



Report to Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council

by Laura Graham BSc MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State
for Communities and Local Government

The Planning Inspectorate
Temple Quay House
2 The Square
Temple Quay
Bristol BS1 6PN
(0117 372 8000

Date 5th February 2008

PLANNING AND COMPULSORY PURCHASE ACT 2004

SECTION 20

REPORT ON THE EXAMINATION INTO THE TONBRIDGE CENTRAL AREA ACTION PLAN DEVELOPMENT PLAN DOCUMENT

Document submitted for examination on 1 September 2006

Examination hearings held on 23 and 24 October 2007

1 Introduction and Overall Conclusion

- 1.1 Under the terms of Section 20(5) of the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (the 2004 Act), the purpose of the independent examination of a development plan document (DPD) is to determine:
 - (a) whether it satisfies the requirements of s19 and s24(1) of the 2004 Act, the regulations under s17(7), and any regulations under s36 relating to the preparation of the document; and
 - (b) whether it is sound.
- 1.2 This report contains my assessment of the Tonbridge Central Area Action Plan DPD in terms of the above matters, along with my recommendations and the reasons for them, as required by s20(7) of the 2004 Act.
- 1.3 My role is to consider the soundness of the submitted Tonbridge Central Area Action Plan DPD against each of the tests of soundness set out in PPS12. In line with national policy, this DPD is presumed to be sound unless it is shown to be otherwise by evidence considered during the examination. The changes I have specified in this binding report are made only where there is a clear need to amend the document in the light of the tests of soundness in PPS12. None of these changes should materially alter the substance of the overall plan and its policies, or undermine the sustainability appraisal and participatory processes already undertaken.
- 1.4 My report firstly considers the procedural tests, and then deals with the relevant matters and issues considered during the examination in terms of the tests of conformity, coherence, consistency and effectiveness. References to library documents are made thus (RD 1.1). My overall conclusion is that the Tonbridge Central Area Action Plan is sound, provided it is changed in the ways specified. The principal change required is to include more detailed information on monitoring and delivery to meet test of soundness viii.
- 1.5 Appendix 1 to the report sets out all the detailed changes I consider necessary, for the reasons given in this report, to ensure that the plan meets all the tests of soundness. Many of these follow from work done by the Council in response to representations on the Plan. Appendix 2 comprises minor changes to the submitted DPD in order to clarify, correct and update various parts of the text, and I endorse them on a general basis in the interests of clarity and accuracy. In the event that any minor spelling or grammatical mistakes remain to be corrected, I am content for this to be undertaken by the Council, so long as the underlying meaning of the plan is not altered.

2 Procedural Tests

- 2.1 The Tonbridge Central Area Action Plan DPD is contained within the Council's Local Development Scheme. The document was submitted for examination in September 2006, together with the Core Strategy and Development Land Allocations DPDs. In the then current version of the LDS (April 2006), it is shown as having an examination hearings date of July 2007. However, I indicated that I would examine and report on the Core Strategy before proceeding with the other DPDs. The examination hearings on the TCAAP took place in October 2007, and I note that this is reflected in the 2007 version of the LDS. Test i of paragraph 4.24 of PPS12 is met.
- 2.2 The Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) has been found sound by the Secretary of State and was formally adopted by the Council before the examination hearings took place. It is evident from the documents submitted by the Council, including the Regulation 28 and 31 Statements and its Self Assessment, that the Council has met the requirements as set out in the Regulations.
- 2.3 The Council commissioned independent consultants to undertake a sustainability appraisal of its first tranche of DPDs (RD 6.1 – 6.8). I am satisfied that as a result of the scoping exercise carried out, there is no need for an Appropriate Assessment [Habitats Directive].
- 2.4 Accordingly, I consider that the procedural tests i, ii and iii have all been satisfied. In addition, the South East England Regional Assembly has indicated that the DPD is in general conformity with the approved Regional Spatial Strategy (RPG9 and Alterations RD 2.1) and with the emerging RSS (RD 2.2).
- 2.5 The TCAAP seeks to address key concerns identified in the Tonbridge and Malling Community Strategy (RD 7.2), particularly in relation to the environment and managing traffic. I am satisfied that test v of paragraph 4.24 of PPS12 is met.

