

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
PLANNING and TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD

24 October 2005

Report of the Director of Planning & Transportation

Part 1- Public

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

1 TOWN LOCK AREA, TONBRIDGE – ENHANCEMENT PROPOSALS

Summary

The purpose of this report is twofold:

- **to seek endorsement of the partnership between the Council, the Environment Agency and others to develop and implement enhancements to the Town Lock area, and**
- **to seek approval of outline proposals for the purpose of public consultation.**

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 The area around Town Lock in Tonbridge was initially identified for enhancement in November 2002 in the context of Council and Environment Agency policies promoting improved public access to the riverside.
- 1.1.2 Meetings between the Council's planning, engineering and leisure services officers and representatives of the Environment Agency, the Medway Valley Countryside Partnership and the Kent County Council Public Rights of Way team led to the drafting of an enhancement brief for the area. This was considered by Area Planning Committee No 1 on 6 November 2003, and approved for the purposes of consultation by Cabinet on 26 November 2005. As a result of this process, the Tonbridge Town Lock Area Enhancement Brief was adopted as supplementary planning guidance in April 2004.
- 1.1.3 It is intended that the Council and its partners should continue with this partnership, and also that the Council should contribute both financial and staff resources towards the design and procurement of enhancements to this area which complement the wider work on a future development framework for the town centre.

1.1.4 As the landowner, the Environment Agency has engaged landscape architects David Huskisson Associates to prepare outline proposals for two of the areas included in the brief:

- Area A, the hard-surfaced area immediately adjacent to the lock on the southern bank of the river, adjacent to Medway Wharf Road, and
- Area B(i), the undeveloped and overgrown area immediately opposite the lock on the northern bank.

Should a phased approach be taken to the enhancements, there is a presumption that works to Area A will be implemented before those to Area B(i). Indeed at this stage Area B(i), is an indicative scheme and will be influenced by the nature and scale of development proposals that are likely to emerge on adjacent land as part of the town centre master planning work.

1.1.5 Conceptual drawings showing the proposals have now been produced, and are attached at **Annex 1**. Larger copies of the drawings will be on display at the meeting.

1.2 The Outline Proposals

1.2.1 The outline proposals for both areas have been drawn up in accordance with the guidance in the Tonbridge Town Lock Area Enhancement Brief, the overall aims of the proposals being to improve public access to the riverside and to create attractive, high-quality open spaces for informal recreation close to the town centre.

1.2.2 Area A encompasses the area immediately adjacent to Town Lock on the southern side of the river, the lock itself, the small island, weir and sluice. Proposals for this area must maintain the operational integrity of the lock, and should also reflect the function and history of the area. Key features of the proposals for Area A include:

- Resurfacing the existing hardstanding areas with block paving to provide an even and attractive surface, with stone sett features which reflect the appearance and function of the lock.
- An avenue of trees creating a semi-permeable screen between the riverside land and Medway Wharf Road and providing structure, height and colour.
- Seating, lighting, litter bins and railings of high quality contemporary design, aligned with the avenue of trees to create a barrier permeable to pedestrians but restricting vehicular access. These replace the existing fence between Area A and Medway Wharf Road.

- Informal seating provided by a low flood defence wall and a grass verge alongside the river.
- An architectural pavilion housing boating facilities and telemetry equipment. This replaces the wooden shed and steel cabinet which currently serve these purposes.
- A landing stage incorporating moorings for boats using the lock and access for canoeists.
- The opportunity for a public art piece or informal play sculpture to act as a focal point.

1.2.3 Area B(i) is identified as an informal open recreation area in the Local Plan. The area is currently overgrown and inaccessible to the public, and offers scope for creating a greater diversity of wildlife habitats. Key features of the proposals for Area B(i) include:

- A footbridge across the Mill Stream, providing access to the area from Lyons Crescent.
- A pathway forming a circular route around an open space with seating and picnic tables. The pathway would be surfaced with coloured macadam, which is resistant to flood damage and provides a smooth surface suitable for wheelchair users.
- Re-profiling of the banks of the stream and river to provide additional water storage, and stabilisation works using willow hurdles and reed bed planting to protect the banks from erosion whilst providing enhanced wildlife habitats.
- Buffer planting behind the reed beds to restrict access and minimise disturbance to wildlife whilst allowing some views of the river from the footpath.
- Selective clearance of the existing woodland and planting of oak and ash to form a native woodland canopy. Understorey planting with native trees and shrubs, including localised clumps of brambles to encourage otters.
- Swathes of wild flowers creating a colourful display throughout the seasons and providing habitats for insects.
- Boundary fencing between Area B(i) and the adjacent land, Area B(ii), which is identified in the Local Plan as a site appropriate for light industrial use and/or retail warehousing.
- Opportunities for future links: (a) to Cannon Lane through Area B(ii), and (b) to the south side of the river, either across the weir or via a new bridge.

