

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
PLANNING and TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD

23 October 2006

Report of the Director of Planning & Transportation

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 SOUTH EAST PLAN

Summary

To update members on the matters and arrangements for the Examination in Public into the Draft South East Plan.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 At the last meeting of the Board I reported on a number of issues relating to the South East Plan and in particular further evidence that the Government Office has commissioned concerning housing provisions. For convenience I attach my last report. **Annex 1.**

1.2 Arrangements and Issues for the Public Examination

1.2.1 Consultation on the draft South East Plan prepared by the South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA) took place between 31 March and 23 June. The Panel appointed to conduct the Public Examination have analysed the representations made and selected the matters for discussion and compiled a list of participants for the examination.

1.2.2 The examination is due to commence on 28 November in Woking. In the period prior to Christmas the subjects for debate will focus on region-wide matters. Amongst these matters will be the overall development provisions for the region.

1.2.3 The Examination then has three sub-regional venues at Chichester, Maidstone and Reading in order that the Panel can consider sub-regional matters and in particular hear from those parties with a direct local concern about their areas. The session in Maidstone is due to run from 6–15 February and will deal with the Thames Gateway, Ashford and East Kent and the Rest of Kent sub region which includes Tonbridge and Malling. The time allocated to the Rest of Kent area is currently half a day and the Council has been included on the list of participants.

1.2.4 The matters to be dealt with in detail during the Rest of Kent session have been identified as follows:

- Does the strategy take proper account of the capacity of towns/locations in the rest of Medway, Dartford and Gravesham and Sevenoaks, and Tonbridge & Malling, Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells for sustainable development (including Policy H1 bearing in mind recent building rates, existing commitments and local housing needs)?
- How does the role of Maidstone as a regional hub relate to the Thames Gateway (Policy KTG11)?
- What is the role of Tonbridge-Tunbridge Wells as a double-regional-hub (Policy CC8b)?
- How does the policy on Strategic Gaps relate to the Green Belt in Kent and can it be justified (Policies KTG3 and KTG11)?

1.2.5 Officers will be liaising with colleagues in other authorities in preparing statements to defend the Council's position and objectives in respect of these matters. In particular we will be making sure that the Panel are aware of the nature of the Council's considered approach to development planning, concerns about infrastructure and environmental protection and the need to promote Tonbridge town centre as part of the identified hub in order to secure investment priority.

1.3 Regional Housing Provisions

1.3.1 Members will recall that concern was raised about the propriety of the 'evidence' being put forward by consultants on behalf of the Government which looks at hypothetical options for housing development in the region. At the Examination In Public Preliminary meeting on 7 September the Panel referred to the report prepared by the consultants and described it as a "useful addition" but at the same time noted that it did not advocate or justify any particular option. It is interesting to note that the consultants are not included as a participant at the Examination in respect of the debates planned to deal with Housing Levels and Spatial Distribution.

1.3.2 In their response to the Draft Plan the Government Office of the South East has expressed the view that higher options should have been taken further by SEERA but GOSE do not advocate any of the options put forward in the consultants report. The presumption is that GOSE feel that this is beyond their remit and would simply be inappropriate for the reasons highlighted in my earlier report.

1.3.3 To this extent the weight that can be given to the consultants report by the Panel is reduced insofar as it is not to be actively used by any party other than presumably as a reference document. Work is in hand, primarily by the County Council officers assisted by others, to put in place a careful critique of the report in the event that it is referred to in aid of cases put to the Panel by other parties. I have, and continue to take, soundings from senior representatives from other authorities.

1.4 Legal Implications

1.4.1 There are none directly arising from this report.

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.5.1 There are none directly arising from this report.

1.6 Risk Assessment

1.6.1 The primary risk in this matter relates to the possible outcome of the Examination Panel's report and the implication for the development strategy for the Borough.

Background papers:

Draft South East Regional Spatial Strategy
List of Matters and Participants for the Examination in
Public

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