

# TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

## CABINET

06 September 2016

### Report of the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health

#### Part 1- Public

#### Executive Non Key Decisions

#### **1 LOCAL PLAN – THE WAY FORWARD**

**This report addresses the key points raised at the Planning and Transportation Advisory Board meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> July and updates the documents and arrangements that will form the basis of the Local Plan public consultation due to commence later this month.**

#### **1.1 Background**

- 1.1.1 The Planning and Transportation Advisory Board at its meeting on the 5<sup>th</sup> July considered a report updating progress in respect of the Local Plan evidence base and setting out proposals and arrangements for the first major public consultation exercise as required by Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012, anticipated to commence later this month.
- 1.1.2 Members requested that consideration be given to simplifying the consultation document in the form of an executive summary and providing better quality mapping to assist the intended audience.
- 1.1.3 Members also raised a number of issues it was hoped could be addressed through the Local Plan process including, delivering affordable housing provision (specifically the role of the private rented sector); planning for housing for older people; accommodating higher housing densities and the implications for infrastructure; the extent and role of the Metropolitan Green Belt; and also the future of the Strategic Gap policy.
- 1.1.4 To ensure that the Local Plan timetable is not delayed, it was agreed that Cabinet should consider any changes to the consultation documents arising from the Board meeting so that arrangements can be put in place to commence the consultation exercise towards the end of September.

#### **1.2 Summary of Revisions to the Consultation Documents**

- 1.2.1 In response to the matters raised at Board, a succinct summary of the Way Forward has been prepared, which aims to raise awareness of the Local Plan

process, 'tell the story' to date and signpost the reader to the main consultation documents, which have also been edited to reflect Member's comments. The summary will be used as an introduction to the main consultation document but can also be read and used as a stand-alone explanatory note. There is also a section at the rear of the summary explaining how to respond in a number of different ways ranging from an electronic survey accessed via our website, through more traditional methods such as in writing or by email.

- 1.2.2 The most significant change to the main document entitled the Way Forward is in the form of a more informed explanation of the proposed strategy by highlighting the main elements and describes how they meet the guiding principles and deliver wider planning objectives.
- 1.2.3 The mapping will be created in such a way as to offer the maximum amount of detail available and appropriate at this stage. A larger scale, more detailed map has been prepared to illustrate the potential development strategy, which will be made available at A2 size to accompany the hard copies of the document. There will also be an electronic version of the map accessible via our website, which will have a zoom function similar to the map used for the Interim Sites Assessments. This will 'go live' as the consultation exercise gets underway. Within the Way Forward there will be some insert maps to illustrate the key areas of consideration. These measures should address the helpful issues raised regarding the quality of the map.
- 1.2.4 As noted at the Board meeting there have been some updating changes to parts of the evidence base, particularly in respect of the Interim Sites Assessments. These changes will be incorporated into a revised set of Sites Assessments and will be uploaded to the website. This has resulted in some amendments to the sites included in the potential development strategy. The two main changes are the removal of site 421 north of Tonbridge Road, Hildenborough as there remains uncertainty over the availability of the site and a revision to the site boundary of site 196 north of Dry Hill Park Road Tonbridge to reflect the fact that a portion of the site in the ownership of Tonbridge School was submitted in error. The revised map is included in the Way Forward appended to this report.
- 1.2.5 Minor amendments have also been made to the Scoping report for the Sustainability Appraisal to reflect this. No changes have been necessary for the Habitats Regulations Assessment document.
- 1.2.6 Other parts of the evidence base are in the process of being updated, which may require minor amendments to the consultation documents prior to the launch of the consultation exercise, but these are not expected to be significant.
- 1.2.7 The revised Way Forward document, including a new executive summary and larger scale map of the potential development strategy together with an 'infographic' summarising the key points are appended to this report for approval. These documents together with the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping report and

Habitat Regulations Assessment report, which were considered by the Board in July, will form the basis of the consultations due to commence later this month.

