



A G E N D A

Thursday 24 September 2015 at 6.30 pm
Council Chamber, Royal Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN1 1RS

1 Apologies for absence

2 Membership changes

a Membership applications

An application for membership of the Town Forum from the Mereworth Road Residents' Association has been received. The Management Committee of the Town Forum has approved this application and we welcome their representative to their first meeting this evening.

b Changes of representatives (for information)

3 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 16 July 2015 (Pages 1 - 10)

4 Actions from previous meeting (10 mins) (Pages 11 - 20)

5 4(h) Sewage egress, Warwick Park

Leader of the Council The Leader of the Council had undertaken to arrange a meeting with Southern Water's operations manager, to which John Cunningham was to be invited. This meeting will take place on 9 October.

5 (6) 'Developing our Green Network'

Working Groups There had been three recommendations arising from this report, a key one of which was how the report's findings and recommendations should assist all other working groups in their work.

This is an on-going action point.

8 Urban Design Framework

Mark Booker Mark Booker, Chairman of the Planning and Development Working Group, to present a list of items arising from the Urban Design Framework document (and linked work) which could usefully form the basis of further working group study.

(i) Mr Booker has prepared the attached action plan, covering both the Green Network and relevant Urban Design Framework issues.

(ii) Mr Booker has also prepared the attached aide-memoire on 'pedestrians and buses in Tunbridge Wells', on which comments are invited.

In respect of buses, please note that TWBC will shortly be commissioning a study into town centre bus routing, which will include formal consultation with the Town Forum and other interest groups. Further details can be found from this link:

<http://democracy.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/mglIssueHistoryHome.aspx?IssueId=50011011&OptionNum=0>

5 Update from the Leader of the Council (10 mins)

6 TWBC's draft corporate priorities 2016/17 (5 mins) (Pages 21 - 32)

The attached report sets out TWBC's draft corporate priorities for 2016/17, which will undergo formal public consultation in the Autumn. The report provides some context for these priorities, within a national, regional/county and local setting. Adam Chalmers, TWBC's Democratic and Community Engagement Manager, will present the report and answer questions.

7 Town Centre Partnership (10 mins)

A report, considering TWBC support and financial contribution towards a proposed Town Centre Partnership, is to be considered by the Cabinet at the end of October. Stephen Gurney, Managing Director of the Index magazine, and TWBC's Economic Development Manager, Hilary Smith, will provide a short, verbal progress report on this initiative.

8 Statement of Community Involvement (10 mins)

A report is to be made to TWBC's Cabinet at the end of October, providing an update on the 'Statement of Community Involvement', which will set out how the Borough Council intends to involve the community, individuals and organisations with an interest in matters relating to development in their area. This is in preparation for local planning documents for the Borough. The report will also set out how the Council will notify the local community about planning applications and involve them in decisions. Kelvin Hinton, TWBC's Planning Policy Manager, will attend and provide an explanation of the process.

9 Electoral equality and arrangements - TWBC Overview and Scrutiny work (10 mins)

Councillor Catherine Rankin will provide a short verbal update on a study being carried out by a task and finish group established by her Overview and Scrutiny Committee, looking at (i) electoral equality and (ii) electoral arrangements in the Borough.

10 Reports from the Town Forum Working Groups (10 mins each group)

(a) Water in the Wells – Michael Holman, Chairman of this working group, will provide a verbal update report.

(b) Tourism and Leisure – Dorothea Holman, Chairman of this working group, will provide a verbal update report.

(c) Transport Strategy – Jane Fenwick, Acting Chairman of this working group, will provide a verbal update report.

(d) Planning and Development – Mark Booker, Chairman of this working group, will provide a verbal update report.

(e) Finance and Other Issues – David Wakefield, Chairman of this working group, will provide a verbal update report.

(f) Culture – Bob Atwood, Chairman of this newly-established working group, will provide a verbal update report on how he wishes its work to develop.

11 Any Other Business

Date of the Next Meeting

Dates of next two meetings, (beginning at 6.30pm):

Thursday 26 November (including the AGM)

Thursday 28 January 2016



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

Thursday 16 July 2015

Attended: Bob Atwood, Cllr Bob Backhouse, Sally Balcon, David Barnett, Cllr Ronen Basu, Adrian Berendt, Mark Booker, Stephen Bowser, June Bridgeman, Cllr Mrs Barbara Cobbold, John Cunningham, Michael Doyle, Allan Gooda, Alex Green, Michaela van Halewyn, Tim Harper, Cllr Nasir Jamil, Sue Kaner, Kyrios Kyriacou, Katharina Mahler-Bech, Cllr Tracy Moore, Altan Omer, Peter Perry (sub), Cllr Catherine Rankin, Cllr David Scott, Kate Sergeant (sub), Cllr Don Sloan, Alastair Tod (Chairman), David Wakefield (sub), Mary Wardrop, Denise Watts, Cllr Lynne Weatherly and Pat Wilson

TWBC officers present: Adam Chalmers (Partnerships and Engagement Manager), Gary Stevenson (Head of Environment and Street Scene) and Mike McGeary (Democratic Services Officer)

Guest speakers: Parish Cllr Jenny Blackburn (item 7) and Rod King MBE (item 3)

Also present: Cllr David Jukes (Leader of TWBC) and Cllr Jane March (Portfolio-holder for Tourism, Leisure and Economic Development)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were reported from: Lorna Blackmore, David Bushell, Cllr Ben Chapelard, Adrian Cory, Jane Fenwick, Cllr Lawrence Heasman, Dorothea Holman, Michael Holman, Bill Kern, Marguerita Morton, Cllr David Neve, Angela Phillips, Nick Pope, Cllr James Scholes, Anne Stobo, Cllr Frank Williams and Cllr Chris Woodward.

2. MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

Mike McGeary reported that the Town Forum's Management Committee had approved a membership application from the Friends of Tunbridge Wells Cemetery, whose appointed representative, Bob Atwood, was welcomed to the meeting.

The Chairman, Alastair Tod, added that he had appointed Mr Atwood as Chairman of the newly-formed Culture Working Group. He asked that any members of the Forum who wished to become members of the working group should make direct contact with Mr Atwood at robert.atwood@virgin.net

3. PRESENTATION BY ROD KING MBE, FOUNDER OF THE '20S PLENTY' ROAD SAFETY CAMPAIGN

Rod King MBE was the founder of the '20s Plenty' road safety campaign. He had been invited to explain details of the campaign and to answer Town Forum members' questions on the topic.

Mr King advised how the campaign aimed to help local communities to establish 20mph speed limits within their areas. He added that, not only had the introduction of such limits achieved an approximate 20% reduction in the number of casualties but it had also significantly lowered both exhaust emissions and noise levels.

Members of the Town Forum were given the opportunity to raise questions on the issue.

Cllr Bob Backhouse enquired whether a 20mph limit could be in place for a **full 24 hour** period or only at 'school run' times. Mr King advised that it would apply 24 hours a day. He added that for schools situated on main (A) roads the position was different in that the speed restrictions could only be in place during specific time periods. But he added that statistics showed that 80% of child casualties occurred at times other than going to and returning from schools.

The Chairman asked whether in general local authorities were establishing just selective roads for 20mph restrictions or whether they were applying this across their **whole town areas**. Mr King advised that, generally, local authorities were applying the restrictions to approximately 70% of the highway network, with exclusions applying to arterial roads.

Mark Booker accepted that 20mph speed restriction signs achieved a high visibility impact but he asked how successful they were in **actually slowing the traffic**. Mr King stressed that the speed restrictions were not about achieving traffic management but much more about getting whole communities to think about how roads were used, how lifestyle decisions could impact on people's behaviour. He added that it helped to make drivers more aware that their journey times were dependent upon how many stops they have had to make to travel from A to B.

