

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

PLANNING and TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD

27 July 2011

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 CONSULTATION - MASTER PLAN AND PLANNING BRIEF FOR THE HOP FARM, EAST PECKHAM

1.1 The background

1.1.1 At the last meeting of the Board it was resolved to carry-out consultation on the submitted draft and the results are set out below. In addition the Board resolved to visit the site and this visit took place on the morning of 11 July

1.1.2 To recap, the Council's planning policy background specific to the Hop Farm is set out in Saved Policy P6/25 and reads:

"Proposals for further tourist related development at Beltring Hop Farm, as defined on the Proposals Map, will be considered in the light of Policies P6/12 and P6/14. Any proposals for development within or adjacent to the defined area, will need to be considered on a comprehensive basis in the context of an approved Planning Brief and Master Plan for the whole site, including all of the open areas. Proposals should preserve and enhance the Grade II Listed Buildings and their settings and accord with Policy P4/1. Piecemeal development and any proposals which conflict significantly with the terms of the approved Planning Brief and Master Plan will not be permitted."*

1.1.3 As I mentioned in my earlier Report it was in this policy context that the Council found it necessary to take action, by the service of a number of Enforcement Notices, against unauthorised uses and works that had emerged in more recent times at the Hop Farm.

1.1.4 A copy of the draft document was provided as a separate Annex for Member's convenience and detailed reference at the last meeting. This and the background documents were placed on the website.

1.1.5 The key proposals are set out as an arrangement of zones around the site intended to balance the considerations of Green Belt status and the fact that much of the area creates, in one way or another, a setting for the group of Listed Oast House Bells that are so characteristic of the site.

1.1.6 As Members will be aware the Hop Farm also hosts a number of substantial public outdoor events which attract substantial numbers of short term visitors and are controlled under the events licensing regime operated by the Council outside the planning control regime. Those events clearly provide a wider context for the proposals embodied within the Brief and Master Plan.

1.1.7 The key zones/concepts are proposed as follows:

- Accommodation Zone – west of the main complex based on the area where the holiday units are permitted. Possible alternative use of some of the area as a hotel.
- Local produce and food zone – around the current entrance area and the approved garden/nursery buildings
- Corporate zone – utilising Bells 1 and 2 and based upon existing facilities used for this purpose
- Hop Farm experience – in Bell 4 focussing on the hop farm history
- The Oast Houses – it is proposed to reduce the number of buildings around the Bells and rethink the nature and location of children’s rides to improve the setting of the oasts – the red “big top” to be removed.
- Children’s rides – most of the travelling fairground rides to be removed and replaced by “designed-in” rides some of which would relocate to west of Bell 5.
- Outdoor activities and attractions – land north of the Bells for use for open uses with better planting to integrate with the Bells and the wider landscape
- Wild wood – enhanced woodland trails
- Farming and countryside attractions – intended to be used for uses that are appropriate to the Green Belt
- Enhancement of landscape framework – new perimeter planting, avenue planting within the site and rationalisation of fencing
- Materials and detailing – the footpaths and fencing will be improved

1.2 Consultation responses

1.2.1 East Peckham PC: supports the Brief

1.2.2 Paddock Wood PC: the need to connect the site to Paddock Wood and its railway station is crucial. Because of local traffic conditions especially HGVs it is desirable to seek cycle way and footway links through development contributions. Improved pedestrian access at the site entrance is also needed. While a shuttle bus is

provided at events better general public transport is needed. There is a flooding risk at the site. There should be no additional pressure on the sewerage system of Paddock Wood as a result of any development arising from the Brief

- 1.2.3 Tunbridge Wells Borough Council: wishes to be kept informed of anything that affects road network or accessibility to the site including Paddock Wood station.
- 1.2.4 KCC Heritage Conservation: The brief could make more of the history of the site including the possibility of the re-introduction of some historic “hoppers huts” as part of a presentation of the site in a “time frame” possibly from medieval times onwards. KCC have offered some suggested words for inclusion in the Brief. Concerned that the “landscape” to be retained/enhanced/replaced should reflect the particular character of the site.
- 1.2.5 Kent Wildlife Trust: Has concerns as some aspects of the Brief/Master Plan appear to encourage increased use of the land around the complex in ways which could adversely affect the woodland or the East Peckham ponds Local Wildlife Site.
- 1.2.6 Other third parties are also concerned with regard to access matters similar to those raised by PWPC and TWBC.

