



LETTER to the editor – 13 June 2008

FUTURE AS CULTURAL CENTRE IS NEGLECTED

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council has hit upon an innovative way to reduce traffic congestion - put off the tourist (and local residents) from the town centre by closing public lavatories, increase car park charges, impose car park charges in evenings and on Sundays, axe the tourist information centre and, as one of your letters pointed out last week, no floral displays. Some readers may remember Tunbridge Wells in Bloom. Add to this the decision to withdraw significant funding from the Trinity Theatre and a picture emerges of a council with little concern for the future of the town as a tourism and cultural centre.

Residents in the centre of Royal Tunbridge Wells complain about noise and the effect of alcohol induced unsocial behaviour and the inability of the council to come to grips with the issues.

What are the factors which have led to this sorry state of affairs?

John Hopkinson
Lower Green Road
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Roy Bullock, Leader of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council said:

"In response to Mr Hopkinson's letter, I would like to comment on the factors that have led to this state of affairs.

Local authorities have to provide a large variety of services, some of which are statutory and some of which are not. This is funded through fees and charges (such as car parking fees), council tax (please remember that TWBC only keeps approximately 10 per cent of all that collected) and Government grant. The council's increase in Government grant this year was just 1.8 per cent or £124,000 (and we have already been informed that this will be just 0.5 per cent or £35,000 next year).

Despite this headline increase, this masks the fact that there were reductions in other Government grants that resulted in a net reduction of over £300,000. In addition, the concessionary fares scheme has increased costs by an estimated £330,000 and that is after additional Government support. It is obvious that with rising costs and an overall reduction in Government income it is impossible to sustain levels of service.

I would also take this opportunity to correct some of Mr Hopkinson's letter.

Public Conveniences - none have been closed although this was set as a target for savings. Indeed, the focus has been on whether we can work more closely with parish councils and private businesses on their provision.

Tourist Information Centre -this year has seen a proposal for it to close for one day a week. No decision has been taken on axing the facility although we will continue to look at innovative ways of providing services that are more efficient and economical.

Trinity Theatre - the council paid for a business plan to be drawn up for the theatre and the council, although reducing its grant this year on previous years, have met the level requested within that business plan.

I trust this answers Mr Hopkinson's questions but am happy to explain anything that needs further clarification."

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