



AGENDA

Thursday 25 May 2023 at 6.00 pm
Council Chamber, Town Hall, Royal Tunbridge Wells, TN1 1RS

Agenda

- 1 Attendance**
(Members are asked to sign the attendance sheet on arrival. A draft attendance list will then be circulated after the meeting. Please advise of any errors or omissions in the draft list.)
- 2 Membership Changes**
 - a) Changes of representatives
 - b) New membership applications
- 3 Minutes of the meetings dated 30 March 2023** (Pages 4 - 13)
 - a) Approval as a correct record
 - b) Matters arising
- 4 Updates from Member Organisations** (Pages 14 - 17)
(Please advise the Secretary before the meeting if you wish to raise a topic under this agenda item.)
- 5 Tunbridge Wells Visitor Economy**
Presentation by Hilary Smith, TWBC Economic Development Manager and Sarah-Louise Koessler, Marketing and Administration Assistant.
- 6 Town Centre Plan 'Transport and Carbon Baseline Report'**
Presentation by Carlos Hone, Head of Planning, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
- 7 Progress by TWBC towards Carbon Neutrality**
Presentation by Karin Grey, TWBC Sustainability Manager.
- 8 Community Energy and Other Actions**
Led by Marieka de Jonge, Local Co-ordinator for Tunbridge Wells Friends of the Earth
- 9 Update from the Borough Council**
Update from Cllr Justine Rutland, Cabinet Member for Tunbridge Wells town and surrounding areas.
- 10 Reports from the Town Forum Working Groups** (Pages 18 - 35)
Reports from:
 - a) Transport Strategy Working Group
 - b) Water in the Wells Working Group
Other Town Forum Working Groups:
 - c) Strategic Planning Working Group
 - d) Culture, Leisure and Tourism Working Group
 - e) Wellbeing Working Group

f) Finance and Other Issues Working Group

11 Urgent Business or Topics for Future Meetings

12 Future Meetings

- 13 July 2023



Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday, 30 March 2023, held online starting at 6pm

ATTENDANCE

- 1 Member Organisations:
Beulah Road Residents' Association – Stuart Anderson | Boyne Park Residents' Association – Sue Bishop and Dorothea Holman | Calverley Park Residents' Association – Jane Fenwick | Civic Society of Royal Tunbridge Wells – Brian Lippard and John de Lucy | Friends of The Commons – Joy Podbury | Friends of The Grove and The Avenues Residents' Association – Tim Tempest | Friends of Tunbridge Wells Cemetery – John de Lucy | Friends of Woodbury Park Cemetery – David Bushell | Grantley Court Residents Association – Lorna Blackmore | Molyneux Park Gardens Residents' Association – Don Sloan | Soroptimist International of Tunbridge Wells and District – Caroline Auckland | Trinity Theatre – Nick Mowat | The Forum – Carolyn Gray | Tunbridge Wells Bicycle User Group – Adrian Berendt | Tunbridge Wells Older People's Forum – Ruth Chambers | Tunbridge Wells Twinning and Friendship Association – Michael Holman and David Wakefield | Culture Hub – Mike Trudel | Inner London Road Residents Association – Pat Wilson and Carol Wilson | Royal Wells Park Residents' Group – Paul Bright | Poona Road Residents Association – Alastair Tod | Culverden Residents' Association – Michael Lees

Councillor Members:
Culverden Ward – Cllr Justine Rutland and Cllr Martin Brice | St James' Ward – Cllr Ben Chapelard | St. John's ward – Cllr Marguerita Morton and Cllr Peter Lidstone | Sherwood Ward – Cllr Hugo Pound | Park Ward – Cllr Victoria White and Cllr Nick Pope

Others in Attendance:
Borough Council Officers – Carlos Hone (Head of Planning) | Secretary – Emer Moran.

MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

- 2 No membership changes were discussed.

MINUTES OF THE AGM MEETING DATED 24 NOVEMBER 2022

- 3 **RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the AGM held on 24 November 2022 be approved

MINUTES OF ORDINARY MEETING DATED 24 NOVEMBER 2022

- 4 **RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2022 be approved

MINUTES OF ORDINARY MEETING DATED 19 JANUARY 2023

- 5 **RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meeting held on 19 January 2023 be approved

UPDATES FROM MEMBER ORGANISATIONS

- 6 Daniel Colborne, newly appointed Ranger for Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons gave a brief introduction to his role and work:
- A focus on where the Common sat within the town centre and 3 key components: safety; ecology/biodiversity; and community engagement.
 - Sought to capitalise and optimise views and sense of open space within the Common.
 - A consultant had been commissioned who had produced a plan going forward with a who raft of different surveys expected to start in October 2023, in order to produce a 5 year ecological plan.

Michael Holman, President of Tunbridge Wells Twinning and Friendship Association (TWTFA), gave an update on recent activities:

- In early May students from the Hermann Ehlers school in Wiesbaden were expected in Tunbridge Wells as part of a weeklong trip to Kent, where they were to visit the Amelia Scott and the Pantiles along with a tour of the town. It was felt that Brexit had made arranging such trips 'impossible', but that short trips such as this kept doors open with Wiesbaden.
- TWTFA were acting as an intermediary between community groups that shared common interests in Tunbridge Wells and Wiesbaden, recently building an exciting link between The Oaks Specialist College and similar organisations in Wiesbaden which provided specialist education for young adults with learning difficulties. In June, 4 students and 2 teachers from The Oaks were going to Wiesbaden for 5 days to share their experiences.
- In October, Wiesbaden's Red Heralds marching band were to visit Tunbridge Wells, in conjunction with the local Sea Cadets, along with two dance groups for a programme of music and dance which was still being prepared.
- The Wiesbaden Wine Festival, which took place over 10 days in August each year, had asked the TWTFA to identify a local vineyard to be named Twin Town Vintner of honour in August 2024. Discussions were ongoing with local vineyards to gauge levels of interest.

Nick Mowat, Executive Director and acting Chief Executive of Trinity Theatre and Arts Centre, gave an update:

- Financially, 2022 had been tough. With post-pandemic audiences not returning to pre-pandemic levels and disappointing Christmas Box Office numbers. Furthermore, there were unexpected VAT implications from the ongoing Clocktower project which had caused a significant financial hit on their accounts.
- Fundraising efforts to raise £25,000 by the end of January and a further £75,000 by the end of February to end the financial year in a better position had been successful, hitting both targets. This meant that the Theatre would end the financial year not owing any money and starting the next financial year on a firmer footing, with invaluable help from visitors, Members, volunteers and staff. No further redundancies would be made following a small staff restructuring earlier last year.
- The summer schedule (April-September) would be released in the coming days, including in June several extraordinary performances from a French company before they go to Edinburgh, and in July an

- Australian company bringing a show called 'Splash Test Dummies'.
- Further fundraising events would be held throughout the year, including on Sunday 4th June when several West End performers would provide an evening of music from West End musicals at a black tie event.

Ruth Chambers of Tunbridge Wells Older People's Forum gave a brief update:

- The Older People's Forum covered the whole Borough and had been around since 2011 with approximately 270 members.
- There had been a vacancy for a Treasurer/Membership Secretary which had been open for the last year. If no one could fill the position the group was in jeopardy, so any volunteers would be welcome.
- A report had just been completed on "'Where are we now: The New Normal' after Lockdown and to update the initial 2020 report on how the pandemic had affected older people in particular. There were 167 respondents, with a selection of closed questions and open comment sections. This was a 50 page document with analysis of responses as well as summaries. The main identified concerns were: the use of technology to access basic services with no alternatives; getting around, socialising and using public services; the decreasing public transport reliability and frequency, and; availability of medical services and ease of access in health and social care. Conclusions and suggestions for improvement were made in the report. These suggestions also overlapped with other vulnerable groups.