Cllr Scott was in favour of 20mph speed restrictions within residential areas. However, he added that, due to current levels of congestion, 20mph was often not achievable due to poor **general traffic flow**. Mr King acknowledged the point, and stressed that a more general 20mph zone helped significantly in achieving smoother traffic flows.

Cllr Bob Backhouse asked how 20mph restrictions helped to slow down those drivers who habitually drove at **speed in residential areas**. Mr King felt that the highway authority – Kent County Council – already had the power to install a 20mph area in cases where the vulnerability to road users, including pedestrians, outweighed the advantages of improved journey times through speeding. A separate issue, he added, was compliance with speed limits where community engagement and enforcement issues assumed greater influence.

June Bridgeman voiced her total support for speed control. She said that, from her past professional experience, when seat belts were first introduced, there was an initial focus on child safety, adding that some of those same principles applied to the current campaign. She felt it important that how the **street scene** looked had a significant impact on drivers' speed. This, she added, lent weight to the current Urban Design Framework initiative being led by the Borough Council. But she warned against the dangers of over-complicating aspects such as signage, where 'simple was best'.

Mr King responded. He reminded the group that it was not speed on its own that caused collisions but by limiting drivers to 20mph the consequences of a collision were hugely reduced. At 20mph, he said, drivers are much more engaged with the communities they are driving through; at 30mph, they are not. Thus, he added, there was a vast difference between the two speeds in terms of the cohesion of all users of communal areas.

Cllr Tracy Moore raised two issues: (i) on through roads in a residential setting, she asked how the 20mph limit could be **enforced**; (ii) she urged local residents to engage effectively with the highway authority – KCC – to take **preventative action** rather than reactive, to make travelling safer and achieve smoother traffic flows.

Mr King added that the challenge was that, if local communities – individually but collectively also – did not take ownership of speed limits, who else would. He added that the 20's Plenty campaign provided exactly the catalyst that was needed, through its help in building up demand for action. He added that establishing a 20mph speed limit throughout the town would provide a great basis for the Borough's Transport Strategy.

The Chairman thanked Mr King warmly for his presentation and responses to the many questions raised.

4. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting dated 21 May 2015 were submitted for approval. There were no 'matters arising' beyond the action points set out in the following minute.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 21 May 2015 be approved.

5. ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

21 May 2015

3(10) Engaging new TWBC members

An informal discussion had been held with a good number of TWBC town ward members on 7 July, at the Trinity Theatre, at which members of the Management Committee had discussed the Town Forum's key topic areas with councillors.

4(a) Details of TWBC Cabinet, committee and board membership

This had been actioned by e-mail, dated 1 June.

4(b) Urban Design Framework

This was actioned by e-mail dated 1 June.

4(h) Blocked drains

Boyne Park: KCC's contractors had undertaken the necessary work;
Warwick Park: John Cunningham advised that there remained a serious problem of egress of sewage; he criticised Southern Water's response to the continuing unsatisfactory situation.

Cllr Jukes advised that Southern Water's commitment was to a major remedial scheme in 2016/17. However, bearing in mind the continuing level of concerns, he undertook to arrange a meeting with Southern Water's operations manager, to which he would invite Mr Cunningham.

6 'Developing our Green Networks' (On-going action point)

The findings and recommendations of the recently-published report on 'Developing our Green Networks' have an impact on all of the Forum's working groups. This remains as an on-going action point for the immediate future.

- 8 'Post-payment' car park scheme – Great Hall car park

This was actioned by e-mail on 1 June.

6. UPDATE REPORT FROM LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Cllr David Jukes, Leader of the Council, reported on the following areas of interest:

- (a) Universities** – Cllr Jukes reported that there had been many calls in the past for the establishment of a good standard university campus in the town. He advised that there were currently discussions being held with two separate institutions, one medical, the other engineering. He hoped to be able to share further news in due course.

Alex Green welcomed this news, adding that he hoped this would become a reality in due course.

- (b) End-of-year budget outcome** – Cllr Jukes advised that the end-of-year budget outcome for 2014/15 showed that the Council's reserves had grown to £21m, following an additional transfer of £0.5m into the General Fund. He added that the authority's assets had increased in value to £94m.

In terms of staffing issues, the Leader of the Council advised that the payroll was reducing; amongst office moves, the Parking team was being decanted from Calverley Terrace, saving the authority some £30k in business rates.

June Bridgeman reminded the group that the Parking team's current location – Calverley Terrace – was a Decimus Burton building, adding that it had earlier been proposed that this would make an ideal Victorian museum attraction. She therefore asked what was the Borough Council's intended future use of the building. Cllr Jukes advised that there was an existing agreement in place for use of part of the building as an Ambulance Service rapid response post.

- (c) New Mayoral car** – The Leader advised that a new Mayoral car had been supplied by Audi, upgrading the A6 to an A8. He stressed that this was at no cost to the Borough Council.

- (d) Citizen Devolution Bill** – Cllr Jukes advised that he was meeting Marcus Jones MP, Minister for Local Government, shortly, regarding proposals to return powers to local authorities. Cllr Jukes said that he was particularly keen on planning and licensing fee income being retained by local authorities.

Kyrios Kyriacou asked if the Borough Council was able to help the Bewl Water Yachting Club from folding. Cllr Jukes advised that this operated from within the Wealden District Council area, so it was not possible to provide any assistance.

Cllr Jane March advised that the Borough Council had responded positively to the complaints it had received over some aspects of the Assembly Hall venue and this summer was beginning £1.5m of improvement work.

There were no further action points arising from this report.

7. FORMING A TOWN COUNCIL: A DISCUSSION TOPIC

Parish Councillor Jenny Blackburn, Chairman of Rusthall Parish Council, reported on the benefits of establishing a local council, as part of the continuing debate into whether a town council might be created for Tunbridge Wells.

Mrs Blackburn considered that a parish council provided the opportunity for better engagement with residents, adding that, in Rusthall, it did not have to operate on party political lines. She advised that, as an alternative to a town council, it was possible to seek to have community councils established for places smaller than the town area.

Mrs Blackburn said that a parish council was a statutory consultee and better placed to provide information for its residents and, with its own precept, it was able to take on direct control of services, such as allotment sites. With issues such as litter collections, she added, it was easier to encourage local communities to take action.

Mrs Blackburn explained how, if there were sufficient support for the establishment of a town council, the first stage would be to call for a community governance review to be carried out by the Borough Council.

In terms of support, Mrs Blackburn said that the Kent Association of Local Councils provided excellent guidance, including training for local councillors. She added that, prior to the establishment of Rusthall Parish Council, the Rusthall Village Association had shown how a locally-based representative organisation had delivered real benefits to the local community.

The following issues were raised by Town Forum members:

Sally Balcon advised that she was a former parish councillor. She asked how much the cost of elections was. Mrs Blackburn advised that a budget of £3k was provided for each four-year cycle of elections.

John Cunningham asked what the annual cost was of running the parish council. Mrs Blackburn advised that, for a Rusthall population of approximately 6,000 residents, it cost between £30k and £40k per annum, which worked out at approximately £3 per month per elector, she added.

Cllr Rankin advised that the cost of providing a service (e.g. street lighting) was currently recovered by the Borough Council through 'special expenses'. If a town council took on this responsibility, they could determine how the service was provided and at what cost and enter into their own contract.

Mrs Blackburn advised that the Parish Council had now taken on ownership from the Borough Council of three plots of land which they had been able to clear.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Mrs Blackburn for her helpful contribution to the town council discussion, a topic which he felt should be examined further.

8. URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK

Mark Booker, Chairman of the Planning and Development Working Group, advised that TWBC's formal consultation period for commenting upon the draft Urban Design Framework Supplementary Planning Document had now passed. He thanked all of those who had responded to the Working Group's draft response, which had now been submitted to the Borough Council.

He advised that the draft Urban Design Framework had been welcomed, on the basis of the benefits it would bring in delivering public realm improvements to the town's central spine. He added that, to some extent, the document filled the gap left when the projected Town Centre Area Action Plan had been abandoned as part of the revision process for the next Local Plan.