### **1.3 Consultation Arrangements**

- 1.3.1 Subject to Cabinet approval, the anticipated start of the consultation exercise will be Friday 30th September concluding eight weeks later on the 25th November, which is longer than the minimum statutory consultation period of six weeks.
- 1.3.2 The main focus of the consultation will be the documents appended to this report. The Way Forward document is structured in a way that enables the reader to fully understand the Local Plan process as prescribed by national planning guidance before summarising the main issues arising from the evidence and proposing a potential development strategy. Set questions are posed throughout to provide consultees with a structure for responding, although comments can be made in a variety of ways on any aspect of the emerging Local Plan.
- 1.3.3 The executive summary and infographic are simpler formats summarising the main points and raising awareness of the Local Plan and the importance of this consultation. With signposting to the fuller consultation documents and the evidence base and clear advice on how to respond, these consultation tools should enable as many people as possible to get involved with the Local Plan.
- 1.3.4 As the consultation opens all the documents will become available on the website along with an electronic survey setting out the 15 set questions in the Way Forward. There will be hardcopies at the two main Council Offices and all libraries and further copies will be made available to all of the Parish and Town Councils.
- 1.3.5 There will be media briefings arranged prior to the launch and further publicity in the form of social media and posters for public notice boards. The Parish Partnership Panel on the 8<sup>th</sup> September will be used as an opportunity to brief local councils of the consultation arrangements and encourage them to work with their local communities to raise awareness and respond. This follows a previous briefing for Parish Councils held at the end of June in the lead-in to the PTAB meeting. An update can also be given to the Tonbridge Forum on 12 September.
- 1.3.6 There will also be a small number of manned exhibitions around the Borough during the 8 week consultation exercise to enable residents to discuss their views face to face with a planning officer should they wish. The number and duration of the manned sessions will have to reflect the limited resources available to the Local Plans Team during this busy stage of plan making.
- 1.3.7 Similarly, requests for meetings will have to be managed proportionately to the resources available. In order to plan for this eventuality, it is proposed that there will be a small number of Local Plan events for Parish and Town Councils and other local amenity and community groups who have expressed an interest in the Local Plan process during the consultation period.

1.3.8 These events will be located as far as possible so that they are accessible by local councils and other local groups. It is envisaged that there will be one or two representatives from each invited organisation. This seems to be a practical way of managing this aspect of the consultation programme and while there may be some flexibility to enable additional officer attendances at meetings on request we must be realistic in controlling and managing our resources. This approach can be explained at the Parish Partnership Panel on 8 September. A progress report will be made to the November meeting of the Planning and Transportation Advisory Board with a full report responding to all of the responses received to follow the close of the consultation exercise. This will inform the next stage of the Local Plan and a further round of consultations currently timetabled for the spring of 2017.

## **1.4 Conclusions**

- 1.4.1 This report responds to the matters raised at the Planning and Transportation Advisory Board in July in respect of the documents and arrangements for the first major public consultation exercise for the Local Plan required by Regulation 18 of the Local Plan Regulations.
- 1.4.2 Subject to the approval by the Cabinet the consultations, as described in section 1.3 of this report, will commence on 30<sup>th</sup> September and run for eight weeks.

## **1.5 Legal Implications**

- 1.5.1 Local Planning Authorities are required to prepare and keep up to date a Local Plan for their area. Failure to do so puts the Council's ability to manage development and plan positively at risk.
- 1.5.2 National planning guidance and the Local Plan Regulations require Local Planning Authorities to consult on their Local Plans for soundness. The minimum statutory period for such consultations is six weeks, but the consultation planned for late September will run for eight, going beyond the minimum to assist those who would wish a little more time. This approach is in line with the emerging Parish Charter.

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

- 1.6.1 The costs of the consultations including printing, advertising, venue hire and staff time can be met from existing budgets.

## **1.7 Risk Assessment**

- 1.7.1 The Regulation 18 consultations for a Local Plan are an important part of the statutory process intended to allow as many people that are affected by the proposals to be involved. Failure to do so runs the risk of the Plan being found unsound.

## **1.8 Equality Impact Assessment**

- 1.8.1 The consultation arrangements have been prepared in a way that provide a range of opportunities to access the information and respond so that as many people as possible may have their say.

## **1.9 Policy Considerations**

- 1.9.1 When finalised, the Local Plan will replace the adopted Local Development Framework, which provides the local planning policy context for Tonbridge and Malling. The emerging Local Plan will gain weight as a material planning consideration as the process progresses.

## **1.10 Recommendations**

- 1.10.1 That the documents appended to this report form the basis of the Local Plan Regulation 18 public consultations as described in section 1.3.

Background papers:

Nil

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