FUTURE MEETINGS AND COUNCIL SUPPORT

- 7 Town Forum Chairman Don Sloan gave a brief introduction to the topic and the leaflet 'Town Forum in Action' sent to Members within the agenda papers which showed the work of the Town Forum, as well as potential discussion points for the item, relating to the future of the Town Forum and ongoing pressures on the Forum and Council in general.

Discussion from Members included:

- Brian Lippard gave a prepared statement regarding his thoughts on the Forum's situation and that if TWBC could not provide the resources of the Council Chamber without charge, when the Town Forum had no financial resources, then there would be no choice but to disband the Forum.
- It was noted by the Chair that the Town Forum did rely upon the Council's support not just for venue but for GDPR and administrative needs.
- Leader of the Council, Cllr Ben Chapelard, disagreed with Mr Lippard's comments and described the disbanding of the Town Forum as 'disastrous', but that the current position meant that Local Government was being starved of funds with a likely outcome of more Unitary Councils nationwide. The leasing of some of the Town Hall to Town Square was to partly remedy this financial situation with cost savings. The Borough Partnership and TWBC were keen to look at alternative solutions for the Town Forum, including holding the meetings at alternative venues and spreading administrative duties among members.
- Town Forum Deputy Chairman Adrian Berendt noted that as a member of the Cross-Party Working Group who looked at alternative working solutions for the Town Hall, he strongly supported the outsourcing of the Town Hall and Town Square would bring vitality to

the building which hadn't existed for many years. He noted that town centre residents did not have a Town Council to represent them, but did produce approx.. £2 million in Special Expenses and he did not feel it unreasonable to find funding from out of this amount. Otherwise there was the option to form a Town Council, which had its pros and cons.

- Mention was made that if there had been knowledge that Town Square weren't going to make allowances to community groups such as the Town Forum, then this would have made a difference in the decision.
- Ruth Chambers disagreed with Cllr Chapelard's proposal that the Town Forum move around, as it was a closed meeting with little benefit to holding it in different locations with no access to microphones etc, and these locations would need paying for.
- Cllr Hugo Pound mentioned that in the first instance they should allow William Benson, CEO of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council to negotiate with Town Square for provision for the Town Forum, and that local councillors would keep the pressure up. He mentioned that there were several locations within the town centre with suitable accessibility and the Town Forum could explore alternative locations. He also noted that online MS Teams meetings gave more options for attendance than in-person meetings, and could be alternated with less formal in-person gatherings to promote cooperation and engagement with each other. He also stated that if Government was moving towards single-tiered, unitary councils, then the argument was strengthened to establish a formal Town Council to provide democratic representation to Town Centre residents.
- Chairman Don Sloan stressed the importance of in-person meetings to getting Town Forum business done.
- Stuart Anderson asked that the Forum did not discount Town Square yet, and that negotiations may go well to secure use of the Council Chamber. The Forum also did not know the cost of the Chamber to hire, so it did not benefit to get too far ahead. However, he also stated that the Forum could use the Showfields Community Centre, which did not have recording equipment but did have enough space and agreed that moving around may help understanding of the area they were representing.
- Cllr Justine Rutland echoes Cllr Pound and Cllr Chapelard's comments that the Town Forum was important to the Council and hadn't been singled out in any way in negotiations as Commons Conservators were facing similar issues and were seeking a community rate to use facilities in the Town Hall.

TOWN CENTRE AREA PLAN AND LOCAL PLAN

8 Councillor Hugo Pound, Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning, gave a short introduction prior to Carlos Hone, Head of Planning at TWBC, giving a presentation on the Town Centre Area Plan:

- The Town Centre Plan was to be a Land Use Planning document, similar to the Borough-wide Local Plan in that it was to be used for decision making. It had been put together by a Town Centre Working Group with members from Councillors, the Town Forum, KCC, TWBC officers and youth representatives etc. Consultants had been used from LDA Design to oversee the initial works and Town Centre Study.
- Engagement so far for the Town Centre Study had included a walking tour with consultants and the Town Centre Working Group; 3 separate workshops, a public pop-up event and an online consultation.

- The online Talking Point consultation was advertised via social media, press releases, local newsletters, schools and Parish/Town Councils, as well as in neighbouring Authorities.
- The wards situated closest to the Town Centre were most represented in the results of the online consultation. Most respondents were aged over 45. Very few were under 26, so further thought was needed on how to engage more younger people, especially those aged 16-35.
- Based on the responses, the most common reason for visiting the Town Centre was to go shopping, followed by use of leisure facilities and to visit parks and green spaces.
- Other centres that respondents preferred to visit were Maidstone, followed by Tonbridge, London, Sevenoaks and other local town centres.
- Most of the respondents/residents preferred to walk to the town centre and to drive. The most popular car park used by respondents was Royal Victoria Place, followed by Crescent Road, on-street parking and then Meadow Road Car Park. Improving the connectivity of the Town Centre by more sustainable modes of transport (cycling, bus, rail) through the Plan would be of benefit.
- Respondents identified a need in the Town Centre for: evening economy (such as a cinema); more leisure facilities and community events; a greater variety of shops, including independent shops and more affordable retailers for young and older people; improvements to the accessibility of the High Street/Pantiles; investment in the overall enhancement/attractiveness of Royal Tunbridge Wells.
- An interactive map was included in the online consultation, with 55 contributors and 178 pins placed, identifying: a lack of appropriate crossing points in various locations around the town; traffic (speeding cars, air pollution, illegal parking etc) with residents and businesses both concerned with the enhancements of the top part of the town, particularly around Camden Road and Grosvenor Road; and, need for more innovative planning and development around the town to maintain harmony with the heritage and historic buildings of the town centre. Other trends were for a farmers market, more shops and cycling infrastructure.
- There was also direct consultation with local businesses. It was hoped that future rounds of consultation would increase the numbers of businesses who responded. Out of the 26 businesses who responded, 12 answered that their staff drove to work and 8 answered that their staff usually worked. None by train. Most frequently used car parks for commuters were Crescent Road and Royal Victoria Place, but most employees preferred on-street parking.
- Businesses identified the following priorities: a reduction in parking fees or the introduction of a 'park and ride' scheme; the promotion of events to increase footfall; creation of better links between the top and lower parts of town; and, traffic congestion, proposing better cycling infrastructure and free short-term parking to increase visitor numbers to the town centre.
- The Town Centre Study was intended to set out a vision for RTW Town Centre and how it was to evolve up to the year 2040. It was the outcome of several technical studies and engagement reports and included: a number of principles to deliver the outcomes of the vision; a masterplan framework; proposals for a number of key projects; and intervention and quick wins.
- The masterplan framework intended to split the town centre into 4 separate quarters: Grosvenor Road and Camden Road to the north would provide a unique and vibrant destination; to the west the train

station and surrounding area was to give a sense of arrival to the town for visitors and improve connections to green spaces; Mount Pleasant Road and Crescent Road to the east were to provide a dynamic, thriving quarter focused on civic life and culture; and to the south the High Street and Pantiles showcased the heritage and heart of the town.

- Documents produced so far within the Town Centre Study included the Town Centre Transport and Carbon Baseline Report (City Science); the Town Centre Retail Study and Health Check (Knight Frank); a Town Centre Stakeholder and Community Engagement report (LDA Design), using the consultation and workshop events; and a Town Centre Study Baseline Evidence Report (LDA Design) which provided a comprehensive summary of all the study documents as well as referencing planning policy and a SWOT analysis of the built environment, economics, carbon emissions and decarbonisation and transportation infrastructure.
- The Plan was currently at the stage of calling for suitable sites, land and buildings available for development within the next 5 years, with a comprehensive car parking strategy assessment due to be completed and potentially further evidence studies needed. A formal statutory public consultation was due to start in late 2023 for a minimum of 6 weeks. Following the consultation the Plan would be drafted and tested prior to submission.