Mr Booker stressed the importance of the Forum undertaking some follow-up work. Some key strategic issues, he added, needed to be resolved before implementation of additional major public realm improvements, such as which streets should be earmarked for future pedestrianisation and where remaining vehicle traffic and buses were to go. Other examples he provided were what improvements to pedestrian connectivity and cycle routes were desirable and where car parking should be concentrated.

Mr Booker focused on some of the practical steps which the Town Forum could take. These included investigating the scope for further pedestrianisation, developing ideas for the future development of the Union House area, a future town square, the Vale Avenue area and the 'area of change' around the Crescent Road car park.

He added that the Town Forum might wish to use its collective knowledge towards ensuring private sector funding for these improvement schemes was put to best effect. He also felt there was a role to play for residents' associations to conduct local surveys in order to put forward suggestions for further tree planting.

June Bridgeman focused on the next steps available to the Forum. She added that she was aware that TWBC's Urban Designer, Alan Legg, was looking at further planning briefs, such as skylines, street scenes etc, which she felt would provide some more useful work for a number of the Forum's working groups. Mr Booker agreed, adding that a design manual was also being worked on by the Borough Council. He undertook to provide a list of items which he felt might be productive for a number of working groups to progress.

The Chairman thanked Mr Booker for this very helpful set of practical suggestions and for his working group's lead in responding to the draft Urban Design Framework SPD document.

RESOLVED – That Mr Booker present a list of items which, arising from the Urban Design Framework document (and linked work) could usefully form the basis of further working group study.

9. FIVEWAYS PUBLIC REALM SCHEME

On behalf of the Transport Strategy Working Group, David Wakefield welcomed the improvements brought about by the Fiveways public realm scheme but raised the following points of concern: (i) traffic turning right out of Dudley Road, where the Working Group felt there was inadequate notice given to motorists, to indicate they were entering a shared space area; (ii) generally, it was felt that there was a view that pedestrians were unaware of bus traffic constantly passing through the area; (iii) could the 'bleak' tarmac surface be improved in appearance; (iv) it was felt that the area would benefit from both a water feature and some tree planting; (v) although supporting the removal of buses from the area, there was concern about where alternative routes could be found.

The Leader of the Council advised that the Borough Council was keen to see all bus traffic re-routed away from the shared space area, adding that discussions would be held with both KCC and the bus companies to try and achieve this.

Cllr Ronen Basu, Portfolio-holder for Sustainability, emphasised how the Borough Council had been working closely with the Town Forum during both the planning and implementation phases of this scheme. He acknowledged that it was difficult to achieve the right level of signage for motorists exiting Dudley Road, Gary Stevenson

(Head of Environment and Street Scene) adding that the very distinct change in road surfaces and alignment was a very clear message to motorists that they should approach with caution. He added that, for both Dudley Road and Newton Road, the signing placed there complied with the relevant regulations and that it was not possible to erect informal signs.

Mr Stevenson added that the bus companies had been reminded to emphasise to their drivers that they should be adhering to the 20mph speed limit throughout the public realm area.

On the tarmac road surface, Cllr Basu advised that it was cost-prohibitive to consider an alternative finish. He added that the Borough Council was awaiting a date for the 'snagging' work to take place, rectifying the installation issues with the pre-Christmas stage. Finally, Cllr Basu advised that the Borough Council was keen to see phase two of the work proceeding, from Monson Road down to the Mount Pleasant Road/Crescent Road/Church Road junction, although no firm decision had yet been taken on that.

One of the Vice-Chairmen, Alex Green, advised that, as a resident of Dudley Road, he believed that, as a motorist, it was very clear as one exited that road that you were joining a shared space area.

The Chairman considered that there were many other shared space areas across the country which worked perfectly well, and Tunbridge Wells should be no different.

Pat Wilson urged that, in considering alternative bus routes, the existing traffic congestion in Church Road would make it unsuitable for further public transport. Cllr Basu responded by saying that, if Church Road were favoured as part of an alternative route, with an additional bus stop for instance, there would be full consultation with affected parties.

David Wakefield felt that there was the possibility to look at terminating some bus routes at locations such as the railway station – and a similar approach to north-bound services – in order to limit the amount of public transport driving through the town centre.

Peter Perry felt that other alternatives also existed, such as electric-powered vehicles, as well as examining the case for changing the 'centre of gravity' of public transport, bringing more services to the south end of the town.

Denise Watts summarised the views of Tunbridge Wells Over Fifties Forum members from a recent survey: generally, the Fiveways shared space scheme had been welcomed, with only a few people expressing their safety concerns about bus traffic. She added that a number of people had said they would welcome the installation of more benches for seating, they would like to see a water feature added and some suggested a market being held in the area.

In summing up, the Chairman enquired what further changes were likely to be provided. Mr Stevenson advised that more benches were planned, together with litter bins and cycle racks scheduled for installation.

Altan Omer asked what plans existed for the installation of a water feature; he enquired whether such an attraction would/could be provided as part of the Millennium Clock or be separate. The Leader of the Council advised that power and water had both been made available in the area, to allow for some flexibility over the exact location of a water feature.

There were no specific action points at this stage.

10. WORKING GROUPS

Update reports were made from the working groups as follows:

Water in the Wells Working Group – In the absence of the Chairman, (Michael Holman), Altan Omer – who was a member of the working group – advised that there was appreciation for the Borough Council’s Urban Development Framework in the opportunities it provided for future water features. Among other matters, attention was drawn to: the issues linked to the proposed Dairy Crest re-development; the fact that plans were still awaited from Dandara as to their proposals for Union House; and the positive news that water was still flowing at the Chalybeate Spring.

Cllr Jane March reported that she had earlier been discussing with Michael Holman whether Section 106 (developer contribution) funds could be used to provide water-based public art installations. She advised that the specific contribution she had hoped might be available had had to be allocated elsewhere on this occasion but that she was looking at other opportunities.

On the Dairy Crest re-development site, Mark Booker advised that the developer had indicated at a recent exhibition of their proposals that they were looking at the possibility of providing funds for the restoration of the fountain in the near-by St John’s Recreation Ground.

RESOLVED – That the progress report be accepted.

Leisure, Culture and Tourism Working Group – The Chairman, June Bridgeman, voiced a few valedictory remarks, following her decision to stand down from chairing this working group. She thanked all the members who had worked so hard on a range of topics, to produce reports of substance, which had contributed towards some practical benefit to the town.

Mrs Bridgeman suggested that it might be helpful to the Town Forum to have an annual report from each working group, which could feed into an overall communications strategy, which she felt the Forum would greatly benefit from.

In terms of ‘**unfinished business**’, Mrs Bridgeman felt the following could very usefully be progressed: (i) the need to establish a fully-resourced tourist promotion structure; (ii) implementation of her working group’s recommendations from its souvenir report; (iii) action to follow the working group’s survey of primary school age children in the town on what facilities they would like, e.g. better swimming provision, as well as a proper youth facility.

Cllr Lynne Weatherly, Cabinet Portfolio-holder for Communities and Wellbeing, advised that KCC had decided on the provision of a youth hub for Tunbridge Wells, adding that further details would follow.

Cllr Jane March responded to a number of the points raised. She advised that: (i) the ‘Visit Kent’ website was increasingly being used by visitors; (ii) the Museum was now selling more souvenirs; and (iii) the Culture and Learning Hub, when it comes to fruition, will have a visitor centre.

Cllr March also advised that the St John’s Sports Centre would be closing its swimming pool for 12 weeks from 9 August, for major refurbishment. She added that other pools in the area would be offering to make their facilities available for regular

swimming clubs currently using St John's, with the refurbishment work taking place in stages, to try and reduce the impact of the closure.

In response to a point raised about the timing of the work, Cllr March advised that the greatest use of the pools was by clubs/instructors during term time, hence why the work was starting during the summer holidays.

