



Thursday 7 March 2013

Attended: Sally Balcon, Cllr Ronen Basu, Lorna Blackmore, June Bridgeman, Cllr Peter Bulman, Betsey Dix, Michael Doyle, Helen Featherstone, Jane Fenwick, John Forster, Maggie Fraser, Alex Green, Michaela van Halewyn, Dorothea Holman, Michael Holman, Glen Horn, Sue Kaner, Kyrios Kyriacou, George Lawson, John Mattei, Chris Morris, Marguerita Morton, Cllr David Neve, Altan Omer, Angela Phillips, Cllr Trevor Poile, Cllr Len Price, Cllr James Scholes, Kate Sergeant, Anne Stobo, Alastair Tod, David Wakefield (Chairman), Mary Wardrop, Victor Webb, Jon Weller and Philip Whitbourn (sub)

TWBC officers present: Adam Chalmers (Democratic and Community Engagement Manager), Kevin Hetherington (Head of Communities and Wellbeing), Adrian Tofts (Planning Policy Team Leader) and Mike McGeary (Democratic Services Officer)

Also present: Cllr Jane March, Cllr Julia Soyke, Dee Kirkwood, Mike Norman and David Walsh (from Fusion 2013 Festival)

Observer: Stephen Lukacs

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were reported from: Stephen Bowser, John Cunningham, Tim Harper, Jim Kedge, J Paul Lambert, Katharina Mahler-Bech, Peter Perry, Margaret Watts and Cllrs Ben Chapelard, Caroline Derrick and Christopher Woodward.

2. MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

The Democratic Services Officer advised on the following changes in representation: (a) Calverley Park Crescent Freeholders' Association – where Mrs Michaela van Halewyn had been appointed to replace Mrs Betsey Dix; and (b) Poona Road Residents' Association – where Alastair Tod had been appointed to replace Mr and Mrs Brondbjerg.

Both the newly-appointed members present were welcomed to the meeting.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 January 2013 be agreed.

4. ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

9 January 2013

5(b) Evidence of formal appointment to the Town Forum

MMcG Representatives to submit evidence of their formal appointment to the Town Forum.

The Democratic Services Officer advised that there had still been a very poor response to the general request for representatives to submit evidence of their formal appointment to the Town Forum. The Chairman reiterated the importance of submitting this information, in the interests of good governance.

5. DRAFT CULTURAL STRATEGY

Cllr Jane March, the Cabinet portfolio-holder responsible for Tourism, Leisure and Economic Development, advised that a draft Cultural Strategy was being considered at the Cabinet meeting on 21 March. She advised that this was a key strategy for the Borough Council, which would set out a five year plan of work, providing the basis towards achieving the following aim: “to grow our role as the cultural centre of the Kent and High Weald so that, in 10 years’ time, the Borough is recognised for its creativity and vibrant cultural provision”.

Town Forum members had been advised as part of their agenda papers that the draft document was available to view on the TWBC website as part of the agenda for the Communities Cabinet Advisory Board meeting, held on 26 February.

Kevin Hetherington, TWBC’s Head of Communities and Wellbeing, was in attendance to provide further detail. He drew attention to the Strategy’s three priorities, based on: economy (support cultural and creative industries); place (passionate and responsible stewards of our built and natural environment); and people (being ambitious and resourceful cultural planners).

Mr Hetherington advised that, during the three months of formal consultation, his staff would be working with a range of interested groups and individuals.

The Chairman asked June Bridgeman and her Leisure, Culture and Tourism Working Group to take a lead in co-ordinating the views of Town Forum members in response to this draft document, as soon as the consultation begins in April. The Chairman added that he would like to see a draft response to the document submitted to the 23 May Town Forum meeting.

Mrs Bridgeman enquired how the draft document linked with tourism and leisure. Mr Hetherington advised that there were strong links, adding that the tourism element was being addressed by means of a ‘destination management plan’, in conjunction with KCC.

Action – The Leisure, Culture and Tourism Working Group to co-ordinate a response to TWBC’s draft Cultural Strategy, once the formal public consultation process begins, and submit a draft response for consideration at the 23 May Town Forum meeting.

6. ‘SO CREATE A DIFFERENCE’ EXHIBITION

Stuart Page, who had been one of the co-ordinators of the ‘So create a difference’ exhibition, held in the RVP shopping centre on 26 January, fed back on the success of the event.

