



TMBC LOCAL PLAN “THE WAY FORWARD”

1. SUMMARY OF THE PLAN

Background: As anticipated in the EMCG March newsletter the draft Local Plan “[The Way Forward](#)” was published by TMBC on 30th September and is on the Council website. Central Government requires TMBC to identify about 6,000 plots for new dwellings between 2016 and 2031 (in addition to those already “in the pipeline”) - around 400 per year. TMBC cannot challenge this. Councils which fail to comply with the government's requirements will have land designated by Whitehall for building in their Boroughs.

TMBC's Planning Challenge: Until recently, TMBC has been able to focus large-scale housing development on “brownfield” sites, of which the largest was West Malling Airfield, aka Kings Hill. Government policy remains that brownfield sites, when available, should be developed in preference to agricultural land, but since most brownfields in the Borough either have been or are being developed some new housing will have to be built on greenfield sites. Around 250 landowners and would-be developers asked that TMBC consider their sites (not all of them greenfield) for housing. “The Way Forward” sets out which sites, or parts of sites, TMBC planners now recommend should be zoned for development.

“The Way Forward” Document: The following is a very short simplified summary of what is a 66-page document plus a “[Potential Development Strategy Map](#)”. TMBC is asking for public feedback on the whole document, though the proposals for development in East Malling and adjacent areas take up only 6 pages. Most of the other 60 pages describe the policies and guidelines the Council has used to develop its plan.

Proposed Developments: Most new building would be in three areas – in Tonbridge, Ditton and Aylesford, and East and West Malling. The proposals which most affect East Malling are as follows:

Broadwater Farm: around 115 acres would be developed with about 1,400 houses. Essentially, Kings Hill would expand to the north-west, beyond the limits of the old airfield and into East Malling - about 900 of the houses within the current East Malling boundary the rest in West Malling. (See pages 27-28 of “The Way Forward”).

East Malling Research and other land east of Kiln Barn Road: around 120 acres east of Kiln Barn Road would be developed with about 1,450 houses. (See pages 26-27 of “The Way Forward”). This land is technically in Ditton or Aylesford, but clearly this development and the proposed expansion of Kings Hill would have a major impact on East Malling.

It is only fair to add that the plan also contains a proposal to designate land on the West Malling side of the bypass as additional green belt. (See pages 38-39 of “The Way Forward”). Also, a large number of sites put forward by would-be developers have been turned down or scaled back, including the proposed Broadwater Farm development.

Impact on East Malling: It is currently proposed that over the next fifteen years slightly less than 3,000 homes would be built immediately to the east and south-west of East Malling Village, 900 of the latter within the parish boundary, the others literally on the other side of the road marking the boundary.

What further worries the EMCG Committee is what will happen when this planning exercise is repeated in 2031 – which it inevitably will be. It is clear that the land between Well Street and Kings Hill, and Research Station land west of Kiln Barn Road could be in the firing-line. (Both these areas were proposed for development by the landowners but turned down in “The Way Forward”). We owe it to the people who will be living here in twenty years time to try to protect them from development which could have quite catastrophic consequences for East Malling as a separate community and as a desirable place to live.

2. EMCG VIEWS ON THE ABOVE

EMCG's thoughts on "The Way Forward" are that we recognise the hard work done by the officers of the council and we applaud them for that. We also recognise the need for more housing in the borough, and recognise that the west side of the borough is predominantly Metropolitan Green Belt, which prevents large housing developments in that area. Hence TMBC's proposal to build around half the housing units required by government in and around East Malling. EMCG's published objectives include:

1. To conserve the village heritage, its buildings, rural character and natural environment
2. To work with the Parish and Borough Councils towards achieving these aims
3. To increase the sense of community by consultation, communication with all of the residents of the village and the surrounding area.

Drawing on these objectives, the preliminary views of the EMCG Committee are as follows:

Broadwater Farm: The proposals for the Broadwater Farm site threaten the goals set out in item 1 above. We fear that any development outside of the original Airfield boundary may open the door to further development across the whole site and indeed, ultimately, further north to the A20. If this were allowed to happen then East Malling, Larkfield, West Malling and Ditton would become one huge conurbation. Looking further in the future the whole area could become suburbs of Maidstone. The consequences for East Malling, its rural character and natural environment would be catastrophic.

To be fair, in 'The Way Forward' TMBC officers are suggesting that the Metropolitan Green Belt be extended eastward to the A228 Ashton Way. This will protect West Malling from encroachment, and effectively guarantees some separation between West Malling and the historically more important East Malling. But it does nothing to address concerns about a possible future Kings Hill / East Malling conurbation. Therefore the Committee proposes to argue that the area of land within Broadwater Farm proposed to be developed should be reduced by around one-third, and for an extension to the Green Belt further east than the A228 so as to maintain a green wedge between Kings Hill and East Malling. This area is, apart from being a beautiful space enjoyed by the community, also home to wildlife such as deer and water voles, which should be protected.