3 Conformity, Coherence, Consistency and Effectiveness Tests (tests iv, vi, - ix)

- 3.1 The TCAAP is derived from extensive work undertaken for the Council by a team of consultants to develop a Master Plan for Tonbridge Town Centre. The process of preparing the Master Plan was undertaken in the knowledge that it would also inform the contents of the TCAAP. It was, therefore, structured to conform with the requirements for the preparation of a Development Plan Document under the provisions of 2004 Act, including those relating to public consultation. A Preferred Options Report (RD 5.5) contains a summary of the physical analysis of the town centre, and establishes a spatial framework as a basis for testing the options set out in the document. This work led to the production of the Tonbridge Town Centre Master Plan (RD 7.29), and the TCAAP. It

also informed the vision for the future of the town centre, as set out in Policy CP23 of the Tonbridge and Malling Core Strategy (RD 5.15) which was adopted in September 2007. I am satisfied that the TCAAP is in general conformity with the adopted Core Strategy.

- 3.2 I have found that in order to fully understand the spatial strategy for the regeneration of the town centre, it is necessary to read the TCAAP in conjunction with the Master Plan. In view of the emphasis that is placed on spatial, rather than solely land use, planning in the preparation of Local Development Frameworks (test of soundness (iv)), I consider that a little more of the contextual information and the broader vision and strategy set out in the Master Plan could have been included in the TCAAP. However, that information is readily available in the Master Plan, and including it in the TCAAP could, arguably, lead to unnecessary repetition. In the circumstances, I am not recommending any changes to the Plan, but it is an approach that the Council should consider in future.
- 3.3 With a very few exceptions, the vision for Tonbridge town centre and the broad aims of the spatial strategy are not contentious. The matters and issues which I identified for the examination can be categorised into two main strands: those relating to development proposals; and those relating to traffic and transportation. These are not entirely discrete issues, and there is a degree of interrelationship between many of them, particularly those relating to the achievement of a sustainable transport strategy, and my report should be read as a whole.
- 3.4 I also raised concerns regarding test of soundness viii, which relates to implementation and monitoring, in a written briefing to the Council, and I deal with this under Matter 3 below.

Matter 1 Development Proposals

- 3.5 ***Issue 1 – Are the development proposals set out in Policy TCA11 (sites a – w) the most appropriate in all the circumstances?***
- 3.6 The development allocations set out Policy TCA11 are derived from the work undertaken during the Master Plan process, which considered the physical constraints and opportunities of the existing town centre, and the potential of individual sites to contribute to the overall vision for regenerating the town. There is an emphasis on mixed use development, which accords with the thrust of Government policy in Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning for Town Centres. The individual site allocations specify the structural elements, such as pedestrian or cycle access and public realm enhancements, whilst retaining reasonable flexibility about the precise mix of uses or activities. This offers scope for meeting a wide range of town centre activities, such as the needs of the evening economy, without being unduly prescriptive. Two of the

most important sites, the Botany and the station complex, are to be subject to development briefs, offering further opportunities for public consultation. I note that a Draft Botany Area Planning Brief (RD 7.30) was published in June 2007.

- 3.7 A number of representations make detailed criticisms of particular elements of the proposals, but such matters are best considered as detailed development proposals are brought forward. Other representations suggest alternative ways in which these sites could be developed. However, the proposals in Policy TCA11 have been developed through the masterplanning process and I find no convincing evidence to persuade me that any of the alternative proposals would be preferable. In particular, I am not persuaded that retail development should be encouraged in locations such as Avenue de Puy (TCA11(p)), which are away from the designated retail areas. To do so would risk damaging the Plan's strategy to consolidate new retail development where it will be complementary to the traditional High Street shops. However, I support Change 15, which would offer greater flexibility for development on this site by replacing the requirement for employment-generating uses with non-retail uses appropriate to a town centre location.
- 3.8 Subject to the inclusion of Change 15 of Appendix 1, I conclude that the plan is sound, having regard to tests of soundness vii and ix.
- 3.9 ***Issue 2 – Is the scale and form of proposed residential development appropriate and are the indicative figures a reasonable guide? Is the Plan consistent with Government guidance in PPS3?***
- 3.10 The amount of residential development proposed for the town centre was one of the matters which attracted most comment during public consultation. Whilst I note this concern, I am also mindful that Government policy encourages the efficient use of land, particularly in locations which have good access to public transport and community facilities and services. Good design is a key requirement in achieving a more efficient use of land without compromising the quality of the environment. The TCAAP stresses the importance of high quality design.
- 3.11 Whether or not a particular scheme constitutes good design will usually involve an element of subjective judgement. Rigid specifications of density limits or building heights may simply stifle innovative design solutions. A low density, low rise development does not necessarily guarantee an attractive development. Change 5 of Appendix 1 replaces a reference to draft PPS3 (which contained a reference to residential densities which is not found in the final draft of the document), with a more general reference to Government guidance. The Change also seeks higher densities for sites with good accessibility to public transport links, whereas previously it referred to sites in close proximity to Tonbridge Station. I note the concern that this could apply to sites throughout