He told how the exhibition had been planned in partnership with James Galpin of Hazle McCormack Young and he illustrated some of the key designs which had been submitted by 14 different architectural practices, on which the public’s views had been sought; he added that visitors had also been encouraged to submit their own thoughts on what the town centre should look like in the future. The intention, Mr Page stressed, had been to initiate a debate on how the town should develop and how spaces in the town could be opened up for public use, where vehicles would be banned.

Mr Page estimated that approximately 500 people had attended the exhibition on the day, adding that over 3,000 Twitter and Facebook comments had been made.

Mr Page advised that the next stage would be the production of a book, charting the event, which would be presented to TWBC at the end of March. The intention at that stage would be to support the community and TWBC in a positive and creative response to the future of Tunbridge Wells.

Members of the Town Forum were enthused by the concept and the results of the exhibition and asked how they could access further details. Mr Page advised that these could be found on the following Facebook page:

www.facebook.com/socreateadifferencetw

In conclusion, the Chairman suggested that Mr Page be invited back to the Town Forum during the summer in order to discuss this initiative further and he urged members in the meantime to visit the above website and view all of the ideas set out.

Action – Mr Page to be invited to return to the Town Forum at a future meeting.

7. CONSULTATION DRAFT SITE ALLOCATIONS DEVELOPMENT PLAN DOCUMENT

Adrian Tofts, TWBC's Planning Policy Team Leader, provided Forum members with a summary of the Site Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD) process. He explained how the site allocations stage provided the detail set out in the Core Strategy, which had been adopted in 2010, in respect of overall levels of development growth in the Borough up to 2026. This identified specific areas for new homes as well as additional retail, mixed-use and community provision.

Mr Tofts advised that, within the Core Strategy period, i.e. up to 2026, there was a requirement for an additional 2,445 new homes to be provided in Tunbridge Wells and Southborough.

The Site Allocations DPD set out some additional policies, covering: (a) the production of a public realm framework for the town centre; (b) specific 'areas of change', which included the Crescent Road/Church Road area (the other two being: Vale Avenue; and Eridge Road); and (c) other proposals, which included an extension to the RVP shopping centre as well as employment allocations.

Finally, Mr Tofts explained the statutory stages in the Site Allocations DPD adoption process over the following 18 months, starting with a 10-week public consultation period, running from 18 March to 24 May.

A number of questions were raised, including: (a) what appeal mechanism existed against the Planning Inspector's final decision; (b) what would be the impact of an additional 2,445 homes in terms of people, cars, jobs etc; (c) what was the relationship between this document and the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment published in 2009; and (d) were all of the planning policy statements (PPGs) and guidance (PPGs) still in use.

Mr Tofts was thanked for his very informative presentation, ahead of the formal public consultation process beginning on 18 March.

The Chairman asked the Forum members how they wished to proceed with examining the Site Allocations DPD document, either by (i) establishing an ad hoc working group to co-ordinate member views and formulate a response or (ii) convening a special meeting of the Town Forum. It was agreed that option (i) was the more practical way forward.

Action – A working group to be formed, consisting of Helen Featherstone, Kyrios Kyriacou, Philip Whitbourn and at least two other members, who would invite all members to comment on the draft Site Allocations DPD document, once the public consultation stage was reached and after members had had the opportunity to attend one of the public consultation events.

N.B. Could all Town Forum members please use the following e-mail address [set up by the Working Group](mailto:planningtw@gmail.com), if they wish to submit comments on the draft Site Allocations DPD proposals: planningtw@gmail.com

8. WORKING GROUPS

Update reports were made from the working groups as follows:

Water in the Wells Working Group – The Chairman, Michael Holman, had circulated an update report with the agenda. In summarising the work of this group, Michael urged Town Forum members to respond to TWBC's Site Allocations consultation process (see minute 7 above) to support the installation of water features, both as one of the attractive forms of public art and as a key initiative to preserve and build upon Tunbridge Wells' spa-town status.

Mr Holman also drew attention to the news that the water flow at the Chalybeate Spring on the Pantiles was felt to be sufficient for the resumption of the Dipper service, subject to the results of a water quality analysis. He encouraged Town Forum members to view the appearance of the Chalybeate Spring building, which he felt was urgently in need of re-decorating, and to support calls to bring its appearance up to an improved standard, ahead of the dipping season.

RESOLVED – That the progress report be accepted.

