

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
PLANNING and TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD

23 October 2006

Report of the Director of Planning & Transportation

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet

1 CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISALS

With the emerging Local Development Framework, the introduction of new Best Value Performance Indicators and increased development pressure in recent years in and around some of the conservation areas, the opportunity is at hand for the Council to review its approach to the management of its conservation areas. This report sets out a way forward, working within the parameters of existing resources.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 At the Development Planning Transportation Committee on 27 January 2000, a prioritised list of areas for the preparation of Conservation area appraisals was agreed. These were East Malling, Aylesford, Snodland, Paddlesworth, Ditton, West Malling and Tonbridge, with Ivy Hatch and Mill Street East Malling to be carried out first as pilot studies.

1.1.2 Since this time, all but Tonbridge and Aylesford have been completed and adopted by the Council. The analysis and map work for Tonbridge is nearing completion and the Aylesford maps have been prepared. Unfortunately the remaining work on conservation area appraisals has not progressed since the departure of the lead officer in March 2005 and the need to focus all energies on the production of the Local Development Framework. However, the introduction of Best Value Performance Indicators on Conservation Areas and their management has once again brought this issue to the fore.

1.1.3 **Annex 1** of this report contains a list of all 59 of the Borough's conservation areas and provides information on their size and date of designation, review and whether or not they have Conservation area appraisals. Members will be aware that the Conservation Areas in the Borough vary greatly in terms of their size, nature and characteristics and indeed the development pressure that they face.

1.1.4 This report looks only at the existing Conservation Areas in the Borough. The consideration of new Conservation Areas or Areas of Special Character will be

addressed in the Environmental Protection Development Plan Document within the next tranche of the Local Development Framework.

1.2 Conservation Areas, Conservation Area Appraisals and Conservation Management Plans

- 1.2.1 Local planning authorities have a responsibility to designate as conservation areas any areas of special architectural or historic interest the character of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. Conservation Areas are widely recognised for the contribution they make to our cultural inheritance, economic well-being and quality of life.
- 1.2.2 Conservation area appraisals include a more specific assessment of significance and some analysis of how that significance is vulnerable as the basis for defining policies for preserving or enhancing their character.
- 1.2.3 Of the 59 Conservation Areas in the Borough, 25 have Conservation Area Studies or Appraisals although only 8 of these 25 have been prepared since 2000. Some 47 of the remaining Conservation Areas have a 'Conservation Leaflet' that provides a brief overview of the key features and characteristics, setting out the meaning and effects of Conservation Area designation. The Council's general leaflet on Conservation Areas is also widely available.
- 1.2.4 Conservation area appraisals should be regarded as the first step in a dynamic process, the aim of which is to preserve and enhance the character of the designated area, and to provide a basis for making suitable decisions about its future through the development of management proposals. Appraisals provide the opportunity to re-assess the designated area and to evaluate and record its special interest. Importantly appraisals can usefully inform and be a material consideration in decisions on planning applications.
- 1.2.5 Management Plans offer guidance such as where and how to enhance the character and historic fabric with the use of traditional materials. They should be realistic, bearing in mind the resources that are likely to be available and define priorities for action specific to the needs and nature of the conservation area concerned. They should also include a programme setting out targets and milestones for the recommended actions. They should also be informed by local consultation and the opportunity for local partnership should be recognised in formulating actions.
- 1.2.6 English Heritage considers that Conservation area appraisals need to be reviewed regularly, not least because of the requirement in BVPI 219b for them to be up to date. English Heritage states that ideally, existing Appraisals should be reviewed every five years. This does not mean starting again from the beginning, especially where there has been little significant change in the area concerned and the existing appraisal is sound. The outcome of the five-yearly review might therefore, result in an addendum to the existing Appraisal, recording what has changed, confirming (or defining) the special interest that warrants designation,

setting out any new recommendations and revising the management strategy. The updated appraisal can then be re-adopted by the Council.

1.3 Conservation Areas, BVPI 219 and the Local Development Framework

- 1.3.1 BVPI 219 specifically relates to preserving and enhancing the special character of Conservation Areas. There are 3 parts to this BVPI, firstly to specify the number of conservation areas in the Borough, secondly to specify the percentage of conservation areas in the Borough with an up to date character appraisal (i.e. adopted within the last 5 years), and thirdly, to specify the percentage of conservation areas with published management proposals. Unless a programme for dealing with the preparation, adoption and re-adoption of the Borough's Conservation area appraisals is carried out, the Council's score for this BVPI will be low. That said there is no indication as yet whether any targets will be set for this BVPI or that it will be used for the purposes of grant allocation or comparative performance purposes.
- 1.3.2 In February 2006, English Heritage published guidance on the preparation of Conservation area appraisals and Management Plans following the introduction of the new BVPIs.
- 1.3.3 The guidance categorically states that conservation areas appraisals and management plans cannot be Supplementary Planning Documents as part of the Local Development Framework. However, up-to-date conservation appraisal and management plan work can provide the background to feed into the Local Development Framework Development Plan Documents by informing policies on the historic environment. Supplementary Planning Documents could be used to detail conservation area policies for major or complex conservation areas or to produce a general conservation area policy Supplementary Planning Document covering all or part of the Borough as appropriate. Any Supplementary Planning Documents must be identified and programmed in the Local Development Scheme and there must be an adopted 'parent' policy from which the Supplementary Planning Document can 'hang'. Supplementary Planning Documents are also subject to Sustainability Appraisal.
- 1.3.4 Conservation area appraisals and management plans are subject to consultation and the process of preparing these should be done in partnership with key stakeholders, such as land owners and local groups.