The Chairman thanked June warmly for having led the working group so effectively and for her commitment and enthusiasm.

RESOLVED – That the progress report be accepted.

Transport Strategy – In the absence of the Acting Chairman, (Jane Fenwick), Peter Perry reported on one of the working group's perennial concerns, namely the **Carrs Corner roundabout**. He said that the working group was calling for a 'SLOW' speed warning to be painted on the road surface and improved signage, perhaps with an electronic speed indicator.

Mr Perry also drew attention to the poorly-maintained roundabout – both with its planting and the surrounding paving. He added that there was continual dialogue taking place with Kent Highways over all of these issues without, he advised, a great deal of progress being made.

Cllr Don Sloan voiced his support for those concerned with the Carrs Corner roundabout situation. He added that, longer term, he believed that KCC were interested in seeing some form of public realm improvements for the stretch of highway from Carrs Corner to the Crescent Road car park.

June Bridgeman reminded the group of the hazards for people using disability scooters trying to cross the road in the vicinity of Carrs Corner, which she felt had become very dangerous, since the building of the new roundabout.

RESOLVED – That the progress report be accepted.

Planning and Development Strategy – Mark Booker, the Chairman of this working group, reported on a number of issues of general interest to Forum members: (i) an interesting and valuable **briefing** given by TWBC's Head of Planning, Jane Lynch, for members of the Town Forum on 9 July on current issues. He added that this was being followed up with a further briefing on 28 July; (ii) the working group felt that the current **Union House** shopping area had suffered significantly from its separation from the remainder of the Pantiles, thus there might be some value in considering extending the provision across the Linden Park Road entrance; (iii) arising from a recent meeting with representatives of Hermes, attended by Mr Booker, it was noted that plans for further facilities at RVP were likely to come forward. Mr Booker added that it seemed that the Camden Centre was not at this stage expected to feature in any changes; (iv) with the Dairy Crest re-development, although some elements were welcomed (e.g. underground parking), there was some controversy, largely associated with the high density of housing proposed. Mr Booker drew attention to other sites in the St John's area where re-development was scheduled in the not-too-distant future, namely at Ford Lifestyle and the Arriva bus depot, both of which would be watched closely by the working group, he added.

Mr Doyle added that he too had attended the Planning briefing on 9 July and wished to convey his thanks to Mrs Lynch for an interesting and welcome initiative; June Bridgeman added that Mrs Lynch was to be congratulated for organising these very helpful briefings.

On the issue of the Camden Centre, Mrs Bridgeman urged that some of the facilities be upgraded. She mentioned the hearing loops and the visual aid equipment in particular, aspects which she said were of much importance to voluntary groups who hired the halls.

With the Dairy Crest re-development, Cllr Don Sloan wondered whether one car parking space per person was adequate although he welcomed the provision being made for bicycle parking.

RESOLVED – That the progress report be accepted.

Finance and Other Issues – David Wakefield, Chairman of this working group, advised that there was nothing to report to the full Town Forum at this stage.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Targetfollow – Sally Balcon referred Forum members to a very good article featured in the Tunbridge Wells Times on the subject of the Commons and Targetfollow. She added that there seemed no evidence of any funds having been spent on improving the Commons.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 24 September 2015 at 6.30pm

The meeting concluded at 8pm.

Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum

Developing our Green Network

Draft Action Plan

Introduction

The report, “Developing our Green Network was endorsed by the Town Forum at its meeting on 21st May 2015. It contains many cross-cutting proposals and recommendations and provides a blueprint for a coherent long term strategy to develop leisure and tourism making use of our green assets, to improve the general health of Tunbridge Wells’s residents and to promote alternative transport choices as a potentially highly effective means of reducing peak hour traffic congestion in the town. This draft Action Plan sets out how the principal proposals made in the report might now be taken forward within three working groups of the Forum in collaboration where appropriate with the remaining working groups.

Leisure Culture and Tourism WG

Leisure walking

Seek publication of the already devised “Rocks, Water and Royalty at the Wells” family trail map.

Seek improvement and promotion of the network of footpaths leading from Hawkenbury Recreation Ground and from High Woods Lane linking into the Tunbridge Wells Circular Walk and High Weald Landscape Trail. Similarly promote the network of footpaths from Hurst Wood also linking to the Tunbridge Wells Circular.

Seek promotion of a leisure walk from the Pantiles to the Beacon hotel and Happy Valley necessitating improvements to the footpaths along the south side of Rusthall Common.

Continue development of the following:

- A wider ranging water features trail map linking with other springs, ponds, lakes and streams emanating from the 5 streams running off the Tunbridge Wells sandstone dome;
- A wider ranging rocks trail map linking the Wellington Rocks with other notable rock outcrops in the town and its hinterland;
- A leisure walking trail map identifying green routes within the town and links to the network of footpaths in the open countryside including the Tunbridge Wells Circular Walk.

Leisure cycling

Work with cycle interest groups and TWBC to develop, promote and signpost leisure cycling routes out of the town and links to rural lanes in the open countryside;

Encourage “Rail and cycle” tourism to points of interest such as Batemans and Bodiam by local residents or visitors basing themselves in Tunbridge Wells.

Encourage the development of bicycle hire businesses aimed at the tourist market.

Horse riding

Promote a “Quiet Lanes” strategy, and the provision of some additional off-road routes to help to keep Tunbridge Wells an attractive place for horse riding by residents and visitors.

Promote the retention and development of equestrian businesses on green belt land adjoining the town.

Signage and public information points

Assist TWBC in devising an appropriate strategy for a unified system of signage for tourist attractions and parks in our town via a network of green routes between those attractions.

In a later phase, promote extension of signage of green utility and leisure routes generally.

Assist in the development and promotion of public information points for tourist and leisure information.

Water features

Support the work of the Water in the Wells WG in bringing new water features to the town

Brick pavements

Promote the retention and enhancement of the town’s characteristic brick pavements which constitute an important element of the “Tunbridge Wells Brand” for tourism purposes and consider the scope for Heritage Lottery funding.

Planning and Development WG

Planning Policy

Explore with TWBC the feasibility of restoring former Local Plan Policy EN 27 which conferred greater protection on former Special Landscape Areas.

Explore with TWBC and Forum members the feasibility of designating a number of additional Arcadian Areas in the town which would merit permanent safeguarding.

Explore with TWBC the feasibility of designating additional important landscape approaches under Local Plan Policy EN 23

Support the work of the Water in the Wells WG in bringing new water features to the town.

Promote the restoration of a greater degree of TWBC leverage over the siting of schools and the opportunities this presents for increasing the use of green routes to schools by seeking reinstatement of former Local Plan Policy CS 3 on new school provision.

Assist KCC, TWBC and Forum members to identify and overcome rights of way obstacles to development of green routes.

Maintain dialogue with representatives of Southborough Town Council and Rusthall, Pembury and Speldhurst Parish Councils on planning policy issues relevant to the green network.

Environment and health

Assist TWBC to co-ordinate use of funds available from NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups, Health and Wellbeing Boards and national government to develop and promote the use of green walking utility routes by residents to help secure significant public health benefits.

Promote additional tree planting to absorb atmospheric pollution (for example along the A26 Air Quality Management Area corridor), and to enhance the visual environment and sense of place in the town centre. Co-ordinate surveys by Forum members to establish appropriate locations.

Promote local food production and the retention and development of allotment sites.

Development and protection of Parks and open spaces

Dunorlan Park

Explore the feasibility of incorporating the large adjoining overgrown area to the north west of the park as an extra wildlife habitat.

Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons

Maintain vigilance against any road improvement scheme whose effects could be to degrade the physical integration of the commons with the centre of the town and assist TWBC to improve pedestrian and cycling connectivity across the commons.

Hawkenbury Recreation Ground

Explore the feasibility of incorporating the important biodiversity site adjoining the site to the south east.