the town centre, but that does not mean that the council will be obliged to accept schemes which do not meet other requirements. For example, within the Conservation Area, the statutory duty to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the special character or appearance of the Area will be an important consideration.

- 3.12 As I noted in my report on the Core Strategy (RD 5.14), the Borough has a healthy housing land supply. It does not rely heavily on sites within the TCAAP area to meet its housing target. However, such targets should not be viewed as a ceiling to growth, and making efficient use of land in the town centre will increase the amount of new housing available in a sustainable location. The provision of smaller units will also help to meet the needs identified in the Housing and Market Needs Assessment (RD 7.9). Paragraph 7.6.2 of the TCAAP makes it clear that the estimated capacity for development of the allocated sites is indicative and that the final schemes may vary.
- 3.13 I am satisfied that the design-led approach advocated in the TCAAP is the most appropriate in all the circumstances, that the indicative figures are a reasonable guide, and that the Plan is consistent with Government guidance. Subject to the inclusion of Change 5, it meets tests of soundness iv, vii and ix.
- 3.14 ***Issue 3 – Is the quantum and type of retail development proposed appropriate in all the circumstances?***
- 3.15 The amount of retail development proposed in the TCAAP is derived from studies carried out for the Council by independent consultants (RD 7.5). I am satisfied that the analysis undertaken provides a robust basis for the policies and proposals of the TCAAP in this respect. A key issue is the amount of expenditure originating within the catchment area of the town that can be retained (retained expenditure), bearing in mind the draw of nearby Tunbridge Wells and Maidstone. The report finds the town centre could support an additional 13,400 square metres of additional retail floorspace up to 2016, assuming a 10% increase in retained expenditure. The indicative figures in the Plan identify about 13,500 of additional retail space.
- 3.16 Tonbridge is relatively well-served for convenience shopping with two large food stores (Sainsbury and Waitrose), and a range of medium-sized and small units. Therefore, most of the additional demand is for comparison shopping floorspace. As the Plan points out, there may be potential for a higher increase in comparison shopping floorspace, if levels of expenditure retention can be increased.
- 3.17 An improved retail offer is a key element of the development strategy for Tonbridge. The Master Plan seeks to provide opportunities for new retail development which will be well

integrated with the existing High Street shops. Together with the proposed environmental enhancements, this should facilitate improved expenditure retention, as the town becomes a more attractive place to shop. I am satisfied that the plan provides the right framework within which the strategy can move forward in a co-ordinated fashion. The success of initial phases of development will need to be monitored and the strategy adjusted if necessary.

3.18 The Council has identified an error in the text of paragraph 2.2.4 of the Plan, which refers to the findings of the retail study. I am satisfied that Change 1 is necessary to ensure accuracy and consistency.

3.19 I am satisfied that the quantum and type of retail development proposed is appropriate and that, subject to the inclusion of Change 1, the plan meets tests of soundness vii and ix.

3.20 ***Issue 4 – Does the Plan adequately address the need for new and improved community facilities?***

3.21 The process of preparing the Master Plan identified a need for improved community facilities in Tonbridge. The proposals for the Botany area (Policy TCA11(a)) specify the provision of high quality, flexible community meeting space to replace that currently accommodated in the Angel Centre. Other proposals (for example the Tonbridge Library site (TCA11(h)) and River Lawn (TCA11(f)), are dependent upon the re-provision of alternative facilities in the town centre. The requirement for a new community facility has been carried forward into the draft Botany Area Planning Brief.