Cllr Hugo Pound then provided further discussion prior to the broader discussion:

- In relation to the 7 principles set out within the Town Centre Study, there had been discussion with several members of the Town Forum to make sure residents were shaping the vision of their town centre. It was not so much a planning document as a vision of what the town centre should be and the planning elements would follow after this. This was then relayed to Carlos.
- Not enough was known to give definitive answers or solutions, but from all the consultations and workshops etc which had so far gone on, the 7 principles had been identified to build the vision.
- The next stage would involve everyone who attended the first workshops to go over the initial report and ask whether it covered their views.
- The Chairman stressed that he would like the Town Forum to contribute to the Plan before it was 'fixed'. Cllr Pound stated that the Town Forum had been well represented in the initial workshops so would be able to give feedback, and the Town Forum would also be able to contribute to the public consultation both as a group and as individual members. .
- Carlos Hone confirmed the workshop participants would be given further opportunity to contribute prior to the document being finalised and he was happy to come back to the Town Forum and other community groups as part of the consultation exercise.

Questions and discussion included the following:

- The Plan had initially been expected to be adopted in late 2025, but there were delays as this timeframe had been created with the provision that the Borough-wide local plan would have been adopted by now, which it had not.
- It was noted by Carolyn Gray that the Town Forum skewed heavily in the older age range and that it was really important that younger

people were engaged with and their views found out before the Plan went any further, rather than the Forum's. This view was echoed by Sue Bishop. Cllr Pound responded by highlighting a suggestion made by Brian Lippard in a previous discussion in which activities and facilities within the town centre were tested against their usefulness to younger people, young families and other demographic groups to ensure they were meeting their needs.

- Jane Fenwick noted that there was a difference between Calverley Grounds and Calverley Park which wasn't correct in the masterplan framework and that access routes marked in the framework to Calverley Grounds went through private land off Crescent Road and down a path that was not a public right of way and that this needed amending. Cllr Pound disagreed with this, stating that the Council did know the difference between the Grounds and Park and that the framework shown was only a graphic and did not represent an accurate picture, but that he took her point.
- Brian Lippard questioned why the next stage of the process was a call for sites, which he felt was 'bottom-up' rather than solidifying a vision first, which would be more 'top-down', noting that the call for sites at this stage would limit the vision on what was available now. Carlos Hone confirmed that the Study document, which he had hoped to bring to the meeting but was still being completed, had the vision within it but that a call for sites was important to determine what land was available and which developers/land-owners were keen to see their land develop. It was an important part of the process and usual to do it not just once but potentially many times, as with other local and area plans.
- Stuart Anderson echoed Cllr Pound's original point that this was primarily a Planning document but that there was a lot of information that could be gained from LDA Design and their material to create the Vision, and that it could be looked at as two separate things – the statutory obligation that Carlos would be dealing with, and the 'softer' Vision side which the Councillors and Forum needed to focus on, therefore to get less hung up on the fixed statutory routes and more on how to add substance to the 7 principles identified by the Consultants.
- Carol Wilson questioned what would happen in the Plan to the busy roads within the town centre which had become more congested due to pedestrianisation of some of the Town Centre. The response was that the principles set out within the Plan showed that streets were to be redefined as spaces for active travel and public transport, but that detail would come at a later date to what, if any, changes would be made to the road network.
- Dorothea Holman asked that the public transport network within the town centre be improved. It was noted in response that the funding of the private bus network was outside the scope of the Town Centre Plan but that within the Local Plan there were ambitious housing plans which would look to provide financial support towards improving bus services. It was also noted by Cllr Lidstone that much of public transport was controlled at county council level.
- The importance of getting younger people to live in the centre of town by providing affordable housing to ensure the sustainability of the town was highlighted. Carlos agreed that town centre living was a key factor and that the emerging Local Plan identified a need to deliver between 150-200 homes within the area but that affordability was an issue. Cllr Pound added the fact that Tunbridge Wells was the only borough in Kent in which the population aged 25-49 was decreasing

because of affordability issues. New housing needed to be affordable and rentable to ensure vibrancy within the town centre.

- Issues at road junctions such as Grantley Court were raised and questioned whether these would form part of the Plan. Issues were asked to be passed to the Planning Department but that there would need to be a formal process for public consultation. It was agreed that there were particular 'node' points which needed focus and attention to make safe and workable for all road users and pedestrians.

Carlos Hone, Head of Planning, then gave an update on the Borough's Local Plan:

- Recent revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in which the Government undertook a consultation between 22nd December and 2nd March. TWBC submitted a response during this time. It was intended that amendments to the NPPF would be adopted into national policy by the Spring, becoming part of the process for decision-making by TWBC.
- In terms of the revisions, the standard method of calculating local housing need remained unchanged, although this was subject to review based on census projections to be published next year. Local Authorities were being allowed to avoid unduly dense development to meet housing need as well as to avoid reviewing Green Belt boundaries.
- Meanwhile, the test of 'soundness' for Local Plan testing and adoption was to be softened, needing only to be effective and deliverable. But this did not affect Plans already in advanced stages, such as Tunbridge Wells'.
- Local Authorities with an up-to-date Local Plan were not to be required to continually show a deliverable five-year housing land supply and historic oversupply could also be used in five-year housing land supply calculations.
- Measures were also being put in place to tackle and penalise developers for slowly building out of permissions.
- Other revisions to the NPPF were regarding: wind energy; energy efficiency; biodiversity net gain; building beautiful; and more homes for social rent.
- The TWBC Local Plan had been in production since 2016 and was now at advanced stages. The Council had received the Inspectors post-hearings letter, setting out the initial findings of the Planning Inspector and was invited to consider the issues raised and the suggested ways forward.
- In regards to the Inspector's findings on the Green Belt, with TWBC having looked at maximising densities in urban areas and the possibility of neighbouring areas accommodating additional housing growth, the release of some Green Belt was in principle seen as reasonable and appropriate strategy and allowed by the NPPF as part of Plan-making. But the Inspector felt there was further work to be completed to consider omission sites and whether they stayed discounted. This work was being completed by Consultants on behalf of the Council.
- In relation to the development of 2800 homes proposed for Tudeley Village, the Inspector raised a number of issues. The release of Green Belt had been considered an appropriate strategy by TWBC as identified in the NPPF and the Council had provided significant evidence to support this, but the Inspector raised issues about whether the site and strategy for TV were justified or effective. The Inspector felt that exceptional circumstances had not been

demonstrated in order to release Green Belt land at this stage. TWBC had been working with consultants to resolve issues and review evidence such as accessibility of the site by sustainable modes of transport.

- The Inspector felt that the expansion of Paddock Wood/East Capel represented a 'logical choice' for growth, but TWBC needed to ensure that the development came forward in a comprehensive manner, so looking at policy and how it was written. Some locations of new housing, community and employment facilities were deemed to be in areas of higher risk of flooding and were not justifiable. These proposals were therefore being reviewed with the Council's consultants in order to set out parameters for the scale, type and mix of uses permitted, while being mindful of the flood risk. Then, as part of the Tudeley Village review, the education infrastructure requirements of Paddock Wood would be reviewed.
- The Inspector had fewer concerns about proposals for Royal Tunbridge Wells. They recommended revisions to Cinema Site police to allow more flexibility, as well as not supporting the safeguarding of Colebrook House for future unidentified development. Further consultation was also required on Hawkenbury access plans.
- Overall the Inspector recognised that a significant amount of work had gone into the preparation of the Plan. It was positively prepared in seeking to meet housing needs despite large areas of Green Belt and AONB, especially in relation to the Council's relationships with neighbouring Authorities. The majority of changes identified and required were straightforward.
- The aim was to present the recommendations to Council Members in June 2023 and then consult on any proposed changes over the summer. Focused Hearings on the changes in strategy were to be held in November. If the Hearings were completed satisfactorily, then a public consultation would go ahead prior to adoption of the Plan.