Woodbury Park Cemetery

Explore the feasibility of incorporating an adjoining triangular overgrown area to the west of the cemetery containing some fine specimen trees.

Trinity churchyard

Assist in the development of a long term plan for the churchyard area.

Hungershall and Nevill Parks

Maintain a watching brief over the long term possibility of formally integrating the parkland between Hungershall and Nevill Parks into the Tunbridge Wells Commons.

Ramslye Greens and Vale Road

In the context of the Urban Design Framework, work with TWBC to enhance the green spaces adjoining Eridge Road and the green triangle at the end of Vale Road by appropriate planting schemes

Robinsgate Wood

Monitor the outcome of the Site Allocation Inquiry to evaluate whether the management plan being developed by Dandara as part of their development at Knight's Wood can be considered effective in

the long term and to provide a suitable precedent for safeguarding of other open spaces on the edge of the town.

Hurst Wood, Smockham, Caen and Caenwood Farms

Explore whether the Robinsgate Wood example might be replicated to protect and develop this major green infrastructure asset lying between Tunbridge Wells, Rusthall, Speldhurst and Southborough.

Transport and Traffic Strategy WG

Transport Policy

Explore with TWBC the opportunities for involving Sustrans, the sustainable transport charity, in formulating an overall green transport strategy for the town as it has done successfully elsewhere.

Continue the identification and development of green utility walking and cycling routes and promote an increase in utility walking for work, shopping and school runs over distances up to 1.25 miles (2km) and cycling over distances up to 3 miles.

Explore with TWBC, KCC and local retailers the feasibility of financing discounted fares for residents or some form of purchased town bus pass with benefits for residents as a part of the overall transport strategy.

Work with TWBC and KCC to introduce additional 20mph zones in the town centre and in other residential areas of Tunbridge Wells to help improve the safety of pedestrians and cyclists and increase the use made of the town's green network.

Promote "Walk and Rail" as an effective alternative to many commuter car journeys between Tonbridge, High Brooms and Tunbridge Wells.

Carry out further research into the longer term prospects for "Park and Ride" including any safeguarding of appropriate sites and methods of financing.

Green infrastructure

Walking

Work with TWBC and KCC in the context of the UDF to seek urgent provision of the safe crossing points identified in Appendix 2 of the Green Network Report with particular emphasis on Crescent Road, Major York's Road and Langton Road.

Seek infrastructure improvement of key links for example on the footpath linking Rusthall with Bishops Down Primary School at the bottom of Coniston Avenue.

Seek to ensure that the important new green route linking Sherwood and Knight's Wood with the Skinners' Academy in Blackhurst Lane is completed in a timely manner over the section of route which falls outside the Knights Wood development.

Cycling

Work with TWBC and cycle interest groups to ensure that the routes identified in the TWBC Cycling strategy are developed and promoted.

Promote the provision of increased and secure (preferably covered) parking for bicycles in the town centre to help to promote their greater use.

Promote the development of a green utility cycle route avoiding the A26 Between High Brooms, the Tunbridge Wells Boys' Grammar School, the TWGGS, the three schools on Culverden Down and Rusthall Primary School and explore further the other additional cycle routes set out in Appendix 3 of the Green Network Report.

Financing improvements

Work actively on a five year plan in relation to development or improvement of cycle tracks and footpaths and the provision or relocation of road crossings and pedestrian refuges with County Councillors who each dispose of an annual highways improvement budget and other national and local sources of financing.

Explore whether increases in the potential budget for Green Network and other transport related projects might be achieved if revenue derived from TWBC car parks were to be made available in addition to the revenues from parking fines.

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Pedestrians and buses in Tunbridge Wells: An aide-memoire of issues

1. Pedestrianisation

Extent of desirable traffic restrictions

Full pedestrianisation of streets other than the existing section of Calverley Road appears unachievable because access is required to other streets or to networks of streets by residents and for deliveries. However, *significant traffic restrictions* might be considered on a phased basis within an overall strategic plan to improve the public realm on the following additional streets:

Grosvenor Road from Tesco to Fiveways

Goods Station Road from Meadow Road to Grosvenor Road

Mount Pleasant from Fiveways to Church Road

Monson Road in its entirety

Calverley Road from Camden Road to Carr's Corner

Camden Road from Calverley Road to Victoria Road

In a later phase, Mount Pleasant as far as the railway station and also the High Street.

Types of traffic restriction

Deliveries by goods vehicles can be restricted to certain times which avoid significant pedestrian flows for example before 9.30 am and after 4.30 pm.

Streets can have time of day loading and unloading restrictions applicable to all traffic.

Streets can have targeted time of day access restrictions as currently at Fiveways.

Parking can be further restricted or prohibited to minimise access but, to provide for residents, alternative parking arrangements may become necessary.

One way systems can be devised so as to minimise through traffic entering outside the time of day restrictions.

Decisions would be needed as to which of the "target" streets should remain open to cyclists and how any shared space should be organised.

Infrastructure

Shared space concepts offer the possibility of calming any remaining traffic and creating a vibrant and inviting street scene, realising the ambitions in the Urban Design Framework.

2. Buses

Guiding principles

Buses offer a desirable modal choice alternative to personal transport as a means of reducing the significant traffic congestion problems in our town and the starting point in any discussion of routing should be to maximise their potential and not to render their use less attractive.

They are also used to a significant extent by the elderly population and those with disabilities, allowing those populations to reach the heart of the town for a variety of purposes. Reducing accessibility can lead to social isolation and an even more sedentary life for these vulnerable populations who may forego journeys altogether. This can have a knock on effect in terms of greater costs imposed on services such as health and social care paid for by the tax payer.

There are many towns, such as Maidstone and Oxford, which have introduced major traffic restrictions on many of their streets, thus improving the public realm while maintaining accessibility of buses to the heart of the town.

The situation in Tunbridge Wells

The principal desire line for those using public transport to access Tunbridge Wells town centre currently runs from the railway station on Mount Pleasant to RVP/Fiveways, with minor extensions north to Tesco on Grosvenor Road and south to the West Station. All the principal amenities of the town are found on this South-North spine. There is no suitable parallel route on any part of this spine, the alternatives involving excessively circuitous diversions on unsuitable or already heavily congested infrastructure.

Diversion of buses from this spine, which is already less trafficked by private cars thanks to recently introduced restrictions, would reduce their effectiveness as an alternative modal choice by reason of the increased journey times and lack of reliability. Diversion would also cause appreciable hardship to a section of the population whose needs should be given special consideration, namely the elderly and infirm. The very slight increases in amenity which might result from diversion from this central spine would be heavily outweighed by all the negative factors and should not be considered further.

Future routing and location of bus stops and shelters

Experience in other towns shows that a satisfactory degree of pedestrianisation can be achieved through a combination of traffic management measures and infrastructure improvements. In Tunbridge Wells this can be pursued in the spirit of the recently adopted Urban Design Framework.

There are places where the public realm could be readily improved without diverting buses from the central spine. Notably, all the bus stops and shelters on the Town Hall side of Mount Pleasant could be moved and incorporated south of the new shelter outside the Metro Bank at Fiveways, leaving a total of 3 shelters on the widened pavements for southbound passengers.

This would immediately free the area around the War Memorial for public realm improvements. There would seem to be no need to displace the existing bus stops on the opposite side of Mount Pleasant serving northbound passengers.

The ideas developed by Councillor Scott for a bus stand near Tesco on Grosvenor Road could readily be achieved by limiting traffic to buses only on the sections of Grosvenor Road and Goods Station Road identified in section 1 above with two-way car traffic re-introduced on Meadow Road. Buses would be able to travel both north and south on Grosvenor Road, improving travel times and reliability, while this would bring the section of Grosvenor Road as far as Tesco effectively into the primary shopping area following public realm improvements there.

