

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
PLANNING and TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD

15 November 2016

Report of the Director of Planning Housing and Environmental Health

Matters for Information

1 LOCAL PLAN UPDATE

This report updates Members on the current Local Plan public consultation exercise, which began on the 30th September 2016. The consultation is due to close on 25th November.

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 The first major public consultation on the emerging Local Plan as required by Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning Regulations began for an eight week period on Friday the 30th September and is due to close at 5pm on Friday the 25th November.
- 1.1.2 In advance of the launch a press release and briefings were arranged for local media, which have resulted in widespread press coverage of the consultation and how to find out more information and respond. Full use has been made of our website and social media and hard copies of the main consultation document ('The Way Forward') and supporting information have been provided to Parish and Town Councils. Further copies have been placed on deposit at all libraries in the Borough and the two main Council Offices at Kings Hill and Tonbridge Castle.
- 1.1.3 In addition a series of four Local Plan events for Local Councils and Community Groups were arranged to take place during the first few weeks of the exercise, to explain in some more detail the purpose of the consultations and how to respond effectively and constructively. The aim of these events is to enable attendees to take messages back to their colleagues and communities.

1.2 Consultation Update

- 1.2.1 At the time of writing this report all four of the Local Plan events had taken place and also all of the six scheduled public exhibitions. As noted above, the events were aimed at briefing local Council and community group representatives about the purpose of the consultation and how to respond. 18 of the 27 Tonbridge and Malling Parish and Town Councils attended. The feedback from the events has generally been positive and those attending have found them helpful.

- 1.2.2 The public exhibitions have been very well attended thus far and have proved to be popular with residents wishing to find out more about the Local Plan and the proposals in The Way Forward document. These were intended primarily to provide a means of engagement for those who do not have access or prefer not to use the internet or prefer a more human interface with the process. We have responded positively to requests for a further evening exhibition due to take place at the Council Offices, Kings Hill on the evening of 10th November.
- 1.2.3 The exhibitions at Kings Hill Community Centre, Larkfield Leisure Centre, the Angel Centre, Hadlow Village Hall, Aylesford Village Hall and Borough Green Village Hall were attended by between 50 and 100 people over the 3 hour sessions. The exhibition at Kings Hill formed part of a separate Local and Neighbourhood Plan event organised and hosted by the Parish Council.
- 1.2.4 In the main those attending the exhibitions have welcomed the opportunity to discuss the Local Plan process, the proposed 'Way Forward' and share their concerns. Officers have been able to provide clarification, reassurances and encouragement to follow this up with a formal response through the various channels available. Despite our best efforts, a relatively small proportion of those attending did not appreciate the need for preparing a new Local Plan to meet future needs or understand the implications of the alternative scenario of not maintaining an up to date development plan and supply of housing. However, overall it is fair to say that the majority of people have been keen to understand the background to the local plan and the local implications and no doubt that will lead to many representations being received following the consultation period.
- 1.2.5 The main topics arising through discussions at the exhibitions include concerns about the proximity of proposed development to their own home, impact on local infrastructure, particularly the local highway network, but also schools and health facilities, ensuring adequate parking to accompany new development and issues relating to Green Belt.
- 1.2.6 As of 3rd November (approximately half way through the 8 week consultation) 149 responses had been received including 84 Survey Monkey returns (this is the on-line questionnaire found on our website responding to the 15 suggested questions in the 'Way Forward') and 65 emails and letters. Normally, there is an increase in the level of response to consultation exercises such as this towards the end of exercise. There will be an opportunity to provide a verbal update on these figures on the night of the Board meeting.
- 1.2.7 Officers have become aware during the consultation of a number of co-ordinated responses being encouraged on a small number of specific issues. These include proposals to extend the Green Belt designation further east than suggested in the Way Forward and objections to the proposed development strategy in respect of the developable areas located at Lower Haysden in Tonbridge, north of Borough Green and in the vicinity of Hermitage Lane, Aylesford.

1.3 Next Steps

- 1.3.1 The consultation is due to close on 25th November after which all responses will be carefully considered and will form part of a report back to this Board.

1.4 Legal Implications

- 1.4.1 Local Planning Authorities are required to prepare and keep up to date a development plan for their area. Failure to do so may leave the Council's planning decisions at risk of appeal and could also lead to intervention from Government.

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.5.1 There will be direct financial and value for money considerations associated with the public consultation exercise described in this report. These costs will be met from existing budgets. In addition and as noted above, failure to prepare a Local Plan within reasonable timescales may have financial implications if this results in appeals being lost.

1.6 Risk Assessment

- 1.6.1 An out of date Local Plan puts at risk the ability of the Local Planning Authority to control development and plan positively for local communities.

1.7 Equality Impact Assessment

- 1.7.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

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