Action – Forum members to: (a) support the provision of water features through TWBC's Site Allocations consultation process; and (b) view the appearance of the Chalybeate Spring and support calls for its external redecoration before the start of the dipping season.

Leisure, Culture and Tourism Working Group – June Bridgeman, Chairman of this group, tabled a summary paper, setting out her members' views on TWBC's proposals for the future of the Tourist Information Centre (TIC), which she felt were regressive and removed the opportunity to develop the profitable retail element. She added that her working group was currently examining an alternative souvenir package.

Councillor David Neve voiced similar concerns about TWBC's plans. He added that, as recently as 2010, there had been strong criticism amongst hoteliers, other accommodation providers and those linked to the tourist industry when TWBC had sought to reduce the TIC profile. He felt there was a strong case for calling-in the Cabinet decision on this (if it were to approve the proposals) on the basis of a clear lack of consultation with affected parties.

Victor Webb felt TWBC was too focused on a cost-cutting process, whereas promoting tourism should be seen as an investment in the Borough's future.

Adam Chalmers, TWBC's Democratic and Community Engagement Manager, explained that the Town Forum had the option of selecting a speaker, to attend the Cabinet meeting on 21 March, if they wished to argue against the proposals. Beyond the Cabinet meeting, any call-in challenge, he added, would have to meet the Constitutional requirements before it could proceed.

The Chairman proposed that June Bridgeman might like to attend the Cabinet meeting, to present the Town Forum's collective view on this issue. Mrs Bridgeman believed that a more effective way forward was for Town Forum members who were against the current plans to make direct contact with their local ward members and request that they attend the Cabinet meeting to voice their opposition.

RESOLVED – That Town Forum members who oppose TWBC's plans for the future of the TIC service should speak to their local ward members and ask that they attend the Cabinet meeting to voice their concerns; as an alternative, Town Forum members who wish to see Mrs Bridgeman set out the Forum's collective opposition should make direct contact with her and ask that she attend the Cabinet meeting, to present an alternative argument.

Action: Town Forum members, if they disagree with TWBC's proposals for the future operation of the TIC, either to contact their local ward members or ask June Bridgeman to speak at the Cabinet meeting on 21 March.

Traffic Strategy Working Group – The acting Chairman, Jane Fenwick, reported that a draft response to TWBC's draft Transport Strategy had been sent to the Council by the due deadline, following its circulation amongst Town Forum members in advance of submission.

Mrs Fenwick added that the next stages were: (a) to follow this submission up by means of encouraging TWBC and KCC to enact the specific suggestions made; and (b) to complete a list of 'congestion-busting' proposals and submit these to TWBC and KCC.

On the issue of parking, Mrs Fenwick's working group believed that more could be done to encourage greater use of TWBC's car parks, to relieve on-street parking problems. She felt that the fact that all traffic and highways issues were KCC's responsibility, rather than TWBC's, made decision-making too remote and unresponsive, which militated against effective traffic management and associated matters.

There were no specific action points arising from this report beyond the 'next stages' summarised above.

Planning and Development Strategy – Under this section, Philip Whitbourn provided an illustrated talk on the architectural merits of the listed buildings which formed the civic centre site, which fell within one of TWBC's Site Allocations 'areas of change'.

Dr Whitbourn re-iterated the proposal presented at the previous meeting by the Leisure, Culture and Tourism Working Group in its report "A place of pleasure and resort", under which a refurbished civic centre would form the basis of a significant cultural attraction. This report, it was recalled, had been circulated to all TWBC councillors. Dr Whitbourn added that, if the working group referred to above under minute 7 were to do justice to this proposal, it would need to plan its work effectively and with enthusiasm and energy.

The Portfolio-holder for Tourism, Leisure and Economic Development, Cllr Jane March, advised that TWBC was engaged in positive discussions with KCC regarding proposals for a cultural hub, but added that the pace of these talks was largely under the control of the County Council. The Portfolio-holder for Finance and Governance (and a KCC member), James Scholes voiced encouragement to Dr Whitbourn in the work which was taking place regarding the cultural hub.

There were no specific action points arising from this report.

9. 'LOVE WHERE WE LIVE' – AWARENESS AND NOMINATIONS

Adam Chalmers drew attention to this year's 'Love where we live' awards, an initiative designed to officially recognise individuals, groups and organisations who are dedicated to helping others in our community. He encouraged Town Forum members to use their unique position in the community to identify suitable nominees, the process for which was set out in a leaflet, copies of which he circulated at the end of the meeting.