The Pembury and Maidstone bound buses do not need to use Monson Road, which is a suitable candidate for greater traffic restrictions, particularly if the Crescent Road/ Monson Road Area of Change is subject to major redevelopment in coming years. Consideration could be given to re-routing these buses via Tesco, Victoria Road and Sandrock Road, allowing them to serve a greater catchment at RVP. Such possible re-routing could be considered in the context of any remodelling of car traffic flows which might be envisaged arising from additional future development of the RVP complex and Crescent Road/ Monson Road areas under the Local Plan.

Long term developments

In the long term context of possible redevelopment of the Sainsbury site and possible restoration of rail links to Brighton and London via Tunbridge Wells West, there may be scope for development of a rail-less tram route originating at a new major transport hub and district at Tunbridge Wells West and terminating at a mini-hub at Grosvenor Road via the central spine of the town. However, until and unless such radical change materialises, connectivity will need to be maintained on the central spine principally via through bus services, possibly augmented but not replaced by additional mini-buses on more circuitous routes.

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Corporate Priorities 2016-17

To: Finance and Governance Cabinet Advisory Board

Date: 25 August 2015

Main Portfolio Area: Leader of the Council

Author of report: William Benson, Chief Executive

Classification: Non-Exempt

Ward: All Wards

SUMMARY

In June/July each year, Cabinet begins the process of formulating its key priorities and setting out its budget strategy for the following year. The Council's medium-term priorities are set out in its Five Year Plan and this paper sets out the likely context in which the Council will be operating over the next 18 months and invites Cabinet to discuss and agree a provisional set of priorities for 2016/17 for consultation.

LINK TO STRATEGIC COMPASS

This report supports all the quadrants in the Strategic Compass

Report status

For decision

Route to Implementation/Timetable:

This paper will be considered by the relevant cabinet advisory board(s) before being considered by Cabinet. If approved, Cabinet will work with the relevant committees and external consultees to refine and refresh the Strategic Compass for consideration by Full Council in February 2016.

BACKGROUND/INTRODUCTION

- (1) Each year, the Council undertakes a comprehensive exercise by which it determines its priorities and budget strategy for the following year. Periodically, that process involves a fundamental review of priorities and ambitions over the medium term; in other years (when that process has only recently been undertaken and there is no reason to make significant changes), the process is more of a review.

WHAT IS THE ISSUE THAT REQUIRES A DECISION AND WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE PEOPLE OF TUNBRIDGE WELLS?

- (2) This paper marks the start of the process by which the Council determines its priorities and budget, which will be finally agreed in February 2016. Before setting out existing and proposed new priority projects, it sets out the context in which we are currently operating and likely future changes that will have an impact on the Council's priorities, services, partners and resources.

It deals with them under three headings: national, regional/county and local.

National

- (3) Since the Council agreed its budget and priorities for the current year, a General Election has seen the return of a majority Conservative government. The Queen's Speech on 27 May 2015 set out an ambitious programme for government and a number of bills were announced that have an impact on local government. Many of them impact primarily on unitary or county councils including: a Childcare Bill and an Education and Adoption Bill but perhaps the two pieces of legislation that will impact most significantly on the Council are the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill and the Housing Bill. The Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill aims to provide for the "*devolution of powers to cities with elected metro mayors, helping to build a Northern Powerhouse,*" in order to fulfil the Government's pledges on devolving more powers and budgets to increase local growth, efficiency and productivity in England and continue in the country's process of economic recovery.
- (4) Whilst primarily focusing on city regions, the Bill makes explicit mention of other areas (including county areas) and makes provision to remove the current statutory limitation on the functions of combined authorities (currently limited to economic development, regeneration and transport) provided that local authorities are willing to streamline their governance arrangements (in city regions, it requires the introduction of elected mayors).
- (5) The Housing Bill extends the right to buy to housing association tenants funding replacement stock through the disposal of local authority-owned high-value houses. It also requires local planning authorities to support custom and self-builders registered in their area in identifying suitable plots of land to build or commission their own home and it also introduces a statutory register for brownfield land with the aim to help achieve the target of getting Local Development Orders in place on 90 per cent of suitable brownfield sites by 2020. It also sets out to simplify the neighbourhood planning system to meet local housing and development needs and to enhance housing growth.
- (6) Other bills that have the potential to have an impact on the Council include a British Bill of Rights (aimed at providing better protection against abuse of the system and misuse of human rights laws), a Policing and Criminal Justice Bill (with specific provisions relating to 17-year-olds who are detained in police custody and ensuring better

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outcomes for those experiencing a mental health crisis), a Full Employment and Welfare Benefits Bill dealing with an expanded Troubled Families Programme, continued welfare reform programme, capping benefits and requiring young people to “earn or learn”.

- (7) A Draft Public Service Ombudsman Bill outlined a proposal to introduce a single Public Service Ombudsman (who would absorb the functions of the Parliamentary Ombudsman, the Health Ombudsman, the Local Government Ombudsman and potentially The Housing Ombudsman) and to ensure that a robust process for accountability and reporting is in place.
- (8) Other bills with the potential to impact indirectly on the Council include an Extremism Bill, an Energy Bill and an Enterprise Bill (aimed at reducing regulation on small businesses), introducing a cap on Public Sector Redundancy Pay and the introduction of business rates appeals reform (including modifying the Valuation Tribunal powers and allowing the Valuation Office Agency to share information with local government).
- (9) Since the Queen’s speech, there have also been further announcements from the Government on planning reform (which has already been subject to numerous reforms over the course of the last Parliament) and the summer budget has also introduced a number of measures (including an in-year cut to public health funding) that will have an impact on the Council in this and future years. The spending review in the Autumn will also be critical as it will determine how the 20 per cent reduction to the Departmental Expenditure Limit to the Department for Communities and Local Government will be apportioned. Shortly before this paper was written, it was revealed that non-protected government departments were being asked to model both 25 and 40 per cent cuts. These issues will be picked up in briefings to Cabinet and the Council and in budgetary papers throughout the year.
- (10) In addition to the legislative programme set out in the Queen’s speech, the Council continues to be affected by a number of measures enacted in the last Parliament. These include, in particular, the allocation of infrastructure and skills funding through the Local Enterprise Partnership (details of which were included in previous years’ reports) and the roll-out of welfare reform – in particular, Universal Credits. On these two issues, the Council has not fared particularly favourably with the allocation of growth and infrastructure funding despite West Kent being better placed than elsewhere in Kent to deliver growth. Similarly, Tunbridge Wells has been earmarked to start the process of implementing Universal Credits in the Autumn of 2015.
- (11) In addition to the issues set out above, the Council continues to be affected by demographic pressures with a growing elderly population placing greater pressure on some services (notably health and adult social care) and development pressures with the demand for housing considerably outstripping the available supply (a situation exacerbated by the various planning constraints/protections in the Borough). A number of funding decisions which ostensibly primarily affect other partners will also have a material impact on the Council and the Borough including the in-year reduction to public health funding to the County Council, and the reduction in rent increases to social housing which has the potential to impact upon planned development programmes and improvements within the Borough.

Key issues:

- The Council will need to keep a watchful eye on the passage of the various Bills set out above through the parliamentary process and, in particular, work with Kent authorities to

ascertain whether there is an appetite to push for devolved powers and funding under the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill along with the necessary improvements to governance arrangements.

- The Council will also need to pay careful attention to the various planning reforms announced in the budget and which have been coming thick and fast over the course of the last few years as well as key provisions of the Housing Bill.
- The Council will need to unpack the consequences of the Budget and the Autumn Spending Review and ensure that key developments and financial consequences for the Council are understood and accounted for.
- The Council will need to engage actively with relevant agencies (principally Job Centre Plus) to ensure that the changes to Housing Benefit and other components of welfare reform run smoothly and that we learn the lessons from the earlier adopters within Kent.