Questions and discussion included:

- Cllr Pound spoke of his role to protect the Officers to allow them to get on with the work that the Inspectorate had asked of them. It was important to recognise that while there were resourcing challenges across the Council that Carlos and his team had done a fantastic job in getting the Local Plan to the advanced stage of development it was currently at, which was a credit to them.

UPDATE FROM THE BOROUGH COUNCIL

9

Councillor Justine Rutland, Cabinet Member for or Tunbridge Wells Town and Local Areas, had updates which given time restrictions she agreed to email out to Town Forum members. She did give a verbal update on Public Realm 2, the traffic restrictions in front of the War Memorial:

- The scheme was to become enforced and go live on 1st April, and she and Cllr Lidstone were keen to hear feedback on the scheme from Town Forum members.
- Cllr Rutland thanked Adrian Berendt and Jane Fenwick and other Town Forum members for conducting traffic counts and giving recommendations for improving the scheme, which would be taken to the Joint Transportation Board on April 17th.
- Cllr Rutland particularly wanted feedback on disadvantages to residents of York and Dudley Road, as well as from businesses on Monson Road.

REPORTS FROM THE TOWN FORUM WORKING GROUPS

- 10 The Chairman asked David Wakefield to speak regarding the Finance Working Group:
- David announced he would be stepping down from the role, and that whoever took on the Working Group needn't be an accountant as there was no accountancy involved, but have drive and energy to take over.
 - The Chairman thanked David for his fantastic contribution to the Forum over many years, giving ideas/feedback, having meetings with Councillors and responding to Consultations.

URGENT BUSINESS OR TOPICS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

- 11 No urgent business or topics for future meetings were discussed.

FUTURE MEETINGS

- 12 The next meeting was scheduled for Thursday 18th May 2023.

Town Centre Area Plan

At our last meeting (30 March) we had an interesting and detailed talk by Carlos Hone, Head of Planning at TWBC, on the Town Centre Area Plan. He also covered the Local Plan and the NPPF.

Sometime earlier, concern had been expressed about the risk of "group think" as it had been noted that all those currently aware of the consultant's report appeared to be in agreement. As a result, Brian Lippard got together a subcommittee of the Civic Society to start with a clean sheet come up with ideas.

Following the meeting we received the proposals below.

RTW Civic Society Proposals for the Town Centre Plan

Introduction

The underlying principle of the Plan should be that it is long-term, achieved when possible by successive, often small steps. This requires the objective to be widely communicated and understood to ensure public support. It should be clear to all what the Council aims to do with continuous open dialogue about the steps to be taken. Material decisions should be taken by elected members in public.

Having adopted a long-term objective it should be rigorously pursued at the expense, if necessary, of short term political or commercial gains. This requires proactive planning and assertive negotiation with developers. An operating principle is needed that planning decisions are based on function and design, with benefits such as tree planting, water features or s.106 payments being subordinate. A general understanding of the Council's objective should result in better considered proposals from the development industry.

We would propose an overall objective of making the town centre work better as a commercial, cultural and community hub, preserving and integrating the inherited features, protecting listed buildings etc, and ensuring that new additions are well-designed in themselves, particularly in regard to scale and materials, and make a provable contribution to long-term objectives. The aim should be to achieve a commercially active centre which is safer, better sign posted, better-connected, and attractive to residents and visitors, rather than specifically to attract tourists. While a central medical centre should be considered we do not believe that a major innovation, a theatre, university campus etc, is a necessary component. Any such development which comes forward should fit the overall objective, not the reverse.

We would hope to experience much fuller and earlier consultation on future projects than we feel took place with the cinema site. That proposal conflicted with the Local Plan, didn't significantly contribute to the economic health of the town centre, and, we feel, is wholly unsuited to its location. It pays no regard to the nearby five or six listed buildings, in its character and scale, and makes minimal contribution to the town centre economy or environment.

Suggested wording for the Vision

That Royal Tunbridge Wells maintains and enhances its standing as a historic Spa Town of national importance, which is a rewarding destination for tourism, the main cultural centre for the surrounding area, a vibrant regional shopping and commercial centre, and a well-managed transport node with improved facilities for movement on foot and by cycle. The defined Town Centre should form the attractive core of a civilised conurbation that is a desirable place in which to live, to work or to visit.

Proposals for inclusion in the Plan

1. The civic complex to be developed as a Community Centre with linked administrative, community, cultural and commercial elements embracing the Amelia Scott, as proposed by the Council in 2020. A central (walk-in) medical centre should also be considered.
2. The extent of the shopping area to be shrunk whilst leaving most of the Camden Road shops where possible because of their distinctive nature and low rents; use s.215 powers to improve substandard properties.
3. Promote sustainability by rationalising traffic circulation to reduce through traffic. Extend pedestrianisation (with limited hours if deemed necessary) and shared space where possible. Make Five Ways into a town square with the possible inclusion of Upper Mount Pleasant. there should be an operating principle that planning decisions should not be based on marginal benefits such as tree planting, water features.
4. Implement Urban Design Framework proposals for Mt Pleasant and facilitate non-car movement between the top and bottom of the town; remove obstacles to walking and cycling.
5. Integrate bus services with smaller vehicles and more frequent schedules where possible.
6. Provide dedicated parking for buses and coaches to replace the former Linden Park coach park with the intention of supporting tourism.
7. Reduce car parking in town centre, especially on-street and on private land where planning permission hasn't been obtained; standardise methods of payment.
8. Aim for TW to become a foodie centre with a wide range of types of food available through a covered market and a possible foodie quarter.
9. Encourage small independent shops; look to encourage those that specialise in a particular market to group together.
10. Diversify shopping areas and improve pedestrian environment to promote the town centre as a leisure area.
11. Encourage tourism where compatible with other objectives (but not to the extent that we end up like Canterbury).
12. Review scope and functioning of the Amelia Scott so that more of the Council's collections can be put on display. Move the Gateway function to elsewhere in the Civic Centre. Improve pedestrian links between the Amelia Scott and the rest of the Civic Centre.
13. Upgrade the Assembly Hall to add wing space for touring productions and a stronger food and beverage offer, and develop it as a multi-purpose venue for community and commercial use.
14. Promote housing (but not care homes) in the town centre, including social housing, to reduce commuting, support the night-time economy and help discourage anti-social behaviour.
15. Recognise all aspects of the town's heritage; buildings should be of human scale, related to their context, and respect existing characteristics and features. Use Article 4 Directions to prevent undesirable Permitted Development.

16. Preserve the Pantiles appearance as it is now.
17. Upgrade the urban environment by maintaining pavements, retaining original brick and stone, repaving as necessary with quality materials, removing temporary tarmac repairs in brick and paving slabs; provide new street trees with tree pits; require owners to maintain or replace street furniture (including such things as telephone cabinets); remove unnecessary signs and barriers.
18. Provide a safe environment, especially for women, with adequate seats, bins and public conveniences, and well-designed street lighting for all users, not just traffic.

Prepared by Peter Lewis, Brian Lippard, Alastair Tod and Philip Whitbourn April 2023

Chalybeate Spring



You will remember that Samuel Danby spoke at one of our earlier meetings about his plans for the Chalybeate Spring. David Scott acted as a facilitator on behalf of The Council, Water in the Wells, and The 1887 Pantiles Residents Association.

David wrote during the Coronations weekend:

It is great to see the Chalybeate Spring project come to life ready for the Kings coronation. I am so pleased I was able to help Samuel to facilitate this idea. I applaud his enthusiasm and determination to invest and get this up and operational. It is such a positive feature for Royal Tunbridge Wells.

Everyone else, please come down and buy some water (50% iron content of the original spring - which makes it very palatable for most people's tastes).

Well done Samuel Danby for your enthusiasm and achieving your dream. I remain a firm supporter and wish you well. I am happy to do what I can to help promote the water.

