

Royal Tunbridge Wells (RTW) Town Forum
1 September 2005

Minutes

Present: Jenny Alexander, Daniel Bech, Jenny Blackburn, Graham Bradley, Andrew Bridge, John Cunningham, Michael Doyle, Jane Fenwick, John Goodfellow, Matt Goodwin, Michael Hicks, Mr Higgs, Val Joy, George Lawson, Michael Larsen, Kalpa Patel, Keith Perry, Jeremy Syers, David Webster, Mr Waller,

Councillors Peter Crawford, Melvyn Howell, Catherine Mayhew, Leonard Price, James Scholes, David Wakefield, Bob Wratten

In attendance: Councillors John Cunningham, Roy Bullock & Peter Davies (TWBC Cabinet Members), Linda Hall. Estelle Grant & Ellie Broughton (TWBC Officers)

Introduction of Acting Chairman

Councillor Melvyn Howell, Leader of the Council introduced himself and explained he would chair the meeting until the Forum appointed its own Chairman.

1. Apologies:

Councillors Baker and Neve, Joe Challis, Mr Dutton, Patrick Shovelton, Patricia Smith, Mary Wardrop.

2. Minutes of the first meeting - 5 July 2005

The minutes of the meeting were approved. However clarification of the Tunbridge Wells Borough Community Plan Partnership was sought and given.

3. Matters arising from the minutes of the first meeting

All matters covered by the agenda.

4. Setting up of the Forum

Ellie Broughton summarised the draft Terms of Reference which had been previously circulated. The Terms of Reference were approved subject to some amendment. A final version is attached (Appendix 1).

Related Discussion points included:

- The extent to which the Forum had 'teeth' for example in considering planning applications. Whilst some members sought for planning applications to come to the Forum, Councillor Roy Bullock and others urged members to concentrate on considering strategic planning issues, not detailed operational matters for which other mechanisms are in place.
- Councillors who sit on planning committees have a duty to preserve their independence, which would be fettered by taking part in discussions about applications. Nonetheless Councillor Howell said the decision of whether the Forum should seek to be a consultee on planning applications was for the Forum to decide. He said details of a new Planning Applications Forum would be given later on the agenda.
- Considering planning applications would require frequent meetings; the internet might prove a more effective vehicle for exchanging views; some bodies (such as Town or Parish Councils) are a 'statutory' consultee, others (such as the Civic Society) are involved on a different basis; Parish Councils take a collective view - would Forum Members wish to do the same or as individual resident's associations or residents?
- Could the Bangladeshi Welfare Association or similar organisations join the Forum? The Terms of Reference gives scope for such organisations to ask to join the Forum.
- Would the publicity for Forum meetings be sought through the Press? Agreed this should be encouraged.

- Forum Members should be encouraged to communicate with those they represent eg including via newsletters, website.

5. Work Programme

Ellie Broughton summarised the areas of interest identified by Forum Members at the last meeting, suggesting these be prioritised as topics for future meetings. It was agreed that there was a need to focus on particular issues at particular meetings. Those identified for early discussion were:

- Licensing.
- Other planning matters.
- (See also items 6 (Alcohol Exclusion Zone) and 8 and 10(iv) below – (South East Plan).)

Daniel Bech asked for Licensing by-laws to be made available on-line. He also suggested that the Council waive copying costs for residents taking digital images of planning/other documents.

Jenny Alexander proposed Licensing be given priority - Rusthall residents fear the potential impact of the new application process. Commander George Lawson said it had been his hope that Councillors would develop a policy that protected residents' quality of life. Yet residents are concerned - have Councillors failed to protect their interests?

Councillor John Cunningham introduced himself as the Council's Cabinet Member with responsibility for the Environment Portfolio. Whilst responsible for Licensing Policy he is not a member of the Licensing Committee and does not attend meetings or vote. He volunteered to attend a future meeting accompanied by Gary Stevenson, Head of Environmental Services, and would be willing to hear about individual cases. Councillor Mrs Barbara Cobbold, a member of the Licensing Committee said she would need to take advice as to whether her presence at such discussions would fetter her independence. Similarly Councillor Jukes (not present) might feel it inappropriate to attend if invited as Chairman of the Licensing Committee.

It was proposed that the Council should agree a central coordination point of objections; the are too many options of how to object with the resultant risk that no one has a sense of strength of feeling/number of concerns.

Jane Fenwick commented that the Council's website does not give advice on how to object. A request was made for lists of applications and decisions to be published.

ACTION POINT: Ellie Broughton to refer suggestions back to relevant TWBC staff to consider.