3.22 I am satisfied that the TCAAP contains a clear commitment to the provision of community facilities, and to a continuity of provision whilst development is underway. The main focus for this provision will be through the comprehensive redevelopment of the Botany Area. To go further and seek to specify individual uses or specific sites would be unduly inflexible. I am therefore satisfied that the Plan adequately addresses the need for new and improved community facilities, and meets tests of soundness vii and ix.

3.23 ***Issue 5 – Has adequate account been taken of the risks of flooding?***

3.24 Tonbridge's historic location on the River Medway creates a degree of tension between the desire to regenerate the town centre and the need to minimise flood risk. A Strategic Flood Risk Assessment has been prepared by the Council, in conjunction with the Environment Agency. The SFRA provides a framework within which individual sites can be considered. Policy TCA2 4(a) requires appropriate flood mitigation measures where demonstrated to be necessary by a Flood Risk Assessment.

- 3.25 The Environment Agency has raised no objections to the TCAAP and I am satisfied that the Plan takes adequate account of the risks of flooding and that tests vii and ix are met.
- 3.26 ***Issue 6 – Has adequate account been taken of infrastructure requirements to serve new development (notably water and sewerage), and of the impact of existing water treatment infrastructure on proposed new development?***
- 3.27 Most new development of any significant size will make demands on infrastructure and may necessitate increased provision. This is dealt with in general terms in Policy CP25 of the adopted Core Strategy and there is no need for this to be repeated in the TCAAP. However, a particular deficiency has been identified regarding sewerage provision in relation to some of the development sites identified under Policy TCA11. In these circumstances, I consider it would aid clarity to draw attention to these known deficiencies in the relevant sections of that Policy. I therefore consider Changes 6 - 14, 16 and 17 to be necessary.
- 3.28 Turning to the effect of the existing Waste Water Treatment Works, I note the concerns expressed by Southern Water regarding odour dispersion from the existing waste water treatment works, and its request that specific housing and mixed use sites should be deleted from the Plan. PPS23 identifies the need to separate necessary, but potentially polluting and other land uses so as to reduce conflicts. However, the sites referred to are within the existing built-up area. Their deletion from TCAAP would be a serious handicap to achieving the regeneration of the town centre as a whole, and the encouragement of a mix of uses and activities. In addition, the evidence put forward by both the Council and Southern Water indicates a relatively low incidence of complaints relating to odour emissions from the works, even though there are already a significant number of homes and businesses within the dispersal area identified by Southern Water (the accuracy of which is disputed by the Council). In the circumstances, I am satisfied that the wider regeneration aims of the TCAAP should carry greater weight and that development proposals for the disputed sites should remain in the Plan.
- 3.29 Subject to the inclusion of Changes 6-14, 16 and 17, I am satisfied that the Plan contains adequate provisions to ensure the delivery of necessary infrastructure to serve new development. I am also satisfied that no changes are necessary to take account of the impact of the existing waste water treatment works. I consider that tests of soundness vii and ix are met.

3.30 ***Issue 7 – Is the proposed Central Area Regeneration Fund in conformity with Government Guidance and appropriate in all other respects?***

3.31 Policy TCA19 establishes a Tonbridge Central Area Regeneration Fund, which is a mechanism through which developer contributions would be pooled to provide, for example, public realm or infrastructure improvements. The Plan makes it clear that further detail will be provided in a forthcoming Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). I am satisfied that a subsequent SPD is an appropriate document in which to expand on the principles set out in Policy TCA19 and to provide more detailed information on the way in which contributions will be calculated and the programme of works to be funded. This approach is consistent with Circular 5/05 and the DCLG Practice Guidance on Planning Obligations, which makes it clear that an SPD on Planning Obligations would need to be subject to rigorous community involvement.

3.32 Nonetheless, it is clear that the Fund would be a potential source of funding for the elements of the transport strategy, and I consider Change 20 to be necessary, so as to clarify that position.

3.33 I am satisfied that subject to the inclusion of Change 20, Policy TCA19 is consistent with Government guidance and appropriate in all other respects. Tests of soundness iv vii and ix are met.