1.4 Tonbridge & Malling Borough Conservation Areas – Next Steps

- 1.4.1 The Borough is fortunate to have such a wealth of areas that are so historically and architecturally significant. Annex A contains a full list of the Borough's Conservation Areas. Many of them are within the Green Belt, the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or within other special landscape areas so development pressure is very limited. On the other hand, there are some conservation areas where there have been pressure both within and adjoining the Conservation Areas. **Annex 2** contains the results of the brief review of the

Borough's Conservation Areas, setting out recommendations for how the Conservation area appraisals should be progressed.

- 1.4.2 The Conservation Areas were last fully reviewed as part of the production of the Local Plan that was adopted in 1998. This current review will feed into the Local Development Framework, particularly those policies in the second tranche for the Environmental Protection Development Plan Document. The review of all conservation area appraisals and management plans should be done on a five year rolling programme as a matter of good practice to provide a formal mechanism to ensure that conservation policies are relevant and up to date. Conservation area appraisals and Management plans can then be re-adopted as appropriate.
- 1.4.3 Following investigation and desktop analysis of the Conservation Areas in the Borough, it is clear that they fall into four categories and could be dealt with in the following way:
- 1) Those that are smaller scale, more rural in nature and where development pressure in and around the conservation area is limited. For these Conservation area appraisals should be carried out and followed up with Management Plans as resources permit.
 - 2) Those Conservation Areas that are more urban in nature, where development pressure in and around them is significant or where change is likely to occur in the short, medium or long term. These Conservation Areas are more vulnerable and a programme for the re-adoption or adoption of Conservation area appraisals and subsequent Management Plans should be carried out as a matter of priority.
 - 3) The third category relates to the 8 Conservation Areas that already have relatively recent Conservation area appraisals. These have been reviewed and are, with the exception of Mill Street, East Malling considered still to be valid and can therefore be re-adopted.
 - 4) The fourth category is those Conservation Areas where there have been some changes and further investigation is required as it may be appropriate to review the Conservation Area boundaries. The Conservation Areas affected would be Holborough Mill, Snodland, and Mill Street, East Malling, and Quarry Hill, Tonbridge. This work would follow from above in terms of priority.
- 1.4.4 There has been a significant amount of redevelopment around the Mill Street area in East Malling, and there is scope for further investigation as to how this redevelopment has impacted upon the Conservation Area.
- 1.4.5 The Local Development Framework identifies Old Holborough, Snodland as a Major Developed Site in the Green Belt. Part of this site falls within the Holborough Mill Conservation Area. As there are derelict and some listed

buildings in the Conservation Area, further investigation should be carried out with a view to preparing a Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plans to address the issues. This will be done in partnership with landowners and other stakeholders as appropriate.

- 1.4.6 Of the 51 Conservation Areas that do not have Conservation area appraisals, the majority are in rural locations with Green Belt status and/or are within the Kent Downs AONB. Whilst there is no significant pressure for change in these areas, Appraisals and Management Plans should still be prepared to ensure their protection and enhancement in a comprehensive and pro-active way. Conservation area appraisals and Management Plans for these areas are non-urgent and should be carried out on an as and when basis as resources allow.
- 1.4.7 On the other hand, Tonbridge Conservation Area is particularly complex, and bearing in mind the issues facing the town, a continuation of the preliminary work on the Conservation Area Appraisal and the preparation of a Management Plan is recommended as a top priority. Likewise, Aylesford has experienced large scale redevelopment and a review of the Conservation Area and production of a full Appraisal and Management Plan is also recommended as a priority.
- 1.4.8 With £50,000 of Planning Delivery Grant earmarked for conservation area work, specialist consultants should be appointed to bring forward an up to date conservation area appraisal and Management Plan for Tonbridge and Aylesford Conservation Areas as a priority. Conservation area appraisals and review of appraisals should then be carried out for Mill Street, East Malling and for Snodland and Holborough Mill. Conservation area appraisals for the remaining areas should be carried out on an as-and-when basis.

1.5 Legal Implications

- 1.5.1 There are no legal implications as the designation of conservation areas falls within the Council's remit.

1.6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.6.1 Preparation of Conservation area appraisals and Management Plan are good practice and provide value for money in the protection and enhancement of Conservation area appraisals. Funding for the work outlined in this report will come from existing budgets and the Planning Delivery Grant.

1.7 Risk Assessment

- 1.7.1 Up to date Conservation area appraisals and Management Plans provide robust information to inform emerging policies and assist with planning application decisions.

1.8 Recommendations

- 1.8.1 Conservation area appraisals and management plans **BE PREPARED** for Tonbridge and Aylesford as a priority using funding from the Planning Delivery Grant.
- 1.8.2 The Conservation area appraisals for Ditton, East Malling Village, Ivy Hatch, Paddlesworth, Stansted, Snodland and West Malling **BE RE-ADOPTED**.
- 1.8.3 Further investigation on the need to review Mill Street, East Malling Conservation Area Appraisal and the need to prepare a Conservation Area Appraisal for the Holborough Mill area **BE CARRIED OUT**.
- 1.8.4 A programme for the preparation of Conservation Areas Appraisals for the remaining areas **BE PREPARED** once the above priorities have been addressed.
- 1.8.5 A review of all conservation areas, appraisals and management plans **BE CARRIED OUT** on a five-year rolling programme.

Background papers:

PPG15 Planning & the Historic Environment
 English Heritage 'Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals' February 2006
 English Heritage 'Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas' February 2006.

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