

## **Response of the Royal Town Forum to KCC's 5 year Strategic Plan consultation 'Your Future, Our Priority'**

### **Summary**

KCC's latest five year Strategic Plan is a major disappointment. It has warm words, but no actions planned which will actually improve the quality of life for residents in Kent.

There are no targets in the document; no reference to measures to implement KCC's declaration of a climate emergency; nothing that targets Kent's air pollution problem – most of its larger towns do not comply with UK Government limits – and no reference to measures to tackle obesity in Kent, which is above national levels. There is no mention of whether KCC is on track to meet its (unambitious) targets on active travel and road safety – the suspicion is that the targets are not being met.

On page 44, the following sentence occurs *"We have a responsibility to improve quality of life for residents and communities, not just monitor service activity."* Unfortunately, the rest of the document contains lots of references to monitoring and little to action to improve quality of life.

### **Detail**

- 1) There are many warm and comforting words in the document. Since these are not backed up with targets, it is impossible to judge whether the outcomes are important to quality of life. E.g. If "A cleaner and greener Kent" means that pollution in our towns, many of which are above legal limits, will be reduced by 5% over 20 years, then the outcome is "unimportant to quality of life". If it were "a 50% reduction over 2 years", then the outcome might be important, depending on measure used.
- 2) The emphasis on infrastructure before housing is welcome, but there are no measures mentioned to ensure that this will be achieved. Prioritising brownfield sites for development is welcome, but there are insufficient brownfield sites in Tunbridge Wells to deliver the new houses "required". That inevitably means that significant parts of Kent at present green will be developed. There is an accumulated and intensifying deficit of infrastructure affecting housing, transport, utilities and community services. What are Kent's proposals for remedying this?
- 3) KCC has declared a Climate Emergency, but the document gives no hint of emergency action. The phrase "Climate Emergency" is included just three times – once to say that it has been declared, once to monitor what the UK Government is doing and once as a long-term ambition.
- 4) With half of its population obese or overweight, Kent is above the national average and yet there is but a single mention of the word 'obese'. That mention is in the context of children and there is nothing about weight management in the health section. There are no proposed actions recorded about improved diets or increased activity.

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Formed in 2005, the Town Forum is the voice of the 50,000 residents of Royal Tunbridge Wells on issues of common interest

#### **Town Forum Management Group**

Adrian Berendt (Chair); Alastair Tod (Deputy Chair); Don Sloan (Deputy Chair); David Wakefield (Finance); Jane Fenwick (Transport); TBC (Culture, Leisure & Tourism); Marianne MacDonald (Wellbeing) Mark Booker (Strategic Planning); Michael Holman (Water in the Wells)

- 5) The section on travel transport is particularly weak:
- a. It is insufficient to “respond” to changes in mode of travel. Policies must drive the modal shift that we want and need – more freight on rail, more people travelling by sustainable modes, making active travel the natural choice for short journeys etc
  - b. There is far too much emphasis on highways and on longer journeys. The section on Active Travel is just 4 lines long. Since 2/3 of all journeys in Kent are less than 5 miles, it would be far better to focus on making short journeys better and safer. A consequence of this would be that longer journeys would also improve.
  - c. Other references to Active Travel are all about “implementing KCC Active Travel Strategy”. This 2017 strategy is supposed to have been achieved by 2021 (12 months away). There is no reference to how close KCC is to achieving the modest targets set out in that strategy.
  - d. Reducing road casualties in Kent is a major determinant of the quality of life. Residents that leave home in the morning are entitled to believe that they will return home in the evening without being injured on Kent’s roads. Yet, there is no reference to the fact that, since KCC set its targets in 2014 for reducing road casualties in Kent, road danger has actually increased. KCC should adopt immediately Vision Zero as a key outcome for road travel, as we do for rail and air travel.
  - e. Why is it necessary for there to be “specific circumstance” for “the use of road safety cameras... to reduce speeding”. We know that road safety cameras reduce speeding and lower speeds reduce road casualties. The question should be “how can KCC implement as many road safety cameras and other road safety measures as quickly as possible?”
  - f. The time is long past for investigating “the introduction of 20mph speed limits by schools during school arrival and pick up.” Forward thinking local authorities are not introducing 20mph speed limits in specific locations at specific times. They are implementing 20mph across all residential streets and town and village centres, by default. The time for introducing wide area 20mph limits is now, because within 2 years, Intelligent Speed Assistance is mandatory on new cars.

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