

**TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**PLANNING and TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD**

**29 July 2009**

**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 CHARACTER AREA APPRAISALS - UPDATE**

**Summary**

**This report brings members up-to-date with work on the Urban Character Area Appraisals and notes a change in the programme for the Landscape Character Area Appraisals.**

**1.1 Progress**

- 1.1.1 I reported to your last meeting that work on the Character Area Appraisals of the Borough, pursuant to Policy SQ1 in the Managing Development and the Environment DPD (MDE DPD), had started. The Character Area Appraisals are being carried out for the main urban areas, the Rural Service Centres and for the countryside in the form of a Landscape Character Area Appraisal of the whole Borough. When complete, they will be an important tool in the Development Control armoury; providing detailed evidence to support development control decisions, particularly on appeal, with the aim of protecting and enhancing local character.
- 1.1.2 The Urban Character Appraisals of Tonbridge and Hildenborough are being undertaken by consultants, Tony Fullwood Associates (TFA). TFA has now identified the broad character areas following a first meeting with stakeholders and local Members on 2 July. Stakeholder/Member walkabouts have been scheduled for July. The assessments of the individual areas, once completed will form the content of an exhibition (or exhibitions) to be held in early autumn setting out draft townscape appraisal maps for each of the character areas. Any necessary revisions will be made following this public consultation prior to a final draft set of appraisals being prepared that will be formally consulted on in the autumn of 2010 in line with the agreed Character Area Appraisals SPD time frame. When TFA has finished their work on Tonbridge they will then progress to deal with Hildenborough (including a Conservation Area Appraisal).
- 1.1.3 In the north of the Borough work is progressing in parallel using officers from the Policy team but, needless to say, priority is being afforded to progressing the MDE

DPD though to the Public Examination this autumn. Despite this, draft Character Area boundaries have been defined for Snodland, Medway Gap, Leybourne and Walderslade and these are now scheduled to be discussed with members and other stakeholders in September and October, with walkabouts to take place during those months before an exhibition in late winter of the draft appraisals. Survey work on the remaining Rural Service Centres (Borough Green, East Peckham, Hadlow and West Malling will take place next year).

- 1.1.4 In the case of the Landscape Character Area Appraisal a considerable amount of initial, mainly desk-based, research has been undertaken and draft Character Areas have been identified. However, the officer leading on this project will now be on maternity leave from the late autumn which means that carrying out the on-site surveys over the summer is not reasonably practicable. I have considered options within our existing resources but in all the circumstances, it has been decided to defer further work on the Landscape Character Appraisals until next year, though this will be kept under review in the light of other resourcing issues and the Council's overall budgetary situation.
- 1.1.5 The deferment of the Landscape Character Area work will mean that, whatever happens, it will not now be progressed through to adoption at exactly the same time as the Urban Character Area Appraisals in the autumn of next year. This is not in itself a serious problem because it was always intended that the Character Area Appraisals SPD would be prepared as a series of volumes. It will simply mean that the Landscape Character Appraisal volume will need to be adopted at a later date. In meantime, there will continue to be reliance on the KCC Character Area work which would have formed the start point for our more detailed studies.

## **1.2 Legal Implications**

- 1.2.1 None

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

- 1.3.1 Since the Landscape Character Area work was to be carried out in-house there are no budgetary implications at the present time. All of the other external work is financed from the Housing and Planning Delivery Grant.

## **1.4 Risk Assessment**

- 1.4.1 There is a risk that Policy SQ1 will be less easy to implement without the early adoption of the Landscape Character Area Appraisals. This is a risk in respect of timing and whilst should not be downplayed it is manageable.

## **1.5 Recommendation**

- 1.5.1 Members note the current position with regard to the preparation of the Urban Character Area Appraisals and the revised programme for the Landscape Character Area Appraisal.

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:

contact: Brian Gates

Nil

Steve Humphrey  
Director of Planning, Transport and Leisure