It was agreed that Licensing be the major agenda item for the next meeting, and Planning for the following meeting.

6. Progress on Open Spaces Project

At the last meeting the Council's head of Environmental Services, Gary Stevenson had proposed that the Forum take an interest in a pilot 'Open Spaces' project to improve the presentation of the town. Councillor John Cunningham summarised subsequent progress:

Additional Resources have been provided to tackle graffiti, fly posting, littering and household waste left out on the street before collection day.

- Three new Street Scene Enforcement Officers, an increase of one, have been recruited who will investigate complaints and patrol the Borough. The introduction of Fixed Penalty Notices for litter and household waste offences is planned.
- Two Graffiti Hit Squad Operatives have been recruited to take over the graffiti removal from a contractor and increase the capacity to deal with the problem.
- All of the new officers are currently being trained so publicity about their roles and the improved new graffiti and fly posting removal service will follow within the next two months.

Improving the appearance of street furniture

- A programme of repainting town centre litterbins, traffic bollards, benches and CCTV camera posts is underway. Work has been carried out in Calverley Precinct and Camden Road.

The project team will be meeting again shortly to formulate proposals for improving the processes within the Council for maintaining the street scene including empty properties. It is anticipated that the Members of the Forum will have the opportunity to express their views of the standards of maintenance that should be achieved.

Concern was expressed as to why the Council fails to identify owners of vandalised properties quickly.

ACTION POINT: Ellie Broughton to seek clarification from relevant TWBC staff

Councillor Roy Bullock gave a short briefing on the Council's imminent consultation to consider the introduction of an Alcohol Free Zone in the town, encouraging Forum Members to take an interest.

7. Community Plan

Estelle Grant, Community Planner, had invited Forum Members at the last meeting to consult with their constituents/neighbours as to their priorities for the next Community Plan. She facilitated a feedback session seeking broad strategic priorities for 5 years and beyond is attached (Appendix 2). All Members contributed.

She also explained the linkage between the Community Plan and the spatial Local Development Framework (LDF). It was confirmed Residents Associations can influence the LDF but their proposals should be well researched and evidence based.

Councillor Roy Bullock advised the Forum of a forthcoming opportunity to learn about proposals for the South East Regional Plan. He encouraged the Forum to be represented at the meeting, scheduled for the evening of 30 September.

ACTION POINT: Ellie Broughton to refer confirm meeting details

8. Information and consultation Opportunities

Ellie Broughton summarised details of a new Planning Application Forums.

The Forum meetings can be held for major planning applications, defined as ten residential units or over or a site exceeding 0.5 hectares or 1,000 square metres floorspace for commercial development. The aim is to encourage discussions between local residents and applicants; a new form of meeting has been introduced into the planning process for major applications.

The meetings will be convened on demand: people who wish to participate in a forum are asked to raise a petition, including 25 or more signatures from residents living in the Borough of Tunbridge Wells. Petitions can be in support of or an objection to a planning application and have to be submitted within the standard 21 day consultation period.

All parties are given an equal opportunity to make a presentation. The aim is to allow early discussion about the planning issues and to explore scope for reaching consensus and for resolving concerns.

Leaflets are available from the Council's officers and details are on www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk

9. Election of Chairman

Matt Goodwin, Chairman of the Village Residents Association was proposed as Chairman by Daniel Bech and seconded by Dr Michael Larsen and John Goodfellow. He was appointed unanimously.

10. Any Other Business

- i) Jenny Blackburn requested a list of e- mail addresses for 'significant officers'

ACTION POINT: Ellie Broughton to organise

- ii) John Cunningham of RTW Civic Society gave Forum members an insight into what might be involved in deciding to form a view on individual planning applications; he explained the Society's approach. A Planning Scrutiny Sub-Committee meets to consider all applications and reports its considerations to a monthly General Committee meeting. Members of the Sub-Committee are all technically competent - architects for example.
- iii) Val Joy pleaded for the Forum to consider other issues at an overview level rather than concentrating on individual planning issues.
- iv) Matt Goodwin proposed an early next meeting and encourage Forum members to attend the 30 September meeting on the South East Plan to inform subsequent discussion by the Forum.

ACTION POINT: Ellie Broughton to organise next meeting

Terms of Reference for Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum

Purpose of the Forum

- Consider and address issues in Royal Tunbridge Wells (unparished area), working with other agencies as appropriate.
- Consider and respond to consultative documents and proposals submitted by the Borough Council, Tunbridge Wells Partnership or other Community Plan partners, from time to time.
- Contribute to the development and implementation of the Community Plan as it relates to residents in Royal Tunbridge Wells.