Matter 2 Traffic and Transportation

3.34 ***Issue 1 – Are proposals to reduce traffic in the High Street desirable, practical and achievable?***

3.35 The need to alleviate the impact of traffic on the town centre is a key issue highlighted in the Master Plan. Traffic congestion, particularly in the High Street has a negative impact on the environment (including air quality) and the economy of the town. From all that I have read and seen, I am left in no doubt that a reduction of traffic levels in the High Street is a highly desirable objective.

3.36 The High Street is the most direct north-south route through the town. The only alternative route across the River Medway is via Cannon Lane. The Transport strategy seeks to manage traffic by introducing measures to reduce traffic flows along the High Street in off-peak hours. These include better signage to direct traffic via Cannon Lane and by giving increased priority to pedestrians outside peak hours. Better message signing for car parks is intended to reduce the number cars circulating to find parking spaces. The removal of some traffic from the High Street will enable environmental improvements to be undertaken, and early work undertaken for the Council (RD 7.40), suggests this could be done in ways which would not be incompatible with maintaining its role

as a through route in peak hours, or create undue difficulties for premises which have to be serviced from the High Street.

- 3.37 The diversion of traffic away from the High Street will increase traffic flows on other parts of the highway network. I can well understand the concern, expressed by those who live on parts of the network that are already under stress, that the redistribution of traffic from the High Street may worsen traffic conditions elsewhere.
- 3.38 Since the TCAAP was submitted for examination, further work has been done by consultants on behalf of the Borough and County Councils to develop the transport strategy in greater detail (RD 7.38, 7.41, 7.44 7.45). These studies indicate that the displacement of traffic can be accommodated without unacceptable impact on other parts of the network. The technical studies are inevitably based on various assumptions about matters such as background levels of traffic growth, and the extent to which reductions can be achieved by reducing travel demand or encouraging a shift from use of the private car to more sustainable modes of travel ("smarter choices").
- 3.39 Some of the assumptions used by the consultants have been questioned, but the sensitivity analysis undertaken suggests that the studies are reasonably robust. The consultants accept that achieving a 14% reduction in traffic through smarter choices is a challenging target (see also Issue 4 below). It is, however, based on an analysis of what has been achieved elsewhere.
- 3.40 The TCAAP also makes reference to the safeguarding of land for a link between London Road and Hadlow Road. This is outside the Plan area, and the safeguarding is effected through a policy which has been saved from the adopted Local Plan. The purpose of the link would be to take traffic out of residential areas and sensitive streets within the Conservation Area, rather than increasing the capacity of the network. The implementation of this link is subject to funding, and its provision is not seen as a prerequisite to the implementation of the wider strategy.
- 3.41 With the exception of the London Road/Hadlow Road link, the transport strategy is primarily one of managing traffic on the existing road network. Work currently being undertaken for the Council to develop a spreadsheet traffic model of the town centre (RD 7.38) should help to ensure that the transportation proposals are developed in a way which is complementary to the physical regeneration of the town centre. This approach also offers an opportunity for the elements of the strategy to be reconsidered if it does not work as expected.
- 3.42 Overall, I am satisfied that the evidence before me indicates that the proposals to divert traffic away from the High Street in the off

peak are desirable, practical and achievable. Tests of soundness vii and ix are met.

3.43 ***Issue 2 – Should the AAP include a commitment to the building of a Hadlow Road bypass?***

3.44 It is argued by some respondents that the aim of reducing traffic levels in the High Street cannot be achieved without a new eastern bypass for the A26 trunk road. The bypass would be designed to relieve traffic congestion on Hadlow Road and the Hadlow Road/Cannon Lane junction. Historically, various routes have been considered for such a scheme, and both long and short routes were assessed in the Tonbridge Urban Transport Strategy in 1999 (RD 7.46).

3.45 As I indicate above, I find there is sufficient evidence to support the Council's contention that the proposals to reduce traffic in the High Street are achievable without overloading other parts of the network. The County Council is not supportive of a bypass, and bearing in mind the general direction of Government policy towards more sustainable modes of transport, there would appear to be no prospect of funding being made available within the lifetime of the TCAAP. To include reference to such a scheme in the TCAAP (together with a safeguarding policy in the DLADPD), would not meet tests of soundness vi, vii or viii.