I urge all to insist on Tunbridge Wells water from s the local restaurants and bars. Together we can make this water world famous again.

I am #DelightedRTW



The voice of the residents of Royal Tunbridge Wells

Report on Public Realm (updated 15-May-23)

Introduction and background

Making the Tunbridge Wells town centre a “Public Realm” where those on foot can walk in comfort was widely supported when conceived more than a decade ago. Stage 1 partly pedestrianised Fiveways and Stage 2 aimed for a “Public Square” in the area around the War Memorial and the (to be) Amelia Scott. Later potential stages include(d) reducing motor vehicle movements on Monson Road and on Mount Pleasant near the main station.

The Pantiles area is almost traffic-free and there are significantly fewer motor vehicles in the High Street. The overall concept thus imagined a pleasant walk with few motor vehicles from the bottom to the top of town. This long-held ambition of joining the two ends of town received added impetus from the early work on the Town Centre Area Plan.

The detailed design of Stage 2 lost certain key features and the Public Realm vision mutated into a scheme with minor road layout changes: some say to the detriment of pedestrians¹: Links to the original² and final³ drawings show the scheme compromises: the road was not narrowed as planned; tarmac (and a white centre line) replaced the granite setts; taxis allowed access and the pedestrian crossing point on Monson Road removed. Tree-planting is not as extensive as envisaged in the original sketch⁴ and the existing bus-gate to Fiveways was not adapted. Of particular concern is the lack of consideration on the impact on local residents: drivers now see York, Dudley and Newton roads as potentially attractive cut throughs but residents have extended driving times.

As a result, an iconic scheme has been compromised and widely criticised. The risk is now of losing the wider objective of a largely traffic-free town centre as envisaged in the Town Centre Area Plan. The Town Forum, together with residents, has spent time observing the area before and after the works were completed, with a view to making constructive suggestions for change.

¹ One comment was “the council spent hundreds of thousands of pounds making that small stretch of unpedestrianised road into an unpedestrianised road.”

² <https://democracy.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/documents/s34502/13%20Appendix%20B%20-%20Initial%20Design%20for%20Discussion.pdf>

³ <https://democracy.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/documents/s41226/7%20Appendix%20B%20-%20Scheme%20Layout.pdf>

⁴ <https://democracy.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/documents/s34501/13%20Appendix%20A%20-%20Concept%20Sketch.pdf>

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

Town Forum Management Group

Don Sloan (Chair) Adrian Berendt (Deputy Chair); Jane Fenwick (Transport and Deputy Chair), David Wakefield (Finance); Stuart Anderson (Leisure Wellbeing and Culture); Mark Booker (Strategic Planning); Michael Holman (Water in the Wells)

Resident-led traffic counts and observations

Residents carried out ten separate observations of the area to:

- (1) Observe changes in traffic patterns after the scheme was implemented; and
- (2) Inform discussion about possible changes to the scheme.

Observations were all at similar times: Fridays at noon for an hour. The first survey (March 2019) was performed before work started. The next four (Dec-19 and Jan, Feb & Mar 2020) were after work was finished, but before COVID impacted. The last five were in Dec-20 (during COVID), Oct-22 and Feb, Mar, May 2023. The first two sessions counted motor vehicles, observed driver behaviour and estimated pedestrian numbers; later sessions included more formal pedestrian counts.

Note: findings are indicative rather than scientific.

The key objective now is to maximise the scheme benefits (safer and more attractive for pedestrians; fewer motor vehicles) and minimise the shortcomings (York and Dudley roads as cut throughs, unsafe crossing at Monson Road). We suggest a further short observation period with more formal traffic and pedestrian counts followed by recommendations from TWBC / KCC to the next Joint Transportation Board. While some changes might need longer consideration, others, such as the Monson Road crossing, need a solution anyway and should be progressed more quickly.

Summary findings

Until enforcement started in March 2023, the number of vehicles (216) seen in the area had decreased by c. 50% compared with the first pre-scheme count in March 2019: still too high to make it truly a “Public Realm”. Following enforcement, the numbers dropped further and are now 25% of previous volumes. Of those, 2/3 are permitted, as they are exiting along Monson Road from York, Dudley and Newton roads. Of the 43 remaining vehicles seen in the restricted area around the War Memorial, some might be exempt.

With the exception of December 2020, where COVID likely affected pedestrian numbers, the ratio of pedestrians to motor vehicles averaged over 6:1.

The reduction of vehicles is in the restricted area around the War Memorial. The number of vehicles using Newton, Dudley and York roads is unchanged and these are now bearing a higher share of movements. Residents in Dudley and York roads fear they will become vehicle cut-throughs, as drivers seek ways to avoid the restricted area.

Conclusion and recommendations

In order to make the scheme successful, further changes are needed. The Town Forum’s **key recommendation** is for a **close monitoring of the scheme** for (say) three months, followed by a **review with proposals for change**. Such a review should include **engagement** to identify the needs of those most affected by the scheme, particularly **town centre residents and businesses**. Possible suggestion include:

- 1) York and Dudley Roads
 - a. Formal counts of vehicle numbers and speeds over the whole day
 - b. Measures to prevent use as a vehicle cut-through, such as:
 - i. Two-way / access only (successful for York Road during construction but may not work long-term)
 - ii. Include more roads within scheme (“except residents; access”)

- iii. Make MPR the exit route for residents (maybe white-listing?)
- c. Review residential parking permit areas for town centre streets, such as:
 - i. Resident only parking
 - ii. Lower charges in town centre car parks
- d. Remove “2-way” hazard sign at York Road – see Figure 9
- 2) Monson Road
 - a. Engage with businesses about needs and street-scene improvements: short term – public art, benches etc – and long term, as part of the Town Centre Area Plan
 - b. Remove Monson Way entrance to Town Hall carpark
 - c. Reduce motor vehicle access either at Monson Way, Newton Road or at Calverley Rd
 - d. Improve crossing point at Mount Pleasant (immediate solution required)**
- 3) Mount Pleasant Road
 - a. Remove centre lines
 - b. Narrow Monson Road junction – model temporarily with planters
 - c. Open up vista into Fiveways by remodelling ‘bus gate’ (longer term)
- 4) Crescent Road / Church Road
 - a. Redo road markings on Crescent Road to discourage right turn into MPR**
 - b. Investigate signal priorities to reduce wait time for pedestrians.
- 5) Inner London Road
 - a. Include residents in consultation about wider implications of scheme
 - b. Measures to prevent ILR being used by traffic to avoid the A26/Church Road lights

Some items could be done immediately; others need longer consideration. Illustrations of some recommendations appear below.

Detailed findings

Many observations were noted as early as December 2019. In summary, while the number of motor vehicles has reduced around the War Memorial, a similar drop has not been observed in vehicles using Dudley, York and Newton roads.

