



Response of the Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum Management Group
at the **TWBC PLANNING & TRANSPORTATION CABINET ADVISORY BOARD** meeting
on **Monday 16 January 2017**

Agenda Item 6: Expansion of car parking in Royal Tunbridge Wells

The Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum is concerned that the proposals contained in the report for Agenda Item 6 appear to have been developed prematurely:

- outside the framework of the Local Plan Review consultations currently underway; and
- without apparent consideration of the obligation already in force to prepare a Masterplan under the existing SADPD in relation to the Area of Change which includes the Crescent Road Multi-storey, but also other adjoining properties ripe for redevelopment.

In its response to the SADPD consultation and in other representations, the Town Forum has drawn attention to the major potential for redevelopment of the entire area bounded by Crescent Road, Calverley Road and Monson road. This land, of the highest potential commercial value, is in the very centre of the town and offers the opportunity:

- for a substantial mixed use development to remedy the shortage of employment sites;
- to enable substantial sustainable residential development;
- for the expansion of the town centre in a sustainable form, perhaps around interlocking squares, thus revitalising a strategically important area which is currently either almost derelict or very sub-optimal in its uses within a town centre.

We note that the entire area has in fact been submitted for development by persons (as yet publicly unidentified) in response to the 2016 Call for Sites consultation.

The effect of the proposal to rejuvenate and add to the current car park could effectively sterilise this whole area for the foreseeable future. It would be difficult to justify the demolition of a building and its planned extension on which millions of pounds would have been spent abortively from the public purse. Closing off the opportunity for major comprehensive redevelopment in this way would almost certainly deter any major developer from taking an interest in the remaining smaller split sites adjoining. Any aerial view of the multi-storey shows just how wasteful it is of the space it occupies and space immediately surrounding it on all sides. It is in a key position at the centre of an area of potential redevelopment many times greater than that of the entire civic complex and Adult Education centre.

When the Town Forum management group were included in the early presentations on the project for a new theatre, new Civic Centre and heritage-compliant re-use of the present Civic Centre, (a project which has received strong conditional support from the Town Forum), it was mentioned to us in passing that, large though the project was, it might still be too small to be of interest to the largest and best resourced developers.

Questions have since been raised in a number of quarters concerning the overall viability of the above project yet it seems that one solution, which might better guarantee financial viability, is being ignored.

This would involve including in the project a major redevelopment of the Crescent Road area on a similar scale to that of RVP with broadly the same institutional legal structures for construction and long term management, but in line with Royal Tunbridge Wells' and the Borough's 21st century needs. This would have a much greater appeal to major institutions and developers than the project in its current form and could relieve TWBC of some of its financing needs.

Land ownership in the area seems considerably less problematical than was the case with RVP and yet all the obstacles to RVP were satisfactorily overcome by its development management team. TWBC is already in control of the greater part of the eastern Area of Change. A careful use of negotiation, CPO powers and financial resources diverted from the present proposal for the Multi-storey should enable appropriate land use assembly of the remainder to take place.

So far as parking requirements are concerned, we would advocate the following:

- Construction of an underground car park of at least 1000 spaces (more should be feasible if required) under the footprint of the existing Multi-storey and TWBC staff car park to provide mainly staff, employee and resident parking for the town centre;
(1. financial viability of such underground development has already been established in relation to the theatre scheme.
2. feasibility of construction under existing buildings has been established at Crossrail in London so the existing public facility might remain open until the new was available);
- Consideration additionally given to a smaller above ground 3 storey car park primarily for shoppers and leisure visitors on a less wasteful alignment than the present one and in such form that it could be converted to other uses in later years if individual motorised transport should decline.

To put it at its most basic, TWBC cannot logically justify seeking to move from the Town Hall on grounds that it is not fit for purpose and does not justify expenditure to make it so and later seek to justify expenditure on an eyesore car park which is not fit for purpose but whose refurbishment could sterilise the wider possibility of major regeneration benefitting the town (and quite possibly also ensuring the viability of its other plans).

We therefore ask that officers first produce public evidence showing:

- what studies have been carried out of the development potential of the whole eastern Area of Change; and
- Why no Masterplan has been produced and consulted on.

Because this information has not been made public or has not so far been produced, the Town Forum urges the Cabinet Advisory Board to **defer any decision today** on the grounds of:

Option 3.1 inadequate consultation with the Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum as a stakeholder in RTW;
Option 3.2 inadequate evidence on which to base its decision; and
Option 3.3 failure of the proposal before it to meet the requirements of the current SADPD 2016 because there has been no prior preparation of a Masterplan for the entire relevant designated Area of Change.

We should, however, be ready and willing to make the wide ranging professional expertise which exists in the Town Forum's constituent organisations available to assist in the preparation of a Masterplan which would include redevelopment of the existing Multi-Storey in a form which would substantially increase the existing parking capacity in the town centre while maximising adjacent regeneration opportunities.