

**TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**PLANNING and TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD**

**23 May 2005**

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

**Part 1- Public**

**Matters for Information**

**1 THE SOUTH EAST PLAN**

**Summary**

**This report provides an update on progress with the South East Plan and in particular outlines the working arrangements for the further work currently underway on the sub-regions including district level housing provisions.**

**1.1 Background**

1.1.1 At the last meeting of the Board a detailed report was made on the draft South East Plan published by the South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA). The report made to the Board and the covering letter communicating the Borough Council's response to SEERA is attached (**Annex 1**) for Members information.

1.1.2 As Members will appreciate there has been much said about the way in which SEERA has handled the consultation on this very important statutory regional planning document. Nevertheless, SEERA's Regional Planning Committee will consider the consultation response and debate the strategy and the scale of growth at a meeting on the 13 June. Subsequently, the Regional Assembly meeting in Plenary Session on the 13 July will determine the scale of development for the region and the sub-regions.

**1.2 Sub-Regional Work and District Based Development Provisions**

1.2.1 In the meantime SEERA has requested principal local authorities (County Councils and Unitary Councils) to provide detailed advice on a district-level basis for the sub-regions on likely available land supply for future housing.

1.2.2 In Kent there are three sub-regions. Kent Thames Gateway, East Kent and Ashford, the Rest of Kent. For each of these sub-regions Member and officer groups have been established to oversee the submission of further advice to SEERA. Clearly Tonbridge & Malling have a keen interest in the work of the Thames Gateway Group and have retained a firm involvement in that group. However, the main focus for us is on the work being overseen by the Rest of Kent group we have been representing the Council in that forum.

- 1.2.3 The programme issued by SEERA requires initial technical work particularly on housing supply to be submitted by the 6 June. For the Rest of Kent area SEERA has indicated that they do not wish to receive further information on affordable housing, employment forecasts and growth and key infrastructure projects. However, the Rest of Kent Members group has quite properly taken the view that this is information that they do wish to assemble for the area and draw to SEERA's attention as it has a very close relationship with the housing provision issues.
- 1.2.4 SEERA has set up a task group of its own to monitor progress and audit the methodology for all of this work.

### **1.3 Technical Work and Public Consultation**

- 1.3.1 It is also expected by SEERA that the principal local authorities in close liaison with district councils will give advanced notice during May and June of a period of public consultation on this sub-regional material that is set to take place for a six-week period in September and October. In advance of this, the expectation of SEERA is that certain key stakeholders such as infrastructure and service providers will be invited to participate in the formative process.
- 1.3.2 All of this presents another very tight programme. However, this is the first time in the south-east plan process where there is an opportunity to make an input from a 'bottom up' approach. To this extent it is important that the effort is made in the next few months to ensure that the best technical information on housing land supply, employment forecast and infrastructure requirements is put forward and that specific local circumstances are for the first time made plain.
- 1.3.3 A particular concern has been raised about the arrangements for public consultation in the autumn. This whole process is, of course, in the ownership of SEERA. However, it is the principal local authorities in conjunction with the district councils who have been asked to take the lead on the public consultation exercise and in particular host a public meeting in every district council area. It is extremely unlikely that a SEERA representative will be available at all such events and the opportunity for confusion by the public is considerable. Moreover the timing will mean that this consultation will run in parallel with the modifications to the Kent & Medway Structure Plan and similar exercises on the Local Development Frameworks of many of the district councils.
- 1.3.4 Nevertheless, there is an opportunity to make it clear that the local authorities at this time are responding to the proposals of SEERA contained in the South East Plan and are taking the opportunity to put forward some meaningful information into the process.
- 1.3.5 SEERA has made it clear that the work on the district level housing provisions must be presented in the context of the options for future housing provision currently published in the consultation draft of the South East Plan. For Members reference the various options for the sub-regions in Kent were set out in a table on

page 4 para. 1.5.3 of the report to the last meeting which is attached. At the time of the consultation the Borough Council made the overriding point that the figures were not derived from local circumstances and analysis.

- 1.3.6 The technical work to assist the Rest of Kent Member's group is being undertaken by district and county council officers across the county. Our officers have been closely involved in this work to ensure that the information ultimately presented to SEERA reflects the Council's own work in terms of its existing local plan, the Urban Capacity Study and other work that is informing the emerging Local Development Framework. In this way it is hoped that SEERA will get a clearer picture of the real position for Tonbridge & Malling and indeed, other districts having followed a similar approach, for the whole of the Rest of Kent area.

#### **1.4 Conclusion**

- 1.4.1 This report is to inform the Board that we are making a positive contribution to this process by way of putting forward technical information to properly inform SEERA. Whether the outcome of that process produces a satisfactory outcome as far as district level development provisions and other strategic policies are concerned is to be seen in due course.
- 1.4.2 We await to hear what arrangements the County Council will be suggesting to meet SEERA's requirements for the consultation process in the autumn, but it is proposed that the districts whilst taking a role in assisting the County Council should do all they can to point out that their position is one of responding and providing information to SEERA rather than in promoting the South East Plan process as a whole.

Background papers:

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Nil

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