Further details of this scheme can be found at: LoveWhereWeLive.co.uk via the TWBC website or, if members would like a copy of the leaflet, please contact Mike McGeary at the Town Hall.

Action: Town Forum members to consider suitable nominees for 'Love where we live' awards within any of the nine categories, for submission by 1 August 2013.

10. FEEDBACK FROM CONSULTATIONS

Adam Chalmers stressed the importance of reporting back on issues where the Town Forum had been asked to respond to formal TWBC consultation issues. Accordingly, he advised how the Forum's submissions on: (a) TWBC's budget; (b) TWBC's draft Strategic Compass; and (c) changes to Council tax exemptions relating to empty homes had formed part of the formal decision-making processes within Cabinet and full Council discussions.

Copies of the relevant sections of TWBC agendas on (a) and (b) above are appended, to show the format of the Forum's submitted comments and how these were presented to councillors, with TWBC's response added.

There were no additional action points arising from this report.

11. 'FUSION' TUNBRIDGE WELLS FESTIVAL 2013

Dee Kirkwood, organiser of a talent competition at the inaugural Tunbridge Wells Festival in 2012, was welcomed to the meeting and invited to speak about plans for this year's event.

Mrs Kirkwood advised that the 2013 competition, which would be held on Saturday 27 July (between 10am and 5pm), had grown to now incorporate five categories, namely: performing arts; short films;

photography; song-writing; and art. She stressed the emphasis would be on: (a) charity fund-raising; (b) providing entertainment; and (c) increasing the awareness of the strength and depth of existing local talent. It was noted that local producers who regularly supported the Farmers' Market would be part of the 'food offer' at the festival.

Cllr Jane March thanked Mrs Kirkwood for her energy and enthusiasm, plus her experience and knowledge, which she was able to bring to the event. She added that the aim of the 2013 event was to provide a serious, quality competition for residents and visitors alike.

Further details of the 2013 event are available at: www.fusiontw.com

There were no action points arising from this report.

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- (a) **Family Day – Grosvenor and Hilbert Park** – Sue Kaner reported that, building upon last year's success, there would be a family day taking place in this park on Monday 6 May (early May bank holiday), to which all were welcome. She made a plea for offers of marshals to help with the event;
- (b) **Library photo booth** – John Forster advised that he had noticed that the photo booth in the Library had been removed, adding that the noticeboard – which had previously been the source of helpful information events and local groups – had apparently once more become available. However, Cllr June March advised that this was only a temporary situation, which was directly linked to the building works taking pace in the Library and Museum;
- (c) **Access to consultation documents in the Library** – Allied to (b) above, June Bridgeman advised that the building works in the Library had resulted in the removal of tables, used by those wishing to view consultation documents etc. This made it very difficult to read reports, plans etc, Mrs Bridgeman explained. **Action:** Mike McGeary was asked to take this matter up with the Library Manager and see what facility could be provided during the building works;
- (d) **Draft Transport Strategy** – Michael Holman enquired how and when the Borough Council would respond to the Town Forum's views submitted on the draft Transport Strategy. Adam Chalmers advised that the consultation period had been extended until 20 April, after which the views of the Town Forum, as well as other interested parties, would be submitted to the Planning and Transportation Cabinet Advisory Board and to the Cabinet (currently scheduled for 29 May and 20 June, respectively);
- (e) **Site Allocations DPD consultation** – Similarly, Michael Holman asked how best the Town Forum could respond to the Site Allocations consultation process. **Action:** Mike McGeary was asked to provide a suggested timetable which would enable the working group – as well as the full Town Forum – to be able to participate fully;
- (f) **Cabinet Advisory Board process** – Mary Wardrop referred to the Cabinet Advisory Board process when Michael Doyle and she had spoken at the 25 February meeting on the Site Allocation item. She felt that the response of the Borough Council had been positive and welcome;
- (g) **Public consultation process** – June Bridgeman felt that TWBC's formal consultation processes were based upon too short a time period. However, it was noted that TWBC's Constitution specified that, for consultations on any significant plan or strategy, the consultation period should be "...no less than six weeks". (The Site Allocations DPD consultation period had been extended to 10 weeks.)

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Town Forum administrator advised that meetings for the remainder of the year had been arranged as follows:

Thursdays 23 May, 25 July, 26 September and 28 November (to include the AGM), all starting at 6.30pm.

The meeting concluded at 8.30pm.