- The number of vehicles seen in one hour fell from 459 in March 2019 to 200-250 in subsequent pre-enforcement counts and, following enforcement, 122 vehicles were counted, including 43 were in the restricted area on Mount Pleasant Road. While the reduction has, as envisaged, 'improved the experience for pedestrians and cyclists', many issues still remain.
- We saw many fewer cars than people on foot: a ratio of between 1:4 and 1:9, with between 1,000 and 1,800 each per hour.
- The overall drop in vehicles between MPR and MR is not mirrored on other roads.
- Although the overall number of vehicles using York, Dudley and Newton roads is little changed, the increased overall share might indicate that people are using YR more to get to MR / Camden Road. Further observations could confirm whether this problem increases.
- Driving is mostly considerate, but some still drive too fast for the location, particularly at the Monson Road crossing.
- While we observed few buses and few people using them, counts were not performed at peak time. More detailed statistics on bus usage on MPR should be sought. On no occasions would buses would have been impeded by a narrower road, confirming earlier requests from the Town Forum to minimise the carriageway width. This is a missed opportunity and further engagement with bus companies is requested about a future narrowing of the carriageway as soon as funding becomes available.
- We observed various odd manoeuvres:
 - U-turns in the middle of MPR from drivers coming from Crescent Road, dropping passengers and then exiting the same way!
 - Driver going north through bus gate, trying to turn left into Dudley Road
- Drivers use NR and MR as a circulation route, probably dropping people off on one or other of those roads. During one of the counts the same vehicle was seen four times, in different directions using Mount Pleasant, Monson, Crescent, Dudley and York roads
- Behaviour of pedestrians varied. While some hesitated crossing York and Dudley roads, the problem was greater on Monson Road and we witnessed several vehicles 'pushing through'. While they did not endanger pedestrians, 'right' had to give way to 'might' on numerous occasions and made pedestrians feel unsafe using the crossing. During the most recent (May-23) observation, drivers seem to be giving way more often and pedestrians appear more confident.
- Some drivers from DR/NR slowed at the southbound entrance to MPR (near Prezzo) and seemed confused; others drove straight across, ignoring the give way markings and a couple of near misses were observed with vehicles turning left from MR to MPR.
- Although we some vehicles driving through Fiveways, that restriction is mostly obeyed.
- Some drivers using MR hesitated at Monson Way and some turned there. Others carried on, some hesitating at MPR, seemingly confused by the no entry sign near YR.

Dudley Road observations

- While there is little change in vehicle numbers, most drivers now exit along MR.
- Much of Dudley Road traffic seems to be drivers seeking to park; delivering; disabled drivers parking and not necessarily people travelling across town.
- During one count, we observed two vehicles parked ON the pavement, including one displaying a disabled parking badge.
- On the approach to the junction with MPR, there's no indication to drivers that they are entering a public realm with the expectation that they should give way to pedestrians.
- The implied 'zebra' by Wetherspoons is hard to see and not always observed by drivers.
- Pedestrians generally seem to feel harassed while crossing the public realm and hurry, as if guilty for holding up the traffic - even elderly people with walking aids.
- Around a third of drivers did not signal to indicate that they were turning left into Monson Rd - making the crossing more hazardous for pedestrians.
- Noticed two close calls between vehicles turning left out of Monson Rd into MPR and vehicles sailing straight on to MPR across the give way markings.

York Road observations

- In early counts there was an equal split of vehicles using MR and MPR. 90% now use MR. Some hesitated as if unsure as to permissions. Delivery drivers didn't hesitate at all.
- Many drivers use YR as a dropping off point, or a waiting area outside NW Bank while a passenger popped to shops.
- Many pedestrians crossing YR seemed unsure as to their right of way.
- A few cars crossing to MR entangled with cars going straight on from NR towards MPR.
- Cars using YR varied in speeds. Some, mainly taxis and delivery drivers clearly faster than 20mph. Others crawled down YR looking for parking spaces, some speeding up as they came to the junction. Feb-23 and Mar-23 – taxis sped across junction and into Monson Road
- A resident was stopped in York Road by a concerned van driver clearly confused about what to do when he reached the junction of YR and MPR.

Newton Road observations

- In March 2019, the split of vehicles exiting along MPR/MR was 50:50; now 90% turn left into MR. It seems that many drivers use NR / MR as a circulation route.
- 1 car seen southbound coming through Fiveways
- 15 buses observed coming from Church Road towards FiveWays, including 4 empty and others turned into MR
- 24 buses came from Fiveways towards MPR including 3 empty and another 2 not in service

Observations on signs

- The road markings on Crescent Road imply that turning right is allowed. The reason for the right turn lane is to prevent congestion at the junction, but that only occurs during the day, when no right turn is permitted. Better would be a left turn lane and a straight on lane. While there is an argument that there is no prohibition on traffic turning right during the evening, there is no reason to encourage it and, in any case, there are fewer motor vehicles at that time
- At the end of York Road there is a two-way sign. Given that this is a 20mph area, there is no need for the sign and it can be confusing, as it implies that a right turn is acceptable. The prohibition sign is also confusing. To the left it indicates “no motor vehicles, except...”; to the right it says “the following area allowed...”.
- It has been observed that the signs from Calverley Road and Camden Road towards Monson Road and Mount Pleasant Road are ‘unclear’, resulting in comments such as “do you have to do a u-turn in the middle of Monson Road?” In fact, as the photos below show, drivers would have to pass 3 “no entry” signs before they reach the one on Mount Pleasant Road itself.
- However, there are a multiplicity of signs and street furniture which should be reviewed and removed where possible.

Figure 1: motor vehicle trend by route

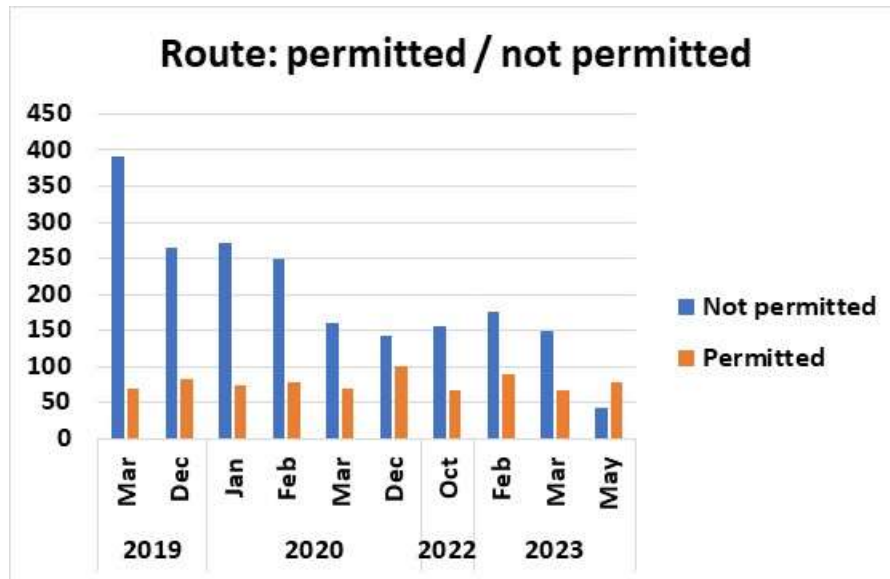


Figure 2: volumes permitted / not permitted

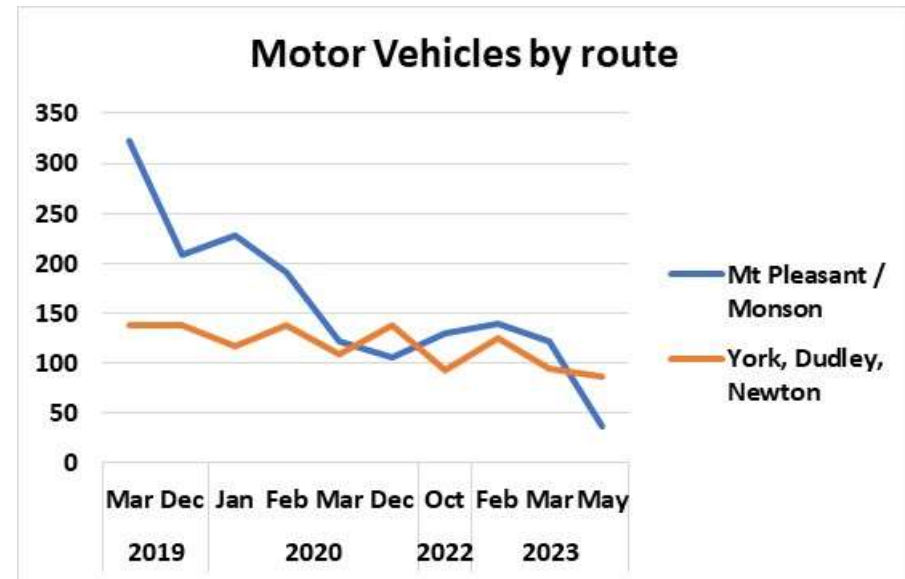


Figure 3: “permitted” / “not permitted”