1.3 Commentary

- 1.3.1 The draft Brief sets out the strategy for the changes proposed in the complex in not only response to the Enforcement Notices (see 1.1.3 above) but also looking to the wider future.
- 1.3.2 In the context of the Enforcement Notices I am aware that, notwithstanding the outstanding appeals due to be heard in late September, the Hop Farm is actively considering all opportunities for resolving the outstanding issues. I will make more comment of such matters below where appropriate.
- 1.3.3 The various opportunities set out in 1.1.7 require a little more comment and clarification in light of the site inspection and response to consultation:
- **Accommodation Zone** – west of the main complex based on the area where the holiday units are permitted. Possible alternative use of some of the area to hotel.

*This area is at present utilised for the major outdoor events such as the Hop Farm Music Festival and also War and Peace. Clearly in the longer term there will be a need to reconcile these matters, however I think that it is fair to say that in light of the decision to allow holiday lodges by the Secretary of State in this area that it could also be a sensible location for an alternative for hotel/conference facilities **if the Council felt able to approve such a proposal.** (In this respect I should make it clear that the Brief/ Master Plan can do no more than assess the locational aspects.*

Hotel/conference facilities are NOT appropriate development in the Green Belt and can only be finally assessed in the context of a planning application which will need to be assessed against all of the criteria that were used in the assessment of the holiday lodges – e.g. tourism benefits, economic viability, flood risk, the level of financial contribution to be dedicated to the long term maintenance of the Listed Buildings and whether any or all of these matters very special circumstances exist to justify the grant of permission. The specific application is not yet ready to be assessed on such matters.) I am satisfied that in broad site planning terms this is equally acceptable a location for the hotel/conference facilities as it is for the holiday lodges.

This area also includes some areas of concrete hardstanding that remain following the removal of the “blue marquee” in partial compliance with one of the Enforcement Notices. I am aware, from my conversations with operators that consideration is actively being given to the removal of the hard surfacing in the near future.

This area of the site and the outdoor activities zone mentioned below, are the major areas close to the built facilities at the Hop Farm that are affected by the outdoor uses mentioned in 1.1.6 above. The Brief and Master Plan locational proposals would effectively permanently displace the outdoor use of those areas.

- **Local produce and food zone** – around the current entrance area and the approved garden/nursery buildings

This locality has been recently developed with a building intended for plant nursery sales use. The current facilities can be utilised and could usefully focus more on local produce as suggested in the Brief.

- **Corporate zone** – utilising Bells 1 and 2 and based upon existing facilities used for this purpose

The interiors of these buildings have been changed over the years but the use in itself is a suitable one subject to detailed submissions where changes to the Listed Building are required– whether it is ultimately possible to achieve some dedicated parking closer to these Bells can only be determined in the light of a detailed proposal/application in the future.

- **Hop Farm experience** – in Bell 4 focussing on the hop farm history

The internal works necessary, essential a lift, should not

- **The Oast Houses** – it is proposed to reduce the number of buildings/structures around the Bells and rethink the nature and location of children’s rides to improve the setting of the oasts – the red “big top” to be

removed. Areas of hardstanding to be broken-up and routes of earlier pathways reinstated.

This initiative is to be welcomed in principle but will, of course, need to be the subject of detailed design work and most likely planning application(s) – clearly the success in detail cannot be judged until that point is reached. The red “big top” is subject to an Enforcement Notice and I shall be seeking a timetable from the operators to support their offer of removal.

- **Children’s rides** – most of the existing travelling fairground rides, predominantly at the northern end of the site, to be removed and replaced by “designed-in” rides some of which would relocate to west of Bell 5.