1.3 Public Consultation

1.3.1 Subject to Cabinet approval, it is proposed to consult the public for their views on the proposals by inviting them to attend an exhibition to be held in Tonbridge later in the year.

1.3.2 In parallel with the exhibition, letters and copies of the proposal drawings will be sent to the following groups inviting their views:

- Tonbridge Civic Society
- Medway River Users Association
- Inland Waterways Association
- Cyclists Touring Club
- Police Crime Reduction Unit
- West Kent Chamber of Commerce
- British Canoe Union/Tonbridge Canoe Club
- Tonbridge Angling and Fish Preservation Society
- Ramblers Association/Weald Way Steering Group
- Tonbridge Town Lands & Richard Mylls Charity
- KCC Recreation and Access
- Adjacent landowners.

1.3.3 This consultation exercise will enable the Council and its partners to demonstrate that the proposals have the support of the local community, a key factor in making applications for external funding. Consultation will also enable the outline proposals to be refined in the light of the comments and suggestions received, ensuring that the detailed designs can be prepared which reflect the needs and wishes of the whole community.

1.4 Legal Implications

1.4.1 It is possible that the Council will need to enter into an agreement regarding the roles of the partners and the future maintenance of the land; however, this will be determined at a later date.

1.5 Financial Implications

1.5.1 The Environment Agency's cost estimate for implementing the totality of the proposals is £950,000, which breaks down as follows:

- Area A - £400,000
 - Area B(i) - £550,000
- 1.5.2 In view of the sums required, the whole project will only be deliverable if the Council and its partners can assemble a portfolio of funding from internal and external sources. These will potentially include capital funding committed by the Council, the Environment Agency and Kent County Council, developer contributions under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act, and funding from external bodies.
- 1.5.3 Cabinet at its meeting on 22 June 2005 endorsed contributions to the Special Projects Reserve including the sum of £100,000 for Tonbridge Environmental Schemes. Given the significant contribution which these proposals could make by setting a standard for future development in Tonbridge town centre and the use of the Riverside. Members may in due course in the context of the capital plan wish to consider whether further resources should be made available.
- 1.5.4 The Environment Agency had £25,000 allocated in its 2006/2007 budget for improvements to boaters' facilities, and is also investigating whether it would be in a position to contribute additional funds towards the project.
- 1.5.5 Kent County Council officers are researching the possibility of obtaining funding for the project on the basis that the long-distance public rights of way the Weald Way and the Medway Valley Path run along the riverside path from Cannon Bridge and then follow Medway Wharf Road. Monies have also been allocated to the resurfacing of Medway Wharf Road, and Kent Highways officers are investigating whether this money can be spent in conjunction with the enhancement scheme.
- 1.5.6 The redevelopment of sites close to the Town Lock area offers the opportunity to secure contributions from developers towards the cost of implementing the enhancement proposals.
- 1.5.7 Council and Environment Agency staff are currently working to identify prospective sources of external funding and to research application requirements with a view to making applications at the appropriate time. Prospective sources of funding include:
- The Big Lottery
 - Landfill Tax Credits (WREN)
 - Aggregates Levy – sustainability fund
 - Tonbridge Town Lands and Richard Mylls Charity, which has already offered the sum of £1,600 towards the cost of providing seats as part of the proposals and may be willing to make additional sums available.

- Medway Valley Countryside Partnership
- The Waterways Trust

1.6 Conclusion

- 1.6.1 There is clearly some way to go in assembling the funding for this project. However, it is good practice to establish a long term plan that is capable of being implemented in phases. A start on the scheme in the short term will be a good sign of positive commitment for the Town Centre Project as a whole. The project will need to be kept under close review but support for the overall approach from the local community is the next step.

1.7 Recommendations

- 1.7.1 That the work undertaken to develop proposals for the Tonbridge Town Lock area and to assemble a portfolio of funding for them **BE NOTED**.
- 1.7.2 That the partnership between the Council, the Environment Agency and others for this purpose **BE ENDORSED**.
- 1.7.3 That the outline proposals **BE ENDORSED** for the purposes of public consultation.

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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