Date	Not permitted					Permitted			Grand Total
	Dudley Rd to Mt Pleasant	Newton Rd to Mt Pleasant	York Rd to Mt Pleasant	Monson Rd to Mt Pleasant	Mt Pleasant to Monson Rd	Dudley Rd to Monson Rd	Newton Rd to Monson Rd	York Rd to Monson Rd	
Mar	19	22	27	119	203	25	23	21	459
Dec	25	12	18	125	84	30	26	27	347
Jan	17	12	15	77	150	28	26	19	344
Feb	19	21	20	94	96	21	27	30	328
Mar	14	11	15	65	56	24	17	27	229
Dec	9	10	18	53	53	35	27	39	244
Oct	4	4	18	59	70	26	16	24	221
Feb	7	10	18	53	87	30	24	35	264
Mar	13	7	7	60	62	17	15	35	216
May	3	1	3	19	17	23	19	37	122

Years	Date	Motor vehicle	Pedestrian	MV : Ped ratio
2019	Mar	459		NA
	Dec	347		NA
2020	Jan	344	1,365	1 : 4
	Feb	328	1,908	1 : 6
	Mar	229	1,764	1 : 8
	Dec	244	840	1 : 3
2022	Oct	221	1,845	1 : 8
2023	Feb	264	1,794	1 : 7
	Mar	216	965	1 : 4
	May	122	1,107	1 : 9
Grand Total		2,774	11,588	1 : 6

Figure 4: Ratio of motor vehicles to pedestrians

Figure 5: Detailed survey results (March 2019 – May 2023)

	1. 01-Mar-19 12:10 - 13:10		2. 20-Dec-19 11:35 - 12:35		3. 24-Jan-20 11:15 - 12:15		4. 14-Feb-20 11:40 - 12:40		5. 03-Mar-20 11:30 - 12:30		6. 18-Dec-20 11:30 - 12:30		7. 28-Oct-22 11:40 - 12:40		8. 17-Feb-23 12:00 - 13:00		9. 17-Mar-23 12:00 - 13:00		10. 12-May-23 12:00 - 13:00	
Mt Pleasant to Monson Rd	203	44%	84	24%	150	44%	96	29%	56	24%	53	22%	70	32%	87	33%	62	29%	17	14%
Monson Rd to Mt Pleasant	119	26%	125	36%	77	22%	94	29%	65	28%	53	22%	59	27%	53	20%	60	28%	19	16%
Mt Pleasant / Monson Road	322	70%	209	60%	227	66%	190	58%	121	53%	106	43%	129	58%	140	53%	122	56%	36	30%
York Rd	48	10%	45	13%	34	10%	50	15%	42	18%	57	23%	42	19%	53	20%	42	19%	40	33%
Dudley Rd	44	10%	55	16%	45	13%	40	12%	38	17%	44	18%	30	14%	37	14%	30	14%	26	21%
Newton Rd	45	10%	38	11%	38	11%	48	15%	28	12%	37	15%	20	9%	34	13%	22	10%	20	16%
Total vehicles (ex buses)	459		347		344		328		229		244		221		264		216		122	
YR/DR/NR	137	30%	138	40%	117	34%	138	42%	108	47%	138	57%	92	42%	124	47%	94	44%	86	70%
Pedestrians					1,365		1,908		1,764		840		1,845		1,794		965		1,107	
Ratio motor vehicles to pedestrians					1 : 4		1 : 5.8		1 : 7.7		1 : 3.4		1 : 8.3		1 : 6.8		1 : 4.5		1 : 9.1	

Figure 6: Narrow Monson Road / Mount Pleasant junction



Figure 7: Road markings on Crescent Rd: current and proposed

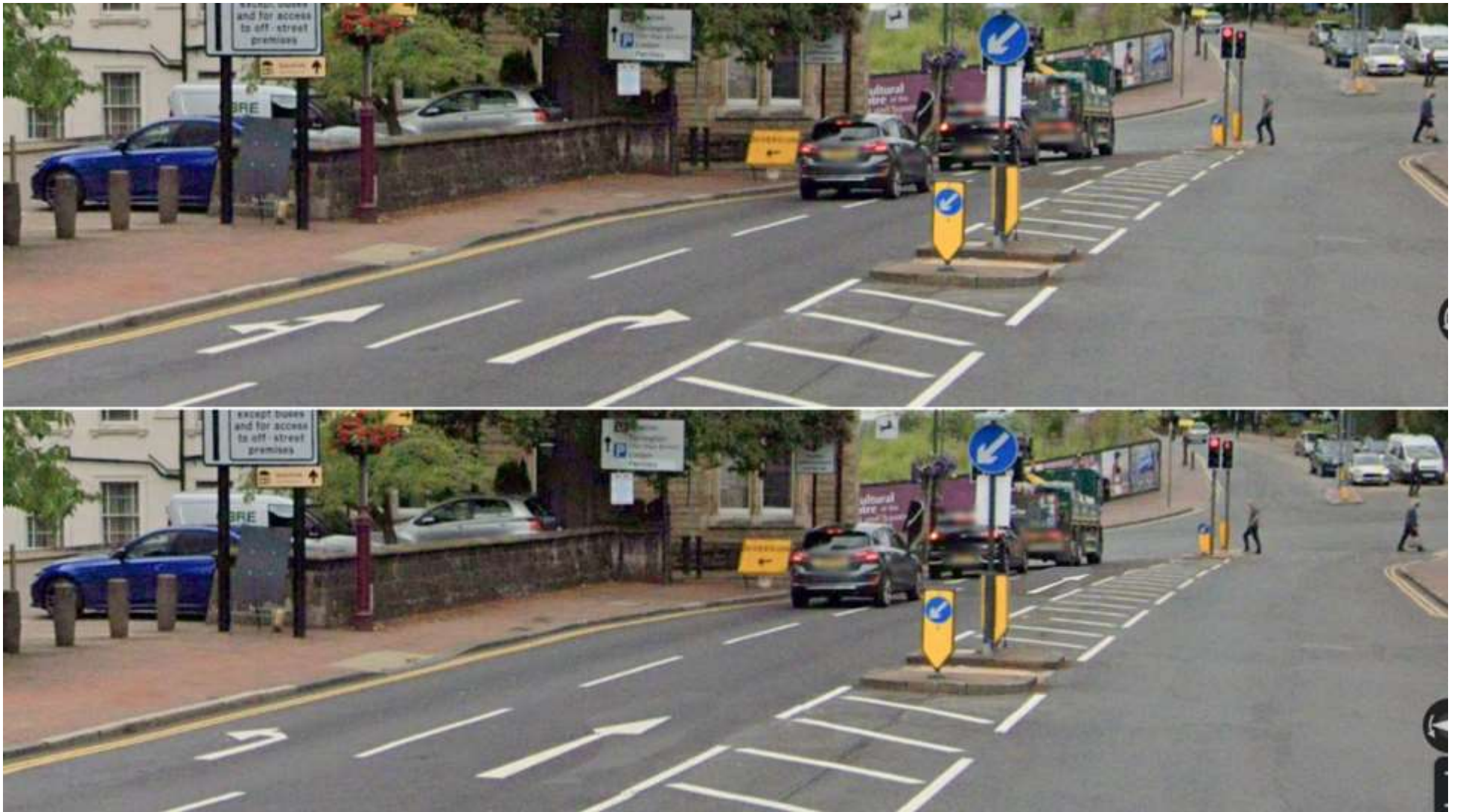


Figure 9: Remove “two-way sign”




Is it necessary to have such signs where the speed limit is 20mph?

