

Submission for the Transport Plan component of the Local Plan

Adrian Berendt, Chair of the RTW Town Forum

Introduction

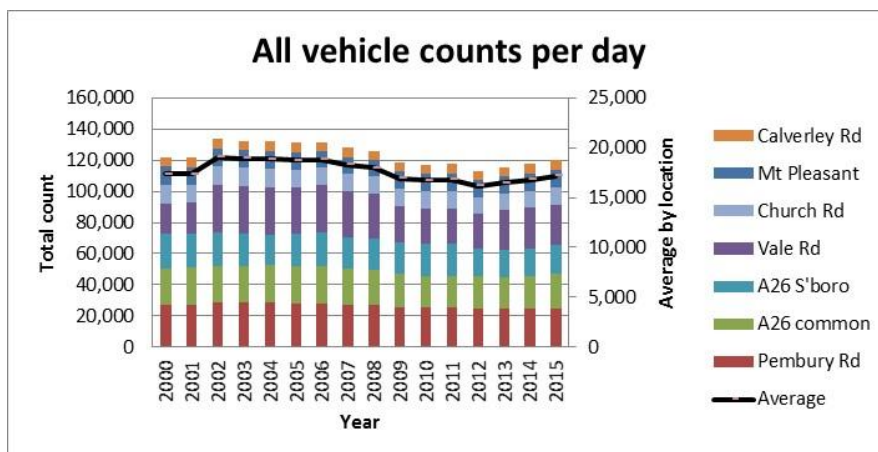
Since 2012, the RTW Town Forum has contributed to consultations about the TWBC Transport Plan 2012-26 and Cycling and Parking strategies and KCC’s Active Travel Strategy. It has produced its own Town Centre Transport Plan and proposals for a Green Network of active travel routes. Given this input to date we do not propose a line by line review to update the existing Transport Plan, but rather we suggest that a radical change in emphasis and outcomes is needed to achieve a future for RTW that benefits everyone that lives, works or visits the town. In particular, we believe that a policy which prioritises active travel, including road safety for vulnerable road users, will improve travel for all road users.

Below we have outlined the key considerations that should be at the forefront of the review and update of the Transport Policy. We have also referenced public documents that support our case as well as the Town Forum’s own research and proposals which have been provided to TWBC for consideration since 2012.

What has not changed since 2012

1. Motor vehicle congestion into and out of RTW has not diminished. In fact the [A26/A264 route update study](#) has shown that traffic levels on the main arteries and key junctions within the town centre are all at capacity. Department for Transport Count Point data since 2000 (figure 1) on main roads in Tunbridge Wells (A26 and A264) show that volumes peaked in 2002, declined through to 2012 and then increased slightly through 2016. Volumes in 2016 are back to levels in 2010.

Figure 1



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

Town Forum Management Group

Adrian Berendt (Chair); Alex Green (Deputy Chair); Alastair Tod (Leisure & Tourism – acting); David Wakefield (Finance); Jane Fenwick (Transport); Linda Lewis (Culture); Mark Booker (Planning); Michael Holman (Water in the Wells)

2. RTW is the business engine of the Borough but traffic congestion is damaging its reputation, deterring businesses and employment growth and contributing to retail decline.
3. A lack of data about car park capacity and failure to invest in modern payment systems have led to a vacuum of information on which to base future investment decisions. The continued public preference for 'free' on street parking is causing more congestion and contributing to a reduced potential car park income from under use of existing facilities.
4. Funding and decision making that depends on KCC approval at all levels of transport and infrastructure is strangling the ability of TWBC and local people to shape the transport future of the town. KCC policies and underfunding have directly led to RTW congestion, reduced safety for pedestrians and cyclists and continued the priority given to heavy traffic directed through the centre of the town.

What has changed since 2012

5. Government policy driving unsustainable housing growth without responsibility for consequences on communities and infrastructure.
6. Permitted Development legislation has led to a reduction in places of employment in RTW now converted to housing, and threatens to worsen the age and employment profiles of the town and its prosperity
7. The upgrade of the A 21 and North Farm traffic management have changed traffic patterns (yet to be analysed).
8. Planned adoption of new technologies which have the potential to transform the transport norms of the past. These include the planned demise of diesel and petrol as the main source of transport fuel, the impact of online shopping the retail sector, and the prospect of driverless vehicle technology rapidly changing patterns of car ownership and use.