As with the previous category this initiative is to be welcomed in principle but will need to be the subject of detailed design work and most likely planning applications – clearly the success in detail cannot be judged until that point is reached. Some of the existing facilities are subject to an Enforcement Notice and I shall be seeking a timetable for the operators to support their offer of removal. In the context of the proposals of the previous category it will be possible to review the siting of the authentic “Victorian galloper”. The relocation of the “climbing frame” to the west of Bell 5 will be a great advantage to the setting of the Listed Building to which it is currently attached – subject to final design. The re-landscaping of the area for bouncing pillows and the redesign, recladding and re-landscaping of the “driving school” features should allow those features to be retained in their current positions whilst, subject to detailed redesign, ceasing to adversely affect the setting of the surrounding Listed Buildings.

- **Outdoor activities and attractions** – land north of the Bells for use for open uses with better planting to integrate with the Bells and the wider landscape

These areas are acceptable, per se, for such use but much will turn on specific detailed design and the points raised by KCC Heritage Conservation. I remain to be convinced that the introduction of facsimile “hoppers huts” would be of value. Habitat enhancement needs to be a longer term aim in the detailed submissions.

- **Wild wood** – enhanced woodland trails

On the face of it this appears to be a sensible use of this land. However I do recognise the concerns raised by Kent Wildlife Trust and would want much more detail before the principle could be finally adopted. Nevertheless there are known examples of site where public access to water rich areas can operate happily alongside nature conservation and the notion should not be totally discounted in principle.

- **Farming and countryside attractions** – intended to be used for uses that are appropriate to the Green Belt

This approach to displaying rural activities seems appropriate but only provided that the detail of any related structures is carefully handled – planning applications for works will be closely scrutinised on detailed design impacts.

- **Enhancement of landscape framework** – new perimeter planting, avenue planting within the site and rationalisation of fencing

This is positive in principle but the key will be the specific landscape design adopted and would need to be further developed if the overall Brief /Master Plan is approved.

- **Materials and detailing** – the footpaths and fencing will be improved

Discussions have begun with the operators with regard to options for the reduction in the visual impact of fencing whilst ensuring suitable levels of security. This will require a balance of fence functionality and design, especially the need to ensure appropriate indigenous landscape design.

1.3.4 In terms of transport and traffic matters the principle intense volume and major traffic generators are the temporary outdoor uses and/or uses well established at the site. While this means that the opportunities to require enhancements through the planning system are limited, the operator should be encouraged to positively address the matters that have emerged in the transportation background study and the views of consultees.

1.3.5 In addition to the above matters I have a number of technical and procedural points that I intend to take up with the operator.

1.3.6 In my view the Brief and Master Plan provides a good basis for looking to the future of this site as anticipated in Saved Policy P6/25 - subject to the various matters set out in 1.3.3 above and those referred to in 1.3.4.

1.4 Legal Implications

1.4.1 The Brief/Plan will become a material consideration for Development Control once it is adopted.

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.5.1 None.

1.6 Risk Assessment

1.6.1 None at this stage – individual proposals will be assessed in the normal fashion for Development Control.

1.7 Equality Impact Assessment

1.7.1 See 'Screening for equality impacts' table at end of report.

1.8 Recommendations

1.8.1 **I RECOMMEND** that the Planning Brief/Master Plan document **BE ADOPTED** for the purposes of Saved Policy P6/25 subject to alterations and modifications necessary as set out in 1.3.3, 1.3.4 and 1.3.5 above.

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: Lindsay Pearson

Nil

Steve Humphrey

Director of Planning, Transport and Leisure

Screening for equality impacts:		
Question	Answer	Explanation of impacts
a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community?	No	Subsequent detailed submissions will need to meet the practical requirements of all sectors for the community.
b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality?	Yes	It is intended that all groups and needs are accommodated in the proposals in this document.
c. What steps are you taking to mitigate, reduce, avoid or minimise the impacts identified above?		

In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above.