

ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

Minutes of Meeting dated Thursday 10 January 2008

1. Present:

Jenny Alexander (Rusthall Village Association), Daniel Bech (Telephone House Neighbours' Association), Jenny Blackburn (Rusthall Village Association), Graham Bradley (Rock Villa & Hanover Residents' Association), Betsey Dix (Calverley Park Crescent Freeholders' Association), Michael Doyle (Hawkenbury Village Association), John Higgs (Hanover Road and Rock Villa Association), Michael Holman (Tunbridge Wells Twinning and Friendship Association), John Goodfellow (Banner Farm Residents' Association), Michael Larsen (Friends of the Grove Residents' Association), Altan Omer (Benhall Mill Road Land Association), Keith Perry (Benhall Mill Land Association), Kate Sergeant (Clarence Road Users' Association), Simon Smith (Inner London Road Residents' Association), Ed Tomlinson (St Barnabas Parish), Christopher Thomas (Chairman of the RTW Town Forum / The Goodwins Nos 1 & 2 Residents' Company / Woodbury Close Residents' Association), Mary Wardrop (Hawkenbury Village Association), David Webster (Clarence Road Users' Association), and Philip Whitbourn (Beulah Road Residents' Association).

Councillors Peter Crawford (Broadwater), Barry Edwards (Rusthall), Mrs Catherine Mayhew (Park), John Miller (Culverden), David Wakefield (Culverden) and Frank Williams (Sherwood).

2. Apologies:

June Bridgeman (Soroptimist International), John Cunningham (Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society), George Lawson, (Friends of the Commons), Alastair Tod (Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society), Gill Twells (Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society) and Tricia Wright (Calverley Park Association). Councillors Roy Bullock (Leader of the Council), Mrs Barbara Cobbold (Broadwater), Mrs Lesley Herriot (St John's), Leonard Price (Culverden) and James Scholes (Pantiles & St Mark's).

(Christopher Thomas in the Chair for the duration of the meeting)

3. Membership Changes

None, however, it was reported at the July 2007 meeting of the Town Forum, that Simon Smith had become the new Secretary for the Inner London Road Residents' Association and therefore became a new Member of the Town Forum; Simon was welcomed by the Town Forum to his first meeting.

4. Minutes of Last Meeting Dated 29 November 2007

The minutes were agreed.

5. Matters Arising/Actions Completed from the Meeting dated 29 November 2007

Actions outstanding from 29 November 2007 Town Forum:

Actions:

- 5.2 Councillor Bullock to report back to the Town Forum on any progress being made on land ownership at the Station/Morrisons.
- 5.3 Christopher Thomas spoke with Councillor Bullock and he stated that the new Directors were extremely busy at the moment due to the budget etc. Christopher Thomas agreed to obtain dates as soon as possible with the Directors.
- 9.2 That the Town Forum submit a 'discussion paper' to Robert Cottrill giving possible future uses for the Town Hall. Michael Larsen and the Vision Committee to take this matter forward.

Actions Completed:

- 5.2 Matt Goodwin to contact Janet Naim regarding the job description for the Press Officer. Christopher Thomas and Daniel Bech had spoken and it was agreed that communication with the press is sufficient; they receive the agendas and minutes and are in contact with the Chairman.
- 9.3 That Christopher Thomas write to the Leader of the Council and the Portfolio for Planning and Development regarding the Town Forum's views on the Cinema Site. (See Appendix A to these minutes. - Appendix B: Councillor Bullock's reply).
- 6.1 That members of the Town Forum read the Core Strategy: Preferred Options Report available from the Council's website.
- 6.2 That Daniel Bech provides a copy of the planning permission of the Cinema Site approved.
- 6.3 Should members of the Town Forum have any items that they want considered at the Council's next Audit Committee (14 January 2008), to email Councillor Price direct.
- 8.1 That Christopher Thomas forward his report to all members of the Town Forum for their comments. This was attached to the 29 November minutes.

6. Reports from Borough Councillors

Councillor Mrs Mayhew – informed the Town Forum that a development partner had been appointed in the name of John Laing/Gladedale. The Council now needed to arrange several meetings with the partner to discuss the project, the way forward and relevant finances; the Town Forum would be kept informed of any developments. The Town Forum noted that David Candlin, Head of Economic Development and Regeneration would be attending the 6 March 2008 Town Forum to update members with the current situation regarding the 'master plan'.

Core Strategy - The consultation period relating to the Core Strategy ends on Friday 11 January; Town Forum members were reminded to submit their comments by then.

Councillors' Convention - On Monday 14 January 2008, a Councillor Convention will take place at the Assembly Hall. All 48 Councillors, Kent County Councillors for the Borough area, Parish Chairmen and Christopher Thomas, as Chairman of the RTW Town Forum, have been invited to attend the all-day convention.