What must change 2018 onwards

9. A radical rethink of the transport perspective so that the needs and demands can be met in the short and medium term. Not more of the same which prioritised moving more vehicles into and out of the town centre, without success. This has led to unsustainable congestion, pollution, damage to its historic fabric and economy while residents, employees and visitors have to fight for their safety in a hazardous and polluting environment. Until 2015, when Kent Police changed its reporting method, road casualties showed a steady decline amongst car drivers on Kent roads, but no progress for pedestrians or cyclists. In 2000, pedestrians and cyclists made up 20% of casualties; by 2015, this share had increased to 31%. Changes in TWBC are less statistically significant, because of smaller population volumes.
10. If RTW is to successfully increase its population as demanded by government policy without destroying its fabric and character and continue to be a focus for excellent primary and secondary schools, innovative business and vibrant retail, its transport future must be significantly different from the past. RTW's transport problems and solutions need to be recognised as separate from the rest of the Borough and managed through a plan of action rather than the piecemeal and

unconnected delivery of today. As previous failed bids for funding have shown, without an overall plan with clear objectives, public funding will not be forthcoming.

11. Improved travel safety across RTW town centre for non-motorised users especially for pedestrians and cyclists by enabling sustainable modes of travel - cycling, walking and public transport. This will also improve air pollution and the quality of public spaces and make the town centre a more attractive place to live, work and visit. Active Travel and Cycling Strategies (already in place), safety improvements for pedestrians and cyclists and 20mph in all residential roads should be given priority over road changes that aim to simply move traffic, but which inevitably fail because of limitations of road space.
12. All new housing and employment developments must have transport infrastructure embedded from the start to enable a choice of active and sustainable travel, public and personal motorised transport.
13. RTW's existing satellite residential communities, such as Pembury, Rusthall and Southborough, need to be provided with sustainable and active travel choices, such as dedicated cycle routes and public transport to enable a choice of travel options for short journeys to school, work, shopping and onward transport. This will help to regain a calm, safe, convenient access to town and rural locations that will reduce the congestion of the daily commute as well as providing more fitness and leisure opportunities.
14. Providing more parking (particularly the most expensive kind – underground) is part of the problem – not part of the solution. Stop investment in more town centre car parking capacity as this is based on inadequate data. Instead, invest in modern parking technologies which enable flexible and accurate charging for both the Council and the users. Continue to limit parking on new private developments and reform the residents' parking rules to be more equitable to all and to free streets from congestion caused by parking.

What else must be considered in 2018 onwards

15. A town wide strategy for electric car charging in car parks, business premises, residences and on-street.
16. The proposed [Brighton Main Line 2](#) represents such a major opportunity for change and development in the south of the town that it is needs to be actively considered and, we believe, encouraged. If built as proposed, the line would provide a direct link access from both the existing Central Station and a newly reopened West Station to Brighton and to Canary Wharf. Private sector funding of £15bn is reportedly available for the project and the UK government has given its backing to re-opening old railway lines.
17. Major Roads Network Consultation

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/proposals-for-the-creation-of-a-major-road-network>

These proposals are significant because

- a. The A26 from Maidstone through Tonbridge and Southborough is recognised as being unable to take more capacity and is no longer a 'strategic route'. This is to be encouraged as

it enables the road to be downgraded for local access only, enabling the reinvigoration of Southborough High Street and the 'St John's Quarter'.

- b. The proposed Chatham to Brighton route via Crowborough will traverse the centre of RTW unless action is taken now. This proposal revives the prospect of a Colts Hill bypass delivering more traffic to RTW via Pembury Road en route to Crowborough and Brighton. The proposals have government funding for road improvements, links and bypasses and TWBC should plan for this eventuality in this Local Plan period even if the outcome is long term. While a southern relief road from the A21 to Bunny Lane and linking to Eridge Road is unlikely to remove significant volumes of traffic from the centre, removing HGV traffic may enable an integrated travel plan for the town, improve the outcomes for pedestrians and cyclists outlined above and help to reduce local congestion. Measures will be needed to ensure that the capacity released roads such on Pembury Road and St John's Road are not filled again with unnecessary and unplanned traffic growth entering or crossing the town centre.

18. Government Funding opportunities must be bid for in a structured way which leads to a defined outcome rather than relying on developer contributions unless they are targeted to deliver the greater outcome. E.g. LCWIP <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-cycling-and-walking-infrastructure-plans-technical-guidance-and-tools>

The RTW Town Forum documents submitted for the purpose of this consultation include:

- *RTW Town Forum Town Centre Transport Plan 2017*
- *RTW Town Forum Vision Document*
- *RTW Town Forum Green Network Document*