

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

PLANNING and TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD

28 July 2010

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 SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT (SPD)

Summary

Character Area Appraisals are being undertaken for the whole Borough pursuant to a policy in the Managing Development and the Environment DPD. This report describes the process and progress with this project and recommends approval of Character Area Appraisals for Tonbridge, Hildenborough and Hadlow for the purposes of public consultation which will take place in the autumn.

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 Policy SQ1 in the Managing Development and the Environment DPD (MDE DPD) seeks to protect, conserve and enhance the environment and character of the Borough. This policy is to be supported by a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which it is intended will ultimately contain, in a series of separate volumes, Character Area Appraisals for the entire built-up parts of the Borough.
- 1.1.2 The principle purpose of the Character area Appraisals is to provide a comprehensive and consistent approach to assessing the character of localities that will prove a valuable tool in the development control process and in considering other proposed changes or interventions. As such, it is very much in line with the new Coalition Government's localism agenda. How much more local can you get than a detailed street-by-street assessment of the character of all of the main built-up areas of the Borough? In this respect, we seem to be ahead of the game again and will certainly be more than ready to address positively the new planning regime as it materialises (see separate report).
- 1.1.3 However, it must be emphasised that the Character Area Appraisals only appraise the character of an area, drawing out those main elements that distinguish one locality from another and identifying important positive features to be conserved and negative features that are worthy of enhancement when the opportunity arises. What the Appraisals specifically do **not** do is identify development

opportunities or make development proposals. However, they do provide the context for considering any such proposals, whether these be promoted through a planning application or as a Development Plan proposal.

1.2 The Project

1.2.1 Work on preparing the SPD is now well underway. The SPD will eventually comprise separate volumes for:

- The main urban areas:-
 - Tonbridge (including the Hilden Park part of Hildenborough Parish) and
 - The Medway Gap (including Snodland, Kings Hill and Aylesford Forstal) and Walderslade.
- The Rural Service Centres –
 - Hildenborough, Hadlow, East Peckham, West Malling and Borough Green.

1.2.2 For resource reasons, we do not intend to carry out Character Area Appraisals of the remaining villages at this stage, though it has previously been indicated through the Parish Partnership Panel that we will be able to provide support to any Parish Council which wishes to take forward its own character assessment in the form of a **Village Design Statement**, though this would need to be produced to a format compatible with the rest of the character area appraisal work. Action with Rural Communities in Kent has indicated its willingness to assist any Parish Council that wishes to take this matter forward, and we would be relying to a great extent upon that assistance. Likewise, for resource reasons, we do not, at the present time intend to progress work on a **Landscape Character Area Appraisal** of the Borough. Instead, we will continue to rely, for the time being, on the Landscape Character Area Assessments previously prepared by the County Council.

1.2.3 As mentioned elsewhere on the agenda, **Conservation Area Appraisals** (where these have not already been done) are being prepared as an integral part of the character area appraisal process. Whilst the on-site assessment and public/stakeholder involvement is very similar, the level of detail in the published documents is greater and the statutory processes for adoption and the legislation under which they are adopted is different. Conservation Area Appraisals therefore need to be read alongside the Character Area Appraisals SPD and consequently appear as “holes” in the Character Area SPD.

1.3 The Process

1.3.1 The first task is to determine, in consultation with local Members, Parish Councils (where they exist) and other local interest groups the general extent of each

discrete character area – the way in which the urban area or rural service centre can be sub-divided into areas of identifiable character. This is normally done at a First Stakeholder Meeting. This is mainly a desktop exercise using maps and aerial photographs but checked on site where necessary. However, any such sub-division is provisional and dependent upon the next task which is the detailed, street-by-street appraisal of each area, the boundaries of which may be changed as a result. Local Members, Parish Councils (where they exist) and any other local interest group are invited to join the technical assessors on a walkabout, so that features regarded as important locally can be identified.

- 1.3.2 Once the initial appraisals have been completed a Second Stakeholder Workshop is arranged at which the initial findings of the Appraisals for the area can be discussed and refined. A draft set of Appraisals for those areas is then prepared and, if necessary and if there is time, shared with the stakeholder consultees before being reported to this Board so that they can be approved for the purposes of wider public consultation. Formal consultation under Regulation 17 will involve a press release, posters, and a series of small scale, manned, public exhibitions/displays which will be promoted in each main area as well as direct consultation with interested parties. The response to consultation will then be reported back to this Board which will then recommend adoption of the revised Appraisals to Council via Policy Overview Committee and Cabinet.

1.4 Progress

- 1.4.1 Because of the overall scale of the task the Appraisals are being progressed in a series of tranches. The first tranche of documents, which have been prepared in liaison with local Members, Parish Councils and other interest groups include the following:

- The Tonbridge Urban Area
- Hildenborough (which at this stage in the process includes both the original village and Hilden Park, which technically lies within the urban confines of Tonbridge), and
- Hadlow

These three documents (some of which were sent out to Members of this Board, Cabinet and APC1 in advance of the agenda for the meeting) are therefore recommended for Members' consideration and approval for the purposes of wider public consultation. This is planned to take place during September and October (thereby avoiding the main holiday period).

- 1.4.2 Work is currently under way on the next tranche of documents which will include Appraisals for Borough Green, East Peckham, West Malling (outside of the Conservation Area), Snodland, Kings Hill, Walderslade and the main Medway Gap urban area. This work will be carried out over the summer with a view to reporting as many as possible of these documents to your next meeting on 17

November 2010. At that same meeting it is intended that you will also consider the response to consultation in respect of the first tranche of documents so that these can be recommended for adoption by Council in February 2011.

1.5 Legal Implications

- 1.5.1 SPD's are prepared pursuant to, and have to follow the procedures set out in, the Town and County Planning (Local Development)(England) Regulations 2004 (as amended).

1.6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.6.1 The cost of this exercise is covered by existing budgets with the external costs being covered by a contribution from the Housing and Planning Delivery Grant.

1.7 Risk Assessment

- 1.7.1 The greatest risk is that, because of the scale of the overall project, we will not be able to deliver on programme. However, the phased approach means that documents can be adopted in a series of tranches and can therefore start being used at the earliest opportunity.

1.8 Recommendation

- 1.8.1 The draft Character Area Appraisals for Tonbridge, Hildenborough and Hadlow be approved for the purposes of public consultation.

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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Core Strategy and MDE DPD

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