3.46 ***Issue 3 – Will the additional traffic generated by the development proposals included in the Plan have an unacceptable impact on traffic congestion in the town?***

3.47 The option testing report (RD 7.38) considers the likely impact of the proposals in the TCAAP in 2016. This shows that the highway network should work reasonably well, with relatively limited incidences of junctions operating beyond capacity. All significant development proposals will be accompanied by a transport assessment, which is the appropriate mechanism for assessing the impact of individual schemes, and the need for mitigation measures, including contributions to the Central Area Regeneration Fund.

3.48 I am satisfied that the overall regeneration strategy for Tonbridge has taken into account the potential impact of new development on traffic congestion and that suitable mechanisms are in place to address any issues that arise. Tests of soundness vii and ix are met.

3.49 ***Issue 4 – Should the Plan seek to reduce traffic levels through greater demand management, such as a reduction in parking?***

3.50 As I have indicated above, the transport strategy included in the TCAAP takes a pragmatic approach to dealing with transportation

issues. The Master Plan (RD7.29, p.71) states: *National transport policy is centred upon reducing the need to travel and, where journeys are unavoidable, encouragement of the use of sustainable modes. Tonbridge is an area with high car ownership and car usage and a commercial/retail centre that must allow car access to enable the town to compete with other retail centres. Bus use is low. The railway station is intensively used by commuters both from within and outside the town, and good availability of commuter parking means that the Station generates car traffic. To move directly to a situation of high non-car mode share would not be supported by local stakeholders and would be unrealistic to pursue at present.*

- 3.51 I recognise that some of those making representations would prefer the TCAAP to take a more radical approach to move towards a more sustainable transport strategy. However, as I indicate above, the current expectation of a 14% reduction in traffic growth as a result of "smarter choices" is considered challenging by the Council's consultants. Other respondents view this as an unrealistic aspiration.
- 3.52 Tonbridge is a relatively small market town, with a rural hinterland, which already loses a significant proportion of the available expenditure in its catchment area to other towns. Notwithstanding the thrust of Government policy to promote sustainable transport choices, PPG13 accepts that: *The car will continue to have an important part to play and for some journeys, particularly in rural areas, it will remain the only real option for travel.*
- 3.53 Nonetheless, I consider two changes to be necessary, so as to reinforce the aim of progressing towards a sustainable transport strategy. Change 18 gives additional weight within Policy TCA12 to reducing the need to travel and to sustainable modes of transport. Change 19 clarifies the role of maximum parking standards in the pursuit of sustainable transport initiatives.
- 3.54 The Council proposed a change to Policy TCA11(b) to include a requirement that at least the existing amount of commuter parking should be retained. The extent to which commuter parking provision can contribute to or detract from achieving sustainable transport objectives is a complex matter. I also recognise that it may have an impact on the viability of the Station complex redevelopment proposals. However, there is insufficient evidence before me to indicate that any particular level of provision should be specified in the TCAAP. When more detailed proposals are brought forward, the level of parking proposed will need to be justified taking all relevant considerations into account. In the circumstances I do not endorse the Council's proposed change to this Policy, and I have deleted it from Appendix 2.
- 3.55 Given the particular circumstances of Tonbridge, I find no convincing evidence that the plan is inconsistent with the general

thrust of Government policy. Subject to the inclusion of Changes 18 and 19, I consider the Plan meets tests of soundness iv, vii and ix.

3.56 *Issue 5 – Has proper account been taken of air quality considerations?*

3.57 The southern part of the High Street has been designated as an Air Quality Management Area under the provisions of the Environment Act 1995. The Council has commissioned consultants to undertake an assessment of the air quality impacts of the TCAAP (RD 7.33). Specifically five scenarios are modelled, derived from the transport model. The first scenario is the baseline year 2006, and the other 4 scenarios relate to 2016. In none of these four scenarios is the NO₂ annual mean objective exceeded. The greatest improvements in air quality would be achieved if the London Road – Hadlow Road Link were to be built, and Hadlow Road south closed to traffic. In summary, the assessment concludes that the proposals of the TCAAP can be implemented without causing an unacceptable impact on air quality in other parts of the town.

