

**TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**PLANNING and TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD**

**20 October 2008**

**Report of the Director of Planning Transport and Leisure**

**Part 1- Public**

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

**1 OPEN SPACE STRATEGY**

**Summary**

**This report outlines the draft Open Space Strategy, explaining what it is, why it has been prepared and what function it will perform, particularly in regard to the Managing Development and the Environment Development Plan Document (MDE DPD). It then sets out the response received during the public consultation on the document during February and March 2008 and concludes with recommendations for amending and progressing the Strategy to adoption. Members are requested to bring their copy of the draft Open Space Strategy to the meeting.**

**1.1 Background**

- 1.1.1 Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) Note 17 'Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation (Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)) states that local authorities should undertake robust assessments of the existing and future needs of their communities for open space, sports and recreation facilities. To assist local authorities in preparing open space strategies the DCLG produced a companion guide to PPG17 called Assessing Needs and Opportunities.
- 1.1.2 In response the Council's Planning Policy and Leisure Sections jointly commissioned a consultant, Dr Joy Standeven, to work with officers to prepare an Open Space Strategy (OSS) for Tonbridge and Malling in accordance with the protocol set out in the PPG17 companion guide.
- 1.1.3 This involved an audit of exist provision of open spaces. The open space that were audited fell into the following categories:
- Parks and Gardens (eg Country Parks)
  - Natural Greenspaces (eg woodland)
  - Outdoor Sports Facilities (eg sports pitches)
  - Amenity Green Space (eg Village Greens)
  - Play Areas for Children and Young People (eg equipped play facilities)

- Allotments
- Cemeteries and Church Yards

- 1.1.4 Approximately 450 sites were surveyed. To verify that the audit was comprehensive and accurate and also to check on the level of usage, Parish Councils were consulted on the initial survey results.
- 1.1.5 Running in parallel to this exercise was an assessment of local need. This involved consultation with a Residents' Panel on issues including the quality, level of provision and accessibility of existing open spaces in the Borough. One of the primary purposes of this exercise was to determine the level of satisfaction of the community living in the Borough with local open spaces. This would provide vital information for the development of local standards.
- 1.1.6 It is envisaged that the Open Space Strategy will perform a multifunctional role including:
- Establishing local quantitative, qualitative and accessibility standards for future open space provision in the Borough through the MDE DPD
  - Providing the evidence base for the formulation of policies and proposals in the MDE DPD, as part of the LDF
  - Highlighting priorities for future provision and maintenance
  - Providing the evidence base for bids for grant monies and other external funding including the Big Lottery Fund
  - Forming the basis for calculating developer contributions for new/improved provision of open space
  - Informing the review of the Borough Leisure and Arts Strategy
  - Assessing applications for grants from parish councils for improvements to open space provision
  - Providing a valuable corporate resource to respond to general enquiries relating to open space provision
  - Identifying sites and drawing up grounds maintenance contracts.
- 1.1.7 The Strategy will also help the Council deliver its corporate priorities, particularly in relation to healthy living, crime reduction, young people and achieving a better street-scene and open space environment.
- 1.1.8 At the January 2008 meeting of the Leisure and Arts Advisory Board, a resolution was passed to approve a draft OSS for public consultation. The following section of this report highlights the response to the consultation. Annex 1 contains a schedule summarising the received comments and proposed amendments.

## **1.2 Consultation**

- 1.2.1 The draft OSS was available for public comment from 18 February to 28 March 2008. A copy of the draft Strategy was sent to all key stakeholders, including all parish/town councils, Tonbridge Sports Association, Sport England, Fields in

Trust, Natural England and neighbouring Local Authorities. A copy of the draft Strategy was made available to view at the Council offices at Kings Hill and Tonbridge Castle and on the Council's website.

- 1.2.2 All comments returned have been carefully considered and a number of amendments to the draft Strategy are proposed. A summary of the comments received and proposed amendments can be found at **Annex 1**. In overview, a high level of response was received, reflecting the value and significance of the Strategy, particularly at a local level. The consultation raised a number of recurring issues that are summarised below.
- 1.2.3 Categorisation of Open Space – the categorisation of open spaces has been questioned in a number of cases. Categorisation has been carried out in accordance with the Companion Guide to Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 - Assessing Needs and Opportunities, that is based on the primary purpose of each site. It is appreciated that some areas may have multifunctional uses and where queries have been raised sites have been reassessed taking local knowledge into consideration.
- 1.2.4 Quality Assessments – in some cases consultees have questioned the outcome of the quality assessment. These assessments were carried out in accordance with guidance and implemented by one single person to ensure consistency across all sites in the Borough. It is appreciated that these assessments may only reflect the condition of each site on the day of the visit and where results have been questioned sites have been revisited and reassessed.
- 1.2.5 Managing Development and the Environment Development Plan Document - Many of the issues raised during the consultation were not specifically relevant to the OSS, but are of relevance to the emerging MDE DPD. Taking this into account, the evaluation of consultation on both documents has been carried out jointly by Officers from Leisure and Planning Services

### **1.3 Legal Implications**

- 1.3.1 The Open Space Strategy will form part of the evidence-base for the Managing Development and the Environment Development Plan Document which forms part of the Council's Local Development Framework. As a Strategy, it must be considered and, if appropriate, adopted, in accordance with the budget and policy framework procedure rules contained in Part 4 of the Council's Constitution. The process by which the budget and policy framework is developed is, at least two months before the Strategy needs to be adopted, the Executive will publicise initial proposals, having first canvassed the views of local stakeholders as appropriate and in a manner suitable to the matter under consideration. Any representations made to the Executive must be taken into account in formulating the initial proposals, and shall be reflected in any report dealing with them. The Executive's initial proposals shall be referred to the Policy Overview Committee for further advice and consideration.

## 1.4 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.4.1 Taking into account the significant level of work involved in the preparation of the Open Space Strategy, an external consultant was appointed to assist the Council. This cost has been provided for in the Local Development Framework budget, and this particular project has been funded partly from the Planning Delivery Grant.

## 1.5 Risk Assessment

- 1.5.1 It is essential that the Strategy be developed and implemented in line with the formal guidance, otherwise there is a risk that the outcomes may be challenged and the Council's Development Plan Document may be found to be unsound.

## 1.6 Policy Considerations

- 1.6.1 Asset Management, Biodiversity & Sustainability, Crime & Disorder Reduction, Healthy Lifestyles, Young People, Community.

## 1.7 Recommendations

- 1.7.1 It is **RECOMMENDED** that, subject to the recommendations of the meeting of the Leisure and Arts Board held on 13 October and Member comment at this meeting, the relevant Cabinet Members be recommended to confirm the proposed amendments highlighted at **Annex 1** and to refer the amended Open Space Strategy to the Policy Overview Committee for consideration.

The Director of Planning Transport and Leisure confirms that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

Background papers:

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Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) Note 17: Planning for  
Open Space, Sport and Recreation  
Assessing Needs and Opportunities: A Companion  
Guide to PPG17  
Open Space Strategy: Technical Study

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