Regional/County

- (12) Many of the county issues derive from the national issues set out above. In particular, there are currently active discussions about the future of the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP). Both Essex and Kent are proposing to break up the SELEP and to create, in Kent, a Local Enterprise partnership made up of Kent and Medway authorities, businesses and skills and education providers.
- (13) Along side this, discussions are ongoing in response to the offer made in the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill and the Housing Bill to seek devolved powers in exchange for the introduction of more effective governance arrangements.
- (14) The Local Enterprise Partnership is of critical importance to the Council – it is the mechanism by which funding for infrastructure is secured alongside other contributions (such as developer contributions). The Borough of Tunbridge Wells faces some significant challenges in terms of infrastructure – most particularly in relation to highways and transportation, but also in relation to education, further and higher education, healthcare, primary/acute/mental healthcare, youth and community centres, water and sewerage and flood defences. Work currently being undertaken by the County Council in concert with TWBC has identified an infrastructure cost of nearly £285 million with a gap (taking account of secured and expected funding) of nearly £150 million – the largest percentage gap in the county.
- (15) Work undertaken by Wessex Economics demonstrates that West Kent plays a vital role in promoting and sustaining the Kent economy as a whole. It also shows that West Kent:
- has historically enjoyed strong job growth, will continue to do so and (along with North Kent) has the best prospects for securing economic growth over the next 20 years;
 - has the highest proportion of business start-ups in Kent, a stronger representation of knowledge-based industries than anywhere else in Kent and boasts the strongest business survival rates;
 - provides significant employment to those living elsewhere in Kent;
 - faces a very real threat to its future success from complacency and lack of funding.
- (16) Individuals in West Kent pay more than double the UK average in income tax and businesses pay 85p in every pound in Business Rates to the Treasury and yet suffer some of the worst congestion in Kent.

- (17) In terms of funding, whilst West Kent accounts for 20 per cent of the population, households and jobs in Kent and will deliver 29 per cent of anticipated job growth, it has received just 7 per cent of KCC's spend and 14 per cent of government spend in Kent to help with infrastructure and economic development. In the most recent allocations of growth, West Kent failed to receive a single penny of the £20m allocated with the money going exclusively to East Kent and Medway.
- (18) Figures from the Department for Transport's Road Congestion and Reliability statistics clearly demonstrate that peak journey times in Tunbridge Wells and West Kent are longer than those elsewhere in the county or in neighbouring counties. Commuters in Tunbridge Wells lose three working days a year through journey time delay relative to those in North and East Kent – a loss of over £32m economic output to the county per year. It is also clear that historic capital funding from KCC has not favoured West Kent which has experienced a sustained underinvestment in its transport network relative to the rest of the county.
- (19) LEP funding has historically been associated with housing and growth which has not favoured Tunbridge Wells and West Kent more generally where unemployment rates are low and house building is constrained but TWBC and the West Kent Partnership more generally are emphasising the importance of West Kent in driving growth and ensuring improving Kent's economic performance relative to other parts of the South East. Tunbridge Wells has only received £1.75m for improvements to the A26 in the first round of Local Growth Fund bids and absolutely nothing in Round 2. The Council will need to work closely with its West Kent partners and with local businesses to ensure that a strong case is made for investment in West Kent and that the voice of local businesses is heard. The Council works with neighbouring authorities within the West Kent Partnership to support local businesses, coordinate bids for infrastructure that is necessary to promote growth and address skills deficiencies.
- (20) Another key issue at a sub-county level is partnership working. Over the past seven years, the Council has responded to the financial challenges by working in partnership with other local authorities. It shares some services with Sevenoaks and Tonbridge and Malling but the majority of services are shared with Maidstone and Swale under the aegis of the Mid Kent Improvement Partnership (MKIP). The Council currently shares Legal Services, ICT, Internal Audit, Revenues and Benefits, Environmental Health and Planning Support within MKIP. The partnership has, over the course of the year trialled a Mid Kent Services Director post to give the partnership a greater sense of cohesion and direction and to explore whether or not services can be traded in the future. The partnership has been overwhelmingly successful in improving customer service and resilience and reducing cost (full details are set out in the Partnership's annual report) – the Council's Internal Audit Partnership has been the first in the country to be fully accredited, Legal Services have been Lexcel accredited and the shared Revenues and Benefits Service has enabled councils to learn from one another with the implementation of Universal Credits. At the same time, the Planning Support shared service has not worked out as anticipated for a variety of reasons and the Council is currently undertaking a piece of work to bring it back in-house.
- (21) The Council is also exploring the potential of a more formal partnership arrangement with Kent County Council to build on a range of existing joint working in areas such as infrastructure, integrating front-line services and libraries into community facilities and aligning regulatory services.
- (22) Health is another key issue at sub-county level with the changes that have been outlined in previous years' reports. The Council works through the West Kent Health

and Wellbeing Board and directly with Kent County Council to understand and align health activity – particularly in the areas of public and mental health.

- (23) The Council is also involved in a wide range of county-wide partnership groups and is leading in a number of areas including housing, ICT, better regulation and the promotion of digital services.

Key issues:

- The Council will need to work closely with neighbouring authorities in West Kent and with Kent County Council to clearly articulate the potential of the West Kent economy to grow and to secure the infrastructure that will be necessary to support and sustain that growth.
- The Council will need to keep the Mid Kent Partnership under review and ensure that existing partnerships are being cliented effectively and that future possible services are considered on their merits.
- The Council will need to continue to engage in relevant county-wide or sub-county boards and groups.

Local

- (24) Locally, the Council is making firm progress against the priorities set out within the Five Year Plan: in terms of infrastructure improvements, works are nearing completion on the North Farm improvements and work has started on the dualling of the A21 and funding has been secured to make some improvements to the A26 and to cycle infrastructure; in terms of property projects, over £5m has been realised from a programme of disposal of the Council's surplus assets, works have started on the John Street car park scheme (a mixed use scheme comprising shops, homes and improved car parking) and a scheme is being developed for the Kevin Lynes site; in terms of public realm, the first phase of 'shared space' has been completed in the town centre and works are well underway as part of a £3.5m Heritage Lottery Funded scheme to improve Grosvenor and Hilbert Park. Culturally, a £1.5m programme of works to upgrade the Assembly Hall has been started and works are in progress to improve Tunbridge Wells Sports Centre; the Council has agreed to part-fund (with contributions from KCC and the HLF), a £12m upgrade, extension and refurbishment of the existing Library, Museum and Art Gallery and Adult Education Centre; in terms of development, work on a number of major schemes is underway including Knights Wood, the Kent and Sussex site and Sherwood and discussions are underway in relation to a number of other key sites within the town including the Cinema site and Union House; in terms of community projects away from the town centre, positive discussions are being held with a number of town and parish councils in relation to enhanced community facilities (particularly in Cranbrook, Paddock Wood and Southborough) and positive discussions are being held on the devolution of services and facilities to town and parish councils and to community groups. The Council has positioned itself as an 'enabling council', recognising that it no longer has the resources to deliver on the full range of ambitions of local groups and residents but seeking to support others in realising those ambitions wherever this might be possible.

Priorities for 2016/17

- (25) As I mentioned in last year's report, the Council has only relatively recently approved an ambitious Five Year Plan. The Leader and I are therefore proposing that we continue to pursue the majority of plans and projects as set out in last year's report with two additions:

- 1) we will include an additional project that will seek to secure higher education facilities for the town; and
- 2) we will include a commitment to produce a sports facilities strategy that will look to build on existing facilities and deliver an additional range of facilities worthy of the Borough.

(26) Full details of these projects are set out below. As well as these additions, we will also consult with Overview and Scrutiny, the Council's cabinet advisory boards, parish and town councils, residents, community and interest groups and partners to establish whether there are any additional priority projects that should be included.

