

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
PLANNING and TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD

4 June 2014

Report of the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 LOCAL PLAN PROGRESS

This report updates Members in respect of progress made in preparing the Local Plan.

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 Since the last Board meeting in March officers have continued to make progress on preparing the evidence base for the Local Plan; the meetings with all the Parish and Town Councils have been concluded; and officers have monitored strategic planning matters in neighbouring authorities and the Government's ongoing planning reforms, which are the subject of other reports on tonight's agenda.
- 1.1.2 The Local Plan is proceeding steadily in accordance with the revised timetable presented at the March meeting. There will be a further update report to the Board meeting in July, which will also receive a revised Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) and Local Development Scheme (LDS) for approval.
- 1.1.3 These documents, introduced as part of Local Development Frameworks, are still a requirement for Local Plans. The SCI sets out how the Local Planning Authority intends to consult and engage with local communities and others with an interest in the Local Plan and development management in general. The LDS is a more formal form of the Local Plan timetable already familiar to the Board.
- 1.1.4 Members are also advised that there will be an additional Board meeting on the 25th September 2014. The purpose of this meeting will be to seek approval of the documentation forming part of the first major public consultation stage for the Local Plan known as the Issues and Options stage, which is anticipated to take place during the autumn. The meeting in September will enable officers to begin consultations in the autumn as timetabled rather than wait for the next scheduled Board meeting in November, which would mean the consultation period would extend over the Christmas period. This period of consultation will focus on high level options for the future development strategy for the Borough. It is envisaged

that a more detailed consultation stage, dealing with site specific matters, will follow in the late spring/early summer of next year.

- 1.1.5 There will also be an opportunity at the next meeting to explain the Issues and Options exercise in some more detail.

1.2 Local Plan Evidence Base

1.2.1 Objectively Assessed Needs and the SHMA

- 1.2.2 The evidence base underpinning a Local Plan is crucial to demonstrating to an independent Inspector at Examination that the Plan has been prepared on robust, relevant and up to date information. It is a key test of soundness.

- 1.2.3 The Government has made very clear that a key starting point for an Local Plan is to establish the Objectively Assessed Needs (OAN) for new development over the Plan period. This has been illustrated through numerous Inspector's reports and withdrawn or unsound Plans across the country. Therefore the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) is arguably the most significant piece of evidence for this Plan. The SHMA was completed in March and the Board advised of the main conclusions at the last meeting. Members will recall that our challenge will be to address an OAN figure of 650 homes per annum throughout the Plan period.

- 1.2.4 At about the same time in March the Government published the final version of its Planning Practice Guidance, which is the subject of a separate report on this agenda. The SHMA has been checked against the new guidance and is almost entirely in accordance. There is one new addition to the guidance relating to the treatment of residential institutions, which have not formed part of housing needs assessments or supply in the past. The guidance now allows residential institutions (including care homes and student accommodation) to count towards meeting housing targets.

- 1.2.5 This is a positive step, but to count such accommodation against housing needs, a needs assessment of this type of accommodation over the Plan period will be necessary. The consultants have been approached by the three original commissioning authorities (TMBC, Maidstone and Ashford) to prepare an addendum to the SHMAs to ensure they are compliant with the latest guidance. An opportunity has also been taken to review new population projections expected to be released by the end of May. These updates are not expected to change the housing need significantly, but they will ensure that the SHMA is as up to date as possible going into the Issues and Options stage.

1.2.6 The Call for Sites and the SHLAA

- 1.2.7 The identification of future land supply to meet the OAN is another key piece of evidence and known as a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA). This is being prepared in-house and officers have been reviewing existing commitments and allocations as part of a desk study. At the last Board

meeting members were advised that a 'Call for Sites' exercise was about to be launched. This is now a requirement of Plan making and provides an opportunity for sites to be promoted by landowners, developers and other parties (including, for example, Parish Councils) early in the Plan making process. The exercise began in early April for a period for 8 weeks concluding on the 30th May.

1.2.8 At the time of writing this report approximately 30 submissions had been received, but more are expected up to the deadline. A verbal update on the number of submissions received will be made at the meeting. Officers will consider all of the proposals over the summer and a report explaining the outcome of the assessment will be prepared for the September Board meeting. At that time, officers' own consideration of other areas and sites will be included.

1.2.9 Employment Land Review

1.2.10 The consultants Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners have already prepared some economic futures work that has fed into the SHMA. They have been retained to build on this work to prepare a new Employment Land Review, which will assess the current stock of employment land and future allocations for their suitability and deliverability in meeting the OAN for employment uses over the Plan period.

