

**Draft response to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's draft
Transportation Strategy and Town Centres Area Action Plan DPD**

Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council is grateful for the opportunity to comment on your draft Transportation Strategy and the Tunbridge Wells section of your evolving Town Centres Area Action Plan and Allocations DPDs. The Planning & Transportation Advisory Board considered these at its recent meeting and it has endorsed this letter as a formal response to your consultations.

Much of the draft Strategy and evolving DPDs deal with matters with a primarily Tunbridge Wells focus and, as such, TMBC would not necessarily wish to comment on such specific details beyond offering general support for the vision and objectives set out in the documents. However, there are a number of elements of the Transport Strategy that are strategic and cross-border in nature and TMBC would wish to record its specific comment on these. This refers in particular to the A21 Tonbridge to Pembury Dualling scheme, the A228 Colts Hill Bypass and maintaining and enhancing rail services on the lines through our Boroughs. We are already working jointly on advocating each of these schemes through the West Kent Partnership so it is pleasing to see these formally referred to and included in the draft Transport Strategy.

As far as services on the Tonbridge to Redhill line are concerned, Tunbridge Wells lost out even more than Tonbridge because the through connection from Tunbridge Wells disappeared at the time of the last franchise award. We are particularly keen on pressing for the direct Gatwick connection to be restored on this line and we would be happy to support efforts in the context of your Strategy to do this.

The Transport Strategy contains much interesting data on travel patterns in the Tunbridge Wells area and emphasises in particular the volume of cross-border movement in the peak hours in both directions, principally on the A26 through Southborough. The adverse impacts in terms of congestion and poor air quality are identified but, unfortunately, little is offered by way of solution in the short or medium term. This is hardly surprising because the scope for significant change is extremely limited through this corridor and the costs of any meaningful changes in road capacity would be considerable, though the planned improvements to the A21 at Castle Hill may help indirectly. We would be happy to work with you to identify effective and affordable ways of improving access along this important corridor.

Much of the transportation improvement sought over the life of the Strategy is intended to be realised through Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) supported by Park & Ride facilities. It is not immediately obvious whether there are any direct implications for Tonbridge in the scheme mapped out in the Strategy but it is

possible to envisage that, in the longer term, there might be potential for an enhanced provision of BRT linking the two centres. Subject to a robust business case identifying need and demand for such a service, it would appear to be a logical longer term development of a Bus Rapid Transit scheme that TMBC would wish to explore with you at some future date if the proposals in the Strategy prove to be a success commercially and in transportation terms.

One of the contributors to any such work of justification will be a local transportation model. In that respect, I note with interest that the Visum model referred to in the Strategy encompasses both of the town centres. This could therefore be a useful analysis tool for development control and development planning purposes for TMBC and I would welcome any feedback you are able to provide on the value and cost effectiveness of using Visum for such purposes based on your experience.

Strategy development and the consultation requirements associated with DPDs can be protracted initiatives. There is a high risk that the pace of change in national policy can outrun the process of Strategy adoption and this is certainly true at the present time. You have, no doubt, sought to keep the documents as flexible as possible to isolate them from this risk but this can only be achieved up to a certain degree. The national policy framework is clearly in a state of flux at the moment and we will be watching with interest to see how this will be accommodated in the next drafts of the Strategy and the DPDs.