Additional projects

- (27) This section provides some brief information on the rationale behind the proposed additional priority projects.
- (28) The first relates to a higher education facility: the Borough already boasts a wide range of first class schools but West Kent has been identified by the Higher Education Funding Council as a 'cold spot' for HE facilities. A number of residents and interest groups have long held a view that Tunbridge Wells should have some sort of higher education facility and that the town bears many of the hallmarks usually associated with a university town. The Council has been in dialogue with a number of individuals and institutions with a view to delivering an HE facility or campus in the medium-term – possibly related to medical science.
- (29) The second relates to sports facilities. The Borough has a number of excellent sporting facilities – not least the Nevill Ground which hosts county cricket – but it also has a number of facilities that are showing their age and which are not suitable for intensive use all year round. We will undertake a piece of work to see what we can do to improve the situation and meet the growing need.

Current priority (2015-16)	Proposed priority (2016-17)
1. Encourage future growth and investment by marketing opportunities that the borough provides	1. Encourage future growth and investment by marketing opportunities that the borough provides
2. Develop business space to encourage business start-ups	2. Develop business space to encourage business start-ups
3. Progress development of the Local Plan and support local parish and town councils to develop their own neighbourhood plans to reflect new levels of growth within the borough	3. Progress development of the Local Plan and support local parish and town councils to develop their own neighbourhood plans to reflect new levels of growth within the borough
4. Work with local developers to secure suitable development schemes for further housing development and associated community infrastructure in our allocated sites within the borough	4. Work with local developers to secure suitable development schemes for further housing development and associated community infrastructure in our allocated sites within the borough
5. Make the best use of land and property assets for the benefit of residents	5. Make the best use of land and property assets for the benefit of residents
6. Submit a Stage 1 Heritage Lottery funding application for the development of a 'cultural and learning hub' in Royal Tunbridge Wells	6. Submit a Stage 2 Heritage Lottery funding application for the development of a 'cultural and learning hub' in Royal Tunbridge Wells

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7. Complete essential works to the Assembly Hall Theatre and consider viability options for the theatre's future	7. Consider viability options for the Assembly Hall theatre's future including the possibility of a new theatre
8. Support Kent County Council and the Highways Agency to bring about infrastructure improvements to key road networks and cycle routes in Tunbridge Wells borough including the A21, North Farm, A26 (Yew Tree Road and Speldhurst Road junctions) and the A264 (Pembury Road)	8. Support Kent County Council and the Highways Agency to deliver planned infrastructure improvements to key road networks and cycle routes in the borough (including the A21 and A26) and submit funding bids for further improvements and initiatives as set out in the Joint Transportation Strategy
9. Work with parish and town councils and community groups to enable the development of community facilities	9. Work with parish and town councils and community groups to enable the development of community facilities
10. Work with parish and town councils and community groups to enable them to take control of local services	10. Note: This work will be completed in 2015/16. The Council has a good relationship with parish and town councils and community groups and any outstanding issues will be dealt with as part of day to day workload.
11. Following the completion and evaluation of phase one, explore options for delivering phase two of the public realm enhancements in Royal Tunbridge Wells	11. Following the completion and evaluation of phase one, explore options for delivering phase two of the public realm enhancements in Royal Tunbridge Wells
12. Complete landscaping works and improvements to the Pavilion and Oast to enhance the appearance and facilities at Grosvenor and Hilbert recreation ground	12. Note: The works will be completed in 2015/16 so this priority can be removed. The focus will be on community involvement projects.
13. Review the existing management plan and work with the Friends Group to develop a long term vision for Calverley Grounds	13. Work with the Friends Group to develop a stage one HLF bid for Calverley Grounds.
14. Carry out work to reduce emissions and contribute to national carbon reduction targets by focusing on our own operations and estate	14. Carry out work to reduce emissions and contribute to national carbon reduction targets by focusing on our own operations and estate
	15. Explore the potential to deliver a higher education facility or campus within or around the town.
	16. Produce a sports facilities strategy that will set out a route-map for upgrading and extending existing facilities around the Borough.

WHO HAVE WE CONSULTED AND HOW? (OR WHO WILL WE CONSULT FOLLOWING THE DECISION?)

(30) The above priorities have been derived from the comprehensive consultation exercise that was carried out as part of the development of the Council's vision. The proposals will be further amended following a range of consultation activity including Council committees, town and parish councils, partners, the Town Forum and other key resident and interest groups.

HOW WILL THE DECISION BE COMMUNICATED?

- (31) The decision will be widely communicated both internally and externally including through staff and member briefings, work with the local media, the Council's borough-wide magazine and website and meetings.

WHAT ALTERNATIVE ACTION COULD WE TAKE? (where appropriate)

- (32) The Council could choose not to have priority projects or to consult on them or to renew them each year.

CONCLUSIONS

- (33) The above report sets out the context in which the Council is currently operating and is projected to be operating over the medium term. Over the past few years there have been a very large number of significant changes to legislation, funding arrangements and working arrangements and the Council will need to keep its priorities and budgets under constant review.

RECOMMENDATION

That Cabinet consider and agree a list of priority (political) projects for consultation in order to direct the Council's programme of activity from April 2016.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

It is vital that the Council takes account of likely changes to the environment in which it will be operating and that decisions on the budget strategy are informed by priorities being set and pursued by the Council.

Contact Officer: William Benson, Chief Executive

Name of Director/Head of Service

William Benson, Chief Executive

Background Papers

Previous years' reports

APPENDICES TO REPORT

APPENDIX A Cross Cutting Issues

APPENDIX B Corporate Priorities for 2015-16 (Year 2 of the Five Year Plan)

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2015-16 PRIORITIES (YEAR 2 – DELIVERY OF THE FIVE YEAR PLAN)

A PROSPEROUS BOROUGH

Our Five Year Plan:

To achieve growth and shape our local economy by enhancing the built environment within our thriving town centres and rural settlements

Making Tunbridge Wells a key destination for businesses

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| 1 | Encourage future growth and investment by marketing opportunities that the borough provides |
| 2 | Develop business space to encourage business start-ups |
| 3 | Progress development of the Local Plan and support local parish and town councils to develop their own neighbourhood plans to reflect new levels of growth within the borough |
| 4 | Work with local developers to secure suitable development schemes for further housing development and associated community infrastructure in our allocated sites within the borough |
| 5 | Make the best use of land and property assets for the benefit of residents |

Making Tunbridge Wells a key destination for visitors

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| 6 | Submit a Stage 1 Heritage Lottery funding application for the development of a 'cultural and learning hub' in Royal Tunbridge Wells |
| 7 | Complete essential works to the Assembly Hall Theatre and consider viability options for the theatre's future |

Tackling congestion

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| 8 | Support Kent County Council and the Highways Agency to bring about infrastructure improvements to key road networks and cycle routes in Tunbridge Wells borough including the A21, North Farm, A26 (Yew Tree Road and Speldhurst Road junctions) and the A264 (Pembury Road). |
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A CONFIDENT BOROUGH

Our Five Year Plan:

To remain a safe place to live, work and visit where communities enjoy good health, are adequately housed and resilient to the challenges they may encounter

Enabling the delivery of community facilities

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| 9 | Work with parish and town councils and community groups to enable the development of community facilities |
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Enabling empowered communities

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| 10 | Work with parish and town councils and community groups to enable them to take control of local services |
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A GREEN BOROUGH

Our Five Year Plan:

To remain a clean and beautiful place to live, work and visit, as a result of the continued effort put in to protect the quality of the local environment

Enhancing our parks and open spaces

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| 11 | Following the completion and evaluation of phase one, explore options for delivering phase two of the public realm enhancements in Royal Tunbridge Wells. |
| 12 | Complete landscaping works and improvements to the Pavilion and Oast to enhance the appearance and facilities at Grosvenor & Hilbert recreation ground |
| 13 | Review the existing management plan and work with the Friends Group to develop a long term vision for Calverley Grounds |

Reducing carbon emissions

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| 14 | Carry out work to reduce emissions and contribute to national carbon reduction targets by focusing on our own operations and estate |
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