3.58 I am satisfied that the Plan has taken proper account of air quality considerations and meets test of soundness vii.

3.59 *Issue 6 – Are there other highway schemes that should be included in the Plan?*

3.60 A number of representations make suggestions for other highway schemes in and around the town centre. However, there is no clear evidence before me that these are preferable to the Council's transport strategy or that the Plan fails to meet any of the tests of soundness without their inclusion.

3.61 *Issue 7 – Are the transport proposals based on a robust and credible evidence base?*

3.62 The transport strategy for Tonbridge has evolved since the 1960s. In 2000, the County Council adopted a Transport Strategy for Tonbridge, following a Tonbridge Urban Transport Study, produced in 1999 (RD 7.46). This work was further developed in the Tonbridge High Street Infrastructure Improvements 2002 (RD 7.40). These studies have informed the preparation of the Master Plan and the TCAAP.

3.63 There is some criticism that these studies are now out of date and/or do not represent current best practice. However, the more recent work on option testing (RD 7.38) is based on 2006 AM and PM traffic surveys, and indicates that the transport strategy remains a robust approach to achieving the aims of the Plan. This more detailed work also indicates ways in which Smarter Choices initiatives and Travel Plan measures in conjunction with new

developments can be implemented to deliver the strategy in a sustainable way.

- 3.64 I am satisfied that the transport proposals are based on a robust and credible evidence base and that test of soundness vii is met.

Matter 3 Implementation and Monitoring

- 3.65 Test of soundness viii requires development plan documents to include clear mechanisms for implementation and monitoring. Paragraphs 2.17 – 2.19 of PPS12 give general guidance on Area Action Plans. A key feature of such plans will be the focus on implementation. Amongst other things, they should set the timetable for the implementation of the proposals. The Companion Guide to PPS12 includes a checklist for the preparation of an AAP, which includes setting out details of the implementation framework, and of the monitoring framework, including relevant targets and indicators.
- 3.66 The TCAAP includes a spatial strategy, a development strategy and a delivery strategy. The last component is very general in nature. It does not give a clear indication of how the individual site specific proposals will be implemented. There is no indication of the expected timescales for delivery or the main delivery agents. The TCAAP does not appear to contain any monitoring framework. No targets or indicators are established.
- 3.67 I indicated to the Council that I considered the TCAAP to be weak when judged against test of soundness 8, and invited them to consider ways in which the Plan could be strengthened. In response, the Council has suggested the addition of a new section on monitoring in Chapter 6 of the Plan (which would be renamed Delivery and Monitoring Strategy), together with a list of performance indicators set out in an Annex to the Plan. So far as delivery is concerned some additional text under section 6.2 is proposed, together with an Annex which identifies, for each development proposal, the delivery agency, timescale, funding source and delivery mechanism.
- 3.68 I also expressed concerns regarding the relationship of the TCAAP to the Local Transport Plan (LTP), which is also relevant in considering test of soundness iv. The LTP is prepared by the County Council, and the current version is based upon a themed approach and does not include references to specific schemes, other than major proposals, in the County. However, it is abundantly clear from the evidence before me, and the Highway Authority's appearance at the hearings, that it has participated fully in the preparation of the TCAAP and the Master Plan. Furthermore, it is continuing to progress various elements of the Plan's transport strategy. The proposed changes indicate where the LTP is intended to be a source of funding or delivery mechanism for specific proposals.

3.69 I am satisfied that the inclusion of Changes 10, 12, 13, together with Annexes B and C of Appendix 1 to this report, will overcome my concerns and the Plan will meet test of soundness viii. I am further satisfied that the proposed changes are based on information which is already in the public domain. They do not significantly alter the policies or proposals of the Plan and do not give rise to any need for any further sustainability appraisal or public consultation.

4 Overall Conclusions

4.1 I conclude that, with the amendments I recommend, the Tonbridge Central Area Action Plan satisfies the requirements of s20(5) of the 2004 Act and the associated Regulations, is sound in terms of s20(5)(b) of the 2004 Act, and meets the tests of soundness in PPS12.

Laura Graham
INSPECTOR