East of Kiln Barn Road: (Though not within East Malling Parish, this is within the surrounding area, so item 3 above applies). We are unenthusiastic about the proposed development to the east of Kiln Barn Road. However we do not oppose it, as it will allow a green wedge to be retained between East Malling and the rural part of Ditton, whilst meeting TMBC's need for a substantial number of housing units. By its size this development will provide monies for new infrastructure and amenities for the borough as a whole.

However we will argue strongly for Research Station land bounded on the east by Kiln Barn Road and by New Road on the west to be classified as green belt, so as to close off the option, after 2031, of building on the green space between East Malling and Ditton. This would, furthermore, protect the East Malling Research establishment, an internationally respected organisation which has been in East Malling for over one hundred years. Apart from being an employer of local people it contributes hugely to global horticultural food production with its work. If this were to be lost to development in the future, it would be a great loss and so to maintain its position it should be included in any green belt strategy.

Traffic Implications: The building of a large number of new properties in the area will inevitably lead to a problem with additional traffic on the surrounding roads which we all know are already stretched to the limit. To be fair, "The Way Forward" includes proposals for a new road to link the proposed Kiln Barn Road estate to the A20, but the A20 itself is increasingly congested. We also believe that the local plan fails adequately to address the issues of parking and congestion which will arise from the building of thousands of new houses in the area around East Malling. We shall argue that this omission needs to be addressed.

Needless to say, the above is the preliminary view of your Committee. We will reach a final position after the public meeting on November 4th (see below) in the light of any feedback you, the members of the Group, provide. We hope to see many of you there, and of course would be glad to hear from by letter or email from those of you who are not able to attend the meeting.

3. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The EMCG Committee is very keen indeed to hear from members of the community what you think about these proposals so that we can accurately reflect your views to TMBC. That's why we have organised a public meeting at **8 p.m. on Friday 4 November in the Malling School**. David Thornewell, Chair of the Parish Council, will summarise the proposals set out in the draft local plan. Our Member of Parliament, Tom Tugendhat, MP, will share his views on what is proposed and will take questions from the meeting, as will the two Borough Councillors for East Malling ward, Roger Roud and Dan Markham. We are setting out 200 chairs for the meeting, and hope that we will need to use some of the "spares" at the back of the hall! Please do try to come if you possibly can, not only to share your views, but to demonstrate by your attendance that this is an issue which the community really cares about.

After the public meeting, members of the EMCG Committee will meet members of the TMBC planning team to share your views with them and to advance the arguments set out in section 2 above (modified as necessary in the light of the feedback from the meeting). We will then prepare a written submission to TMBC, which will appear in full on the website. We will, of course, share with members any reaction we get from TMBC or local councillors.

4. WHAT TO DO IF YOU WANT TO COMMENT OR OBJECT

You can download "[The Way forward](#)" from the TMBC website or it is available to view at the Council's offices at Kings Hill. In addition [public exhibitions](#) will be held at locations across the borough, details of which can be found on the Council's website together with downloadable versions of the exhibition boards.

TMBC are keen for local residents to take part in the consultation by sharing their views and comments on the emerging Plan which includes 15 detailed questions TMBC would like to see answered. But of course you don't have to answer all these questions, or indeed any of them. You can simply email your comments to (address) or write to Ian Bailey, Planning Policy Manager, Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council, Gibson Building, Gibson Drive, Kings Hill, West Malling, Kent ME19 4LZ. If you want to complete the interactive form and answer all or some of the questions, they are available on the Council's website: www.tmbc.gov.uk/localplan **The deadline for comments is 25 November 2016**

You can object to the plan on any grounds you choose to raise, but be aware that planners will not take into account objections which are strictly personal for example, loss of a favourite view you have enjoyed for many years. Nor will they take into account the noise or disturbance arising from actually building houses. What they *will* take into account includes

- Adverse effect on the community of noise, disturbance, overlooking, loss of privacy, over-shadowing etc
- Unacceptably high density / overdevelopment of the site and loss of agricultural land and green space providing a local amenity
- Negative visual impact of the development
- Negative effect of the development on the character of the neighbourhood
- Loss of existing views from neighbouring properties would adversely affect the residential amenity of neighbouring owners
- If in or adjacent to a Conservation Area, adverse effect of the development on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.
- If near a Listed Building, adverse effect of the development on the setting of the Listed Building
- Adversely effect on highway safety or the convenience of road users (but only if there is detailed technical evidence to back up such a claim)

We would like to stress that the single most effective action EMCG members can take in respect of this development is to write to TMBC with detailed views and/or objections. We hope that very many of you will write, and would be grateful if you would send us copies of emails or letters - by email to twisden@aol.com or by post to Court Lodge, Church Walk, East Malling ME19 6AG