Linkage with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and the Tunbridge Wells Partnership

Where co-operation from the Council, the Partnership or other body is required the Forum's recommendations will be submitted by the appropriate representative(s). In such cases the respective representative(s) will be responsible for ensuring the Forum is kept informed of progress and opportunities to attend Council, Partnership and / or other meetings, and will also act as go between to keep the Forum informed of progress. The Chairman or delegated nominee will represent the Forum at the Partnership.

Membership of the Forum

- Councillors representing constituents in Royal Tunbridge Wells (unparished area).
- Representatives of Residents' Associations and other organisations representing residents' interests and open to residents to join in Royal Tunbridge Wells (unparished area). Each representative may bring one guest from their Association where appropriate to the agenda. Representatives may change accordingly to the Association's wishes.
- The Forum will give careful consideration to requests from other bodies to attend.
- The Forum may co-opt individuals with particular knowledge, skills, expertise and / or interest or may invite individuals and / or organisations to attend particular meetings where appropriate to the agenda.
- Officers of the Council and other bodies may be asked to attend the Forum, to present material, give guidance, or to respond to enquiries, or to hear from the Forum.

Those wishing to be considered for membership should apply in the first place to the Town Forum Chairman or Secretary.

Role of Forum Members

Forum members are expected to:

- Represent the views of their ward / association / group and to report back to them any progress or plans of the Forum.
- Identify ways in which their members can contribute to the work of the Forum and to the Community Plan.
- Participate in consultation exercises and give consideration to strategic issues

Election and role of Chairperson

The Forum will elect a Chairperson and deputy on an annual basis. Their role will be to ensure that:

- All views are heard and that an unbiased record of the meeting is produced
- There is agreement about any follow up action required. This might include communications, proposals with other bodies, preparing bids for funding, training requirements, and other practical activities.
- Agree agenda items for discussion

The chairperson or delegated nominee will represent the Forum on other bodies as it may be invited to attend.

Frequency of meetings

The Forum will agree the frequency of meetings.

Servicing of the Forum

During the first year and subject to availability and resources the Council will provide some administrative support and will make its facilities available to the Forum for meetings. Support will be reviewed annually.

Publicity

Dates, agendas and minutes of meetings will be posted on the Borough Council website and on the board outside the Town Hall.

Timing and location of meetings

The Forum will consider timing and location of meetings to ensure that they are held at a convenient time and place that is easily accessible for its members.

Substitutions

Members should make every effort to attend, but may send a substitute if necessary and will ensure that the person is suitably briefed.

Transparency

The Forum is expected to be open, transparent and accountable. The Forum should ensure that all interests have a voice where necessary and that hard to reach groups are appropriately represented and engaged.

Reporting mechanisms

Members have responsibility to report back to the people they represent. From time to time members may be asked to provide evidence on the methods and successes of the strategies they employ to ensure appropriate feedback to their respective organisations. The Forum should consider with which other forums it needs to regularly or occasionally communicate.

Sub-groups

The Forum can set up sub-groups or working parties to tackle particular issues or areas as it feels appropriate.

Based on the Council's model for Partnership Forums and revised for a Town Forum, 25 May 2005, Ellie Broughton, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. Subsequently amended for adoption by the RTW Town Forum on 1 September 2005.

TRW Town Forum - Community Plan Priorities, September 2005

Environment

Conservation area – enforcement
Review of conservation areas
Character of the town (planning)
Deteriorating infrastructure of the town
Planning
Enforcement of s.215 (untidy land)
Cleanliness of the town
New development sympathetic to surroundings (raised by 2 people)
Built environment and green environment
Enforcement

Economy

Tourism – develop and market the town

Community Safety

Public safety e.g. street lighting (proposals by LTP to reduce street lighting?)

Transport

Transport – roads and parking (raised by 2 people)
Upkeep of roads and pavements (raised by 2 people)
Traffic control
Disabled transport (raised by 2 people)
Bus services – especially to the new hospital
Pedestrian friendly town
Pedestrian crossings
Decriminalisation of pavement parking to enable traffic wardens to deal with this
No bikes on pavements e.g. Pantiles, and signs in appropriate places to say so
Support Tunbridge Wells to Eridge Rail link as Sussex is supporting the Uckfield to Lewes link
Speeding

Housing

Affordable housing

Health

Health, access and disability
Building of new hospital

Community Development / Social Inclusion

Facilities for young people (raised by 4 people)
Improved community facilities for Rusthall
The elderly – inclusion and awareness of benefit entitlement

Education

Education - Improve standards for secondary moderns

Other

Joined-up government on infrastructure and planning
Licensing

Also add list from Civic Society