

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

PLANNING and TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD

24 October 2005

**Joint Report of the Director of Director of Planning & Transportation
and the Cabinet Member for Planning & Transportation**

Part 1- Public

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

1 SOUTH EAST PLAN

Summary

To update the Board on progress during the consultation period on Part 2 of the South East Plan and seek endorsement for further submissions to be made.

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 Members may recall that we submitted a report to the Cabinet on the 7 September dealing with the consultation document on Part 2 of the South East Plan. This is the stage of the process when the County Council in liaison with other authorities is required to provide advice to the South East of England Regional Assembly (SEERA) on matters such as future district level housing provision, employment, infrastructure and other sub-regional matters.
- 1.1.2 The consultation period ran from the 5 September to the 17 October and the position adopted by the Cabinet as outlined in the annex to this report has been forwarded to the County Council. Inevitably, however, during the consultation period a number of other matters have emerged which will be of interest to Members and will be discussed at a Member level Steering Group for the Rest of Kent Area to be held on the 2 November at which we will both be present.
- 1.1.3 A public consultation meeting was held at the University of Greenwich at Kings Hill on the 4 October. This comprised an excellent presentation by officers of the County Council and was also attended by an officer of SEERA. That meeting drew a greater attendance than the previous event held during the Part 1 consultation and those members of the public who attended and also Members of the Council were able to make points that were recorded by both the County Council and SEERA.
- 1.1.4 There are three specific issues that have moved on during the consultation period that directly affect the Councils planning position.

- 1.2 Housing Provision.** At the time of the report to Cabinet in September, the stance of other authorities in the Rest of Kent, in particular Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells Borough Councils, was not known. Indeed, even at this stage we cannot be certain as to the final position of these authorities. However, from discussions with colleagues and from some public meetings, it would seem that there is a strong move from Maidstone Borough Council to favour a higher housing development option which may even go beyond Option 2 as proposed in the consultation document. Interestingly, there is also a suggestion that a preference for the higher option may also be the advice given to Members of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. As we have said we cannot be sure of the final position of our neighbours but the Board will be interested to know how positions seem to be shaping up.
- 1.2.1 Whilst support can be given to Maidstone taking a higher rate of development than it has done in the past there is concern as to the physical and spatial implications of the level of expansion that has been suggested. In particular we will need to be satisfied that the direction of future growth around Maidstone and the likely sites to be chosen is not detrimental to the function of Tonbridge and Malling and are of a sustainable nature. This view has been clearly expressed at officer level to Maidstone Borough Council and a further opportunity will arise at the forthcoming member level steering group.
- 1.3 A Policy for the Rest of Kent.** At the meeting of the SEERA Assembly in the summer Maidstone Borough Council advanced a proposition that there should be a specific policy dealing with the role of Maidstone. Work on this subject has progressed with the drafting of a policy applicable to the Rest of Kent Area as a whole. There seems to be some merit in this as otherwise in Kent there will be policies for Kent Thames side, Ashford and East Kent but a gap in the Rest of Kent Area. An early draft of the suggested policy is attached as Annex 1 and this is subject to redrafting but Members will see the general direction that is proposed which broadly and subject to careful editing seems to present an acceptable position as far as Tonbridge and Malling is concerned.
- 1.4 The Identification and Role of Regional Transport Hubs.** The Cabinet decision of the 7 September was that subject to further clarification from SEERA the role of Tonbridge Town Centre as an important transport hub or interchange should be fully recognised in the advice given to SEERA. This was the adopted position because of the need to increase accessibility by additional transportation investment and the potential for employment and appropriate commercial development in the central area of Tonbridge.
- 1.4.1 It is understood that there is also recognition within Tunbridge Wells Borough Council of the advantages of the two towns together being recognised as a Regional Hub. From the point of view of Tonbridge inclusion as a Regional Hub should bring with it increased opportunities to attract investment in transportation and in particular public transport improvements. As a Regional Hub it is recognised that the towns would be a point for encouraging employment and

appropriate commercial development and all of this is consistent with the emerging Tonbridge Central Area master plan. The additional work prepared to date by officers supporting the Member Steering Group has advanced a case in support of a Regional Hub but only on the basis that it is recognised that Tonbridge in particular is highly constrained at the periphery of the urban area not least by metropolitan green belt and the opportunities for outward expansion are severely limited. On this basis and subject to further development of the case through the Member Steering Group it is recommended that the Council support the identification of Tonbridge/Tunbridge Wells as a Regional Hub in the South East Plan.

- 1.4.2 If there are any other matters that Members wish to raise this will be an opportune moment prior to the Member level Steering Group taking place on the 2 November which will in turn inform the County Council's final position in its advice to SEERA.

1.5 Recommendation

- 1.5.1 The emerging position of other authorities in the Rest of Kent Area **BE NOTED** as far as housing provision is concerned and that the previous qualifications identified by Cabinet in respect of the Maidstone position **BE CONFIRMED**. Kent County Council and Maidstone Borough Council **BE REQUESTED** to provide more information on the potential strategic location of development in and around Maidstone in meeting Option 2 in the consultation document and in particular the County Council **BE ASKED** to strengthen the need to retain the strategic gap between Maidstone and the Medway Gap in submitting its advice to SEERA.
- 1.5.2 The emerging policy for the Rest of Kent Area **BE SUPPORTED** subject to final editing and drafting.
- 1.5.3 Support **BE GIVEN** to the role of Tonbridge/Tunbridge Wells being identified as a Regional Hub on the basis identified in this report.

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

Background papers:

Nil

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