

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

**27 February 2006**

**Report of the Director of Planning & Transportation**

**Part 1- Public**

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

**1 KENT DOWNS AONB LANDSCAPE DESIGN HANDBOOK**

**Summary**

**To adopt the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Handbook as a material consideration for development control.**

**1.1 Outline of the Document**

- 1.1.1 The Kent Downs AONB Unit has published a Landscape Design Handbook following consultation on a draft document in 2003/04. The Handbook is produced to an extremely high quality standard of presentation. Its purpose is to provide practical, readily accessible design guidance to contribute to the conservation and enhancement of the special characteristics of the AONB as a whole, and the distinctiveness of its individual character areas. The guidelines are not meant to inhibit innovative design, but to provide a sound framework and information base from which sympathetic design can be developed.
- 1.1.2 Copies of the document can be viewed, on request, at reception in the Gibson Building and will be available for inspection on the evening of the meeting. It will be my intention to include access to it on the Council's Website once it is adopted.
- 1.1.3 The Handbook is in four sections. Section 1 sets the context. Section 2 incorporates a number of AONB-wide landscape design principles for:-
- New built development
  - Infrastructure and communications
  - Minor road improvements
  - Rural diversification
  - Recreation and tourism
  - Woodlands, hedges and trees

- Rivers, ponds and wetlands
- Chalk grassland, acid grassland/heathlands and arable field margins
- Historic landscapes
- Countryside furniture
- Hard materials
- Planting species

1.1.4 Section 3 relates to landscape character area design guidance. Tonbridge and Malling Borough contains part of the following character areas-

- Sevenoaks Greensand Ridge (in the vicinity of Ightham)
- West Kent Downs (west of the Medway)
- Kemsing Vale (in the vicinity of Wrotham)
- The Medway Valley
- Mid Kent Downs (east of the Medway)
- Low Weald (in the vicinity of Shipbourne)

1.1.5 Section 4 sets out detailed guidance on:-

- Materials
- Fencing, gates and timber structures
- Woodland and hedgerows

1.1.6 The document contains useful guidance and design advice for dealing with planning applications within the Kent Downs AONB. The Handbook was prepared in consultation with your officers and stakeholders within the AONB including Parish Councils, landowners and farmers. It was originally intended that the document should be adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance. However, as explained in the report on Plaxtol Parish Design Statement, the new planning system makes it difficult procedurally to progress the document as a formal Supplementary Document at this stage in the LDF process. I therefore, recommend, as with the case of the Parish Design Statement, that the Council adopts it as a material consideration for development control.

## **1.2 Legal Implications**

- 1.2.1 Adopting the Design Handbook as a material consideration for development control will enable its content to be considered in assessing planning applications in the AONB.

## **1.3 Financial and Value for Money Considerations**

- 1.3.1 In terms of value for money, an extremely useful document has been prepared at no direct expense to the Council other than its normal annual contribution to the AONB Unit and a small amount of officer time.

## **1.4 Risk Assessment**

- 1.4.1 Since the document only provides guidance, it is unlikely to be the sole determining factor in any appeal decision.

## **1.5 Recommendation**

- 1.5.1 The Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Landscape Design Handbook **BE ADOPTED** as a material consideration for development control.

Background papers:

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Nil

File ref: 17-7-18

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