Figure 10: Open up Fiveways vista



Figure 11: No entry warning signs

<p>Camden Road</p> 	<p>Calverley Road</p> 	<p>Monson Road (1)</p> 
<p>Monson Road (1)</p> 	<p>Mount Pleasant Road</p> 	

Appendix: Scheme timeline.

April 2018	Final scheme approved
March 2019	Town Forum traffic observation 1
April 2019	Work on scheme started (York Road closed to through traffic)
October 2019	Scheme works complete
December 2019	Town Forum traffic observation 2
March 2020	Enforcement starts
?Summer 2020	Enforcement suspended
January – March 2020	Town Forum traffic observations 3 – 5
March 2020	COVID lockdown starts
Autumn 2020	Signs changed
December 2020	Town Forum traffic observation 6
October 2022	Town Forum traffic observation 7
February 2023	Start of informal enforcement – warning notices only
February – March 2023	Town Forum traffic observation 8-9
April 2023	Full enforcement recommenced

Comment from Culverden resident when crossing Monson Road 4th May 2023 at 6:20pm

- A pedestrian started crossing from the Prezzo side and got to the middle of the road. At that point, there was a car coming from the opposite direction meaning she wasn't able to cross to the other side - she stepped back to avoid being hit by that car, only for another car to now be behind her on the first side of the road - it had come from around the corner by Prezzo. So she almost got hit by that car, and was left waiting in the middle of the road.
- A second pedestrian then had exactly the same thing happen to her, crossing from the Amelia side.
- This morning at approx 9.15am as I went to cross, I had to wait for a delivery van doing a U-turn on the raised paving section on the Monson Rd crossing, presumably as he had noticed the road restrictions sign.

The reason I mention these points is that I think they call into question KCC's approach of waiting to see how the enforcement goes. In particular:

- The two near-misses last night were outside the hours of the restrictions. Pedestrians still need to cross Monson Rd outside 9am-6pm, at which point there are no restrictions at all, but still plenty of traffic. So reduced traffic between 9-6 makes no difference at this time of day - for anyone crossing outside the restricted hours, the road is now fundamentally more dangerous than before the changes, due to the loss of the island. Waiting to see how the enforcement goes will make no difference to this at all.
- The raised paving area has introduced ambiguity into this crossing point - it gives pedestrians the impression it is a safe crossing point, so they may take less care crossing. assuming they have priority, but for drivers, it is still a road and not a formal pedestrian crossing (eg zebra-crossing). I can't see any special treatment for raised crossings in the Highway code: <https://www.highwaycodeuk.co.uk/pedestrian-crossings.html>. (This is similar to the "pseudo" zebra crossings by Pret and the Opera House - they give the impression of being zebra crossings with the light/dark paving stones, but actually aren't - so again, there is ambiguity - pedestrians think they are zebra crossings, but for drivers, they don't look like normal zebra crossing (no lights etc) so quite often they are ignored - I know this from personal experience after nearly being hit myself a few years ago). Adding ambiguity to road crossings feels like a very bad idea.
- Poor design of the road restrictions - I can't think of any other example where road restrictions come into force midway along a road, forcing drivers to make a U-turn to abide by them. In any other design I can think of, there is always an "escape" route, ie another road you can drive away down. eg outside the post office, to avoid the restrictions turning left into Grosvenor Rd, you can drive right past KFC etc. A lot of drivers will also make this assumption, only to find they have nowhere to go, and are then forced to make a U-turn. Unfortunately, to make this even worse, the point at which they are forced to make the U-turn is the Monson Rd raised crossing point - again, adding extra risk to pedestrians. Whilst the enforcement will reduce traffic flow in the area hopefully, the risk will always remain for pedestrians due to this poor design (as there will always be drivers using the road who are unfamiliar with the restrictions, eg visitors, or delivery drivers, as per my example this morning).

I believe the three points could be used to contest KCC's approach to waiting to see how the enforcement goes. I appreciate there isn't likely to be much in the KCC budget for this, but I'm afraid this is a problem of their own making and it feels like they should be obliged to fix it. Hopefully restoring the central island would be in the £10ks as opposed to £100ks. If it is then restored, potentially the design of the restrictions could also be revisited.



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM



WATER IN THE WELLS WORKING GROUP

REPORT TO THE TOWN FORUM 25 May 2023

Current membership: Bob Atwood, Jane Fenwick, Michael Holman (Chair), Mike McGeary, Altan Omer, David Scott, Alastair Tod, Pat Wilson.

We have held no formal meetings since the Town Forum on 30 March. Communication between members has been by e-mail and phone.

Two items dominate this report: the transformation of the Pantiles Chalybeate Spring, and the completion of the project to renovate the Royal Doulton fountain in St John's Park and Meadows.

1. **Chalybeate Spring:** Good news at last! The blue hoardings were removed just in time for the coronation to reveal the long-awaited fruit of Samuel Danby's enthusiasm, vision and investment. Both basins have been covered over, so one cannot tell how much chalybeate water is flowing, but the right-hand basin now has a small gushing fountain in the reconfigured base. Suddenly, we once more have water. Whether it is actually chalybeate water remains to be discovered, but there is movement, light and life! While the overall external structure has been left intact, the internal core has been transformed. Everything is now bright and sparkly. The left-hand basin is lit by a globe chandelier and its left-hand wall has a colourful mural with figures reminiscent of the town's spa heyday. On its rear wall, bottles labelled 'Royal Tunbridge Wells Mineral Water' are on display. We await more information on the operation of the business now linked to the bottled water. High up between the two basins a video screen has been installed. Mr Danby has to be congratulated on bringing the Spring, for years shamefully neglected by the Borough Council, into the 21st century. Let's hope it will be the launch pad not only for Tunbridge Wells Water, but also for the promised entertainment offering in which the transformed Chalybeate Spring will play a central role.
2. **The Potteries – Pantiles 1887:** The replacement part is still awaited, and the feature is still without water.
The Pump Room toilets are still not accessible.
3. **St John's Park and Meadows:** With planting complete and the Chilstone plaque appropriately inscribed, an opening ceremony for the refurbished fountain is planned for Thursday 29 June at 17.30. It is all of eight years since the Section 106 allocation of £10,000 for the restoration of the Royal Doulton fountain was made. And all of 103 years since the original fountain was gifted to the Council by local benefactor Joseph Horatio Love (1853-1935).
A further success for St John's Park and the Parks Department is the installation of a royal blue bottle filling station at the upper, left-hand entrance to the children's playground.
The public toilets are locked.

4. **Knights Park:** The repairs have been successful: the feature continues to function. It is clean, full of water, bubbling jets bubbling and lights lit.
5. **Royal Wells Park:** This too is functioning well, although the lighting is in need of repair.
6. **Amelia Scott:** The danger of frost now over, I am assured that once the water has been passed fit for consumption, the drinking fountain will be turned on.
7. **Dunorlan:** The bottle green filling station continues to work well. The basin of the Victorian fountain, however, is a disgrace, full of flourishing water plants and general detritus. The area to the north of the fountain is still a quagmire and the fountain unsafe to approach. When I went on my regular inspection, volunteers were busy clearing weeds and willows from the cascade and rills. One volunteer asked if and when the fountain would be working - questions I was unable to answer.

The public toilets are boarded up.

8. **Grosvenor and Hilbert Park:** Powered by the pumps, the Dripping Well is dripping well. We await the installation of a bottle filling station close to the Dorking Road entrance – royal blue or bottle green, it matters little.

The public toilets are boarded up.

A final note: *public toilets do not normally form part of my Water in the Wells report, but on my tour of the parks on 15 May, I was shocked that not a single public park had a functioning toilet for the general public.*

I am happy to answer any questions and provide additional information.

(16 May 2023)

(Michael Holman, Chairman, 'Water in the Wells'. 07799456524; email: michaeldekholman@gmail.com)