements to open space provision
- providing a valuable corporate resource to respond to general enquiries relating to open space provision
- identifying sites and drawing up grounds maintenance contracts.

1.2.4 The OSS has a number of aims which can be summarised as follows:

- enrich people's quality of life by providing open green space for their enjoyment and health related activities;
- enhance and conserve biodiversity by sustaining and where possible improving natural habitats;
- encouraging local people to respect, care for and use open spaces without damaging the natural environment;

- enable the co-ordination and delivery of services designed to develop and maintain excellent open spaces;
- enhance the quality and sustain improvements to open spaces to meet needs of all;
- effect plans that will provide a network of connected spaces where users can do a wide range of activities;
- ensure sufficient open space is accessible and protected to improve the quality of life of current and future generations;
- engage the local community in actions that positively support the Open Space Strategy;
- encourage civic pride in the local environment;
- to provide needs based evidence to assist in the negotiation of developer contributions.

1.3 Development of the OSS

- 1.3.1 The draft OSS was prepared in full accordance with PPG 17 guidance with the assistance of external consultant, Dr Joy Standeven. The first step identified the implications of existing strategies, in particular the LDF Core Strategy, and reviewed other existing documents and research. Local communities were consulted through a residents' panel survey. The sample size was 1,409 and an 82% response was received, which is high. Sports clubs, parents, carers and children had previously responded to research focused on sports pitches and play provision. Questionnaires and maps were sent to all parish/town councils, which assisted in verifying the completeness and accuracy of the audited data, together with identifying the level of use of open spaces.
- 1.3.2 More than 500 open green space site visits were conducted to audit the quantity, quality and accessibility of sites based on standards derived from national guidelines, residents' views and the objectives of the strategy. The data was analysed to identify deficiencies in accessibility, quality and quantity from the application of the standards to the population within the effective catchment of each different type of open space or recreational facility.
- 1.3.3 Unmet needs were identified and five strategic options were proposed aimed at achieving the objectives of PPG17. The strategic options are as follows:
- To **protect** the open space/facility.
 - To **enhance quality** and protect the open space.
 - To **enhance value** or convert to another primary recreation purpose.

- To enhance quality and value or **redesignate** for another use.
- To propose **new provision**.

1.3.4 The Strategy concludes with a number of policies addressing spatial planning and leisure management matters associated with open spaces. **Dr Joy Standeven will be in attendance at the meeting and will make a presentation to Members of the Board**, which will incorporate an outline of the research. Taking into account the role of the OSS in achieving objectives within both my Leisure and Planning Service, Members of the Planning and Transportation Advisory Board have been invited to attend the presentation.

1.4 Consultation

1.4.1 Subject to Member comment at the meeting it is proposed that public consultation takes place during February/March 2008 on the following basis:

- the draft OSS is to be circulated to all key stakeholders including all parish/town councils and the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership;
- copies of the draft OSS are to be deposited at the Council's offices at Kings Hill and Tonbridge for public viewing;
- copies will be circulated internally within the Council and to surrounding local authorities;
- a copy will be available to view on the Council's website, which will incorporate a formal response form.

1.4.2 A list of comments received will be reported to the May 2008 meetings of this and the Planning and Transportation Advisory Boards, along with any recommended alterations to the draft Strategy. The revised draft Strategy, including an Action Plan, will then be considered by the Policy Overview Committee on 3 June before being recommended for adoption by Council in July 2008. At that stage it will become a material consideration for development control and its conclusions can be taken forward through the remainder of the LDF process and be taken generally into account in leisure management, in particular, to inform the review of the Leisure and Arts Strategy.

1.4.3 At the same time as stakeholders are being requested to comment on the draft Strategy and the accuracy of the assessment, they will also specifically be requested to bring forward proposed solutions to address those sites in the draft Strategy which have been identified for either enhancement, or redesignation. (See section 7 of the draft OSS).

1.5 Legal Implications

- 1.5.1 The OSS will form part of the evidence-base for the MDEDPD which forms part of the Council's Local Development Framework. As a Strategy, it must be considered and, if appropriate, adopted, in accordance with the budget and policy framework procedure rules contained in Part 4 of the Council's Constitution. The process by which the budget and policy framework is developed is, at least two months before the Strategy needs to be adopted, the Executive will publicise initial proposals, having first canvassed the views of local stakeholders as appropriate and in a manner suitable to the matter under consideration. Any representations made to the Executive must be taken into account in formulating the initial proposals, and shall be reflected in any report dealing with them. The Executive's initial proposals shall be referred to the Policy Overview Committee for further advice and consideration. The Policy Overview Committee shall canvass the views of local stakeholders if it considers it appropriate in accordance with the matter under consideration, and having particular regard not to duplicate any consultation previously carried out by the Executive. The Policy Overview Committee shall have six weeks to respond to the initial proposals of the Executive unless the Executive considers that there are special factors that make this timescale inappropriate. Having considered the report to the Policy Overview Committee, the Executive, if it considers it appropriate, may amend its proposals before submitting them to the Council meeting for consideration. It will also report to Council on how it has taken into account any recommendations from the Policy Overview Committee. It is, therefore, appropriate at this stage for the Executive to adopt these initial proposals for consultation with local stakeholders.

1.6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.6.1 Taking into account the significant level of work involved in the preparation of the OSS, an external consultant was appointed to assist the Council. This cost has been provided for in the LDF budget for 2007/08, and this particular project has been funded entirely from the Planning Delivery Grant.
- 1.6.2 Members will note from sub-section 1.2.3 that one of the roles of the OSS is to assist in securing external funding. We are pleased to report that with the assistance of the Local Play Strategy the Council has recently been awarded £223,000 from the Big Lottery Fund to progress schemes in Leybourne, Hildenborough, Aylesford, Ditton and Tonbridge. Without the evidence base provided by the Strategy this funding would not have been secured.

1.7 Risk Assessment

- 1.7.1 It is essential that the OSS be developed and implemented in line with the formal guidance, otherwise there is a risk that the outcomes may be challenged and the Council's DPD may be found to be unsound.

1.8 Recommendations

1.8.1 It is, therefore, **RECOMMENDED** that:

- 1) subject to Member comment at the meeting, the draft Open Space Strategy be circulated for consultation as outlined in the report; and
- 2) the outcome of the consultation and the revised Open Space Strategy be brought forward to the May 2008 meetings of this and the Planning and Transportation Advisory Boards for Members' consideration prior to submission to Policy Overview Committee.

The Director of Planning, Transport and Leisure confirms that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

Background papers:

contact: Robert Styles
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Assessing Needs and Opportunities: A Companion
Guide to PPG17 - ODPM

Technical Study: Evidence Base for the Open Space
Strategy – Dr Joy Standeven

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