1.2.11 A first draft of this review has been recently received and a meeting with the consultants arranged for the 19th June to discuss feedback and amendments. Further updates will be provided to this Board as information emerges.

1.2.12 Retail Studies

1.2.13 The same consultants have also been retained to prepare a retail study for the whole borough, building on the work that has already been prepared in respect of Tonbridge Town Centre and the Botany redevelopment.

1.2.14 Green Belt Review

1.2.15 Officers are reviewing the extent of the Metropolitan Green Belt designations to ensure that the reasons for including those areas are still relevant and up to date and in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework and the Planning Policy Guidance. This is normal procedure when a Plan is prepared or reviewed.

1.2.16 Depending on the outcome of the Call for Sites exercise and the SHLAA process in general there may be a second stage to this exercise to meet other Local Plan objectives.

1.2.17 Sustainability Appraisal

1.2.18 A scoping exercise into a Sustainability Appraisal of the Local Plan has also begun in-house. Further updates will be provided to the next meeting of the Board.

1.3 Community Engagement

- 1.3.1 The meetings with all 27 of the Parish and Town Councils have been successfully concluded. The feedback was generally positive in respect of raising awareness of the new Local Plan, an opportunity to ask some questions about the process and the challenges ahead and a willingness to work proactively with the Borough Council.
- 1.3.2 Lines of communication have remained open between officers and the local councils. Offers to attend public meetings alongside the Issues and Options consultations in the autumn will be taken up, resources permitting.
- 1.3.3 The valuable lessons we have learned from the 1-1 meetings with the Parish and Town Councils will be incorporated into a similar exercise to raise awareness of the Local Plan with the unparished communities of Tonbridge. There are a number of key stakeholder groups already in existence, such as the Town Forum, Tonbridge Civic Society, resident's associations and the Town Team. A similar format to the parish 1-1 presentations explaining the Local Plan process and challenges, with a Q&A session will be invited to this group either as a single round table event or as a series of 1-1s over the summer.

1.4 Responding to Ongoing Planning Reforms

- 1.4.1 This matter is addressed in more detail in another report on this agenda, but needless to say, officers are monitoring this situation very carefully along with other emerging Local Plans, particularly how Inspector's reports interpret Government guidance. Any significant changes, such as the introduction of residential institutions being able to contribute to meeting future housing need, will be taken on board as illustrated earlier in this report in respect of the SHMA.

1.5 Duty to Cooperate

- 1.5.1 Meetings have been held with officers from Maidstone, Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks since the last Board meeting to share the results of the SHMA and other relevant strategic planning matters. Officer comments were recently returned to Maidstone Borough Council in respect of their recent Local Plan consultations and these are the subject of another report on this agenda seeking member endorsement.
- 1.5.2 These meetings, consultation responses and other example of working proactively to address strategic planning matters will contribute to meeting the Duty to Cooperate, which is another test of soundness in preparing Local Plans.

1.6 Local Plan Timetable and Next Stages

- 1.6.1 As noted in the Introduction to this report, there is one significant change to the timetable to incorporate an additional meeting of this Board on 25th September to

allow Members to consider the content of the Issues and Options stage consultations.

- 1.6.2 The meeting in July will receive further updates on progress and also copies of a SCI and LDS for approval. More details on what the Issues and Options exercise in the autumn will comprise will also be provided.

1.7 Legal Implications

- 1.7.1 The Council as Local Planning Authority is required to prepare a Local Plan for its area.

1.8 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.8.1 Ensuring that the Local Plan is prepared in accordance with national planning policy and guidance and based on a robust, up to date and proportionate evidence base will reduce the risks associated with submitting an unsound Plan for examination.
- 1.8.2 In house resources will continue to be focused on parts of the evidence base and process where local knowledge, experience and skills are available and also to ensure a proactive liaison with communities, local councils and other key stakeholders.

1.9 Risk Assessment

- 1.9.1 Failure to maintain an up to date Development Plan runs the risk of a lack of control in managing future development in the Borough and potentially increasing appeal costs.

1.10 Policy Considerations

- 1.10.1 The Local Plan will be the Council's primary land use planning policy document.

1.11 Conclusions

- 1.11.1 This report provides Members with an update of progress on the preparation of the Local Plan, advises of next steps and future meetings.

Background papers:

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Nil

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