

# Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum

## Future direction

Matt Goodwin 27.03.2006

### Purpose of Town Forum

The Town Forum was set up by TWBC in response to very adverse Audit Commission (AC) report in 2004; the AC called for evidence of partnership working between TWBC and residents and the Town Forum is one of the means that has been established to achieve and demonstrate that partnership.

The Town Forum has had some significant achievements including:

- pulled together a disparate group of people and demonstrated a strong commonality of aims and interests.
- responded to a series of high profile consultative documents.
- highlighted a number of areas of public concern and obtained considerable local media coverage.
- proved that local people are willing and keen to be engaged, even in their own time and at their own expense.

However, profile of the Town Forum is too low and it is easy to ignore; this is partly because it's so new but also because we have not sufficiently set an agenda to which TWBC must respond.  
It is time to reappraise the direction of the Town Forum.

### The future

The Town Forum needs to concentrate on TW issues; primarily these should be **thought leadership** in the following areas, some strategic, some not:

- infrastructural matters – compulsory measures on energy and water measures for residents and developers, road and rail integration etc.
- positioning the Town for the future – attracting value added businesses to set up or relocate to the Town including educational measures.
- public policy matters – for example alcohol control etc.
- develop initiatives to ensure that views of disenfranchised and the under represented are taken into account.
- smaller issues but which impact directly on quality of life, including street lighting, pavement conditions, community projects etc.

### What we also need to do

1. consider the composition of the Town Forum.
2. review the roles of local Councillors on the Town Forum – they will typically have the knowledge that we need to inform Town Forum debates and we need their more active and helpful involvement.

### What the Town Forum needs from TWBC

- more active partnership – attendance by leadership demonstrating interest and giving feedback on where and how the Town Forum could contribute more.
- a formal structure under which TWBC and all other partner agencies commit to involvement with the Town Forum rather than relying on persuasion to secure.
- a formal reporting mechanism under which Town Forum views, proposals and recommendations are submitted directly to the most appropriate persons **and** under which appropriate response and feedback is made to the Town Forum.
- following TWBC restructure and loss of the principal Town Forum supporter we need an active commitment from TWBC on resources and general support.

And finally, we need to see more complete transparency in local governance. The recent lamppost issue, whilst not in itself interesting, has highlighted a number of deep flaws. They are:

1. determining responsible parties in TWBC and/or KCC – it is simply unacceptable that the system is so opaque.
2. that it required two high profile local residents and a lot of media coverage to achieve movement on something so basic and necessary. Would this have been achievable by a normal member of the public?
3. that it has required the attention of the Leader of the Council.