Councillor Wakefield – stated that the Commons were now sold, including the Title of Lord of the Manor of Rusthall and the buildings. The exchange of contracts would be in the next week or so and it was hoped that the completion would be by the end of January 2008. He would know more following the Commons Conservators meeting due to be held on 24 January 2008.

7. Council Tax – Consultation of Tax Base 2008/09

Michael Doyle brought to the Town Forum's attention the Council's draft Budget 2008/09 to 2010/11 paper that was submitted to the Council's Cabinet on 20 December 2007, in particular appendix 1 to that report.

He went on to explain that the appendices summarised the responses received from an article that was published in the September 2007 issue of iLocal on 'How would you spend your Council Tax?' This included: things TWBC should stop, things TWBC should spend less on or charge more for, things TWBC must keep, and things TWBC should do/spend more on. Extracts from the results of the Simalto public consultation were also drawn to the Town Forum's attention.

The Town Forum was informed that the Council's final budget would be submitted to Cabinet on 7 February that incorporated the views of the consultation, including the Council's Corporate Services Select Committee. The report would then be submitted to full Council on 20 February 2008 for final approval.

The Town Forum was informed that should they wish to pass on any comments relating to the budget then they would have to reply within the next week. The Chairman asked Mr Doyle if he wished to pursue the matter of Council Tax and spending in depth and form a working group with John Goodfellow. Mr Doyle explained that his intention was to make it known to the Council of his concerns towards how the iLocal findings were treated by Cabinet and the lack of prominence in the Cabinet papers. As Mr Doyle and Mr Goodfellow did not wish to pursue this matter in depth the Chairman, therefore, resolved the matter be closed.

8. Cinema Site – Existing approval for demolition

This item was discussed as part of action point 9.3 of the minutes from October's meeting.

Councillor Wakefield stated that a design brief for the cinema site had been agreed and had been put out for competition. He stated that the design was for a hotel of roughly 40-50 bedrooms with retail space on the ground floor.

Councillor Mrs Mayhew informed the Town Forum that six architects had shown interest in the competition and the closing date for submissions would be 14 February 2008. A Panel would then meet on 20 February to decide on the most appropriate design; she did state that the final decision was up to the owner and not the Council, but the owner would be given the full details and reasons why the Council had chosen that particular design.

A briefing would then take place on 27 February with all Councillors and the Town Forum about how the Panel reached their decision and the reasons why and what would happen next.

Following the above comments, Councillor Wakefield then made remarks in relation to why the cinema had not been demolished yet. Councillor Wakefield mentioned that should the building be demolished now, then no business rates would be paid. The Chairman and Daniel Bech reacted by saying this was not sense insofar it is not TWBC that receives the business rates, rather KCC. The Chairman also made reference to the letter from Councillor Roy Bullock (Appendix B), which stated the reason for not demolishing was Network Rail.

The Chairman then went onto say that he had asked Roy Bullock to obtain a simple explanation as to why the cinema site could not be demolished immediately and that he is awaiting this.

It was stressed though that this was not the reason why the building had not been demolished before the decision on the design. Dr Bech stated the building can be demolished without being built on straight away according to the planning permission granted previously (March 2006).

Action:

- 8.1 That Daniel Bech organise a "Cinema Working Group" to bring forward ideas and suggestions on how to resolve this matter.
- 8.2 That Roy Bullock provides the Town Forum with a letter from Network Rail giving a simple and understandable reason why the cinema site cannot be demolished immediately.

9. Report on the role and performance of the Town Forum in 2006/07 and key residents' challenges to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

Christopher Thomas reminded members of the Town Forum that on 14 December 2007 he had submitted a report to Councillor Bullock relating to the role and performance of the Town Forum in 2006/07 and key residents' challenges to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. As of yet, he had not received a reply from Councillor Bullock; once he receives a reply he will update the Town Forum.

Action:

- 9.1 That Councillor Bullock reply to Christopher Thomas' letter/report regarding the role and performance of the Town Forum in 2006/07 and key residents' challenges to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council dated 14 December 2007.

10. Reports from Committees and Working Groups

Planning: "Working Group Core Strategy" – Philip Whitbourn briefed members of the Town Forum on various issues, namely:

Core Strategy Consultation – The Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's Core Strategy - 'Preferred Options Report' was submitted to the Town Forum for consultation; the period ran from 30 November 2007 to 11 January 2008.

A working group, consisting of Daniel Bech, Jenny Blackburn, June Bridgeman, Michael Larsen, Councillor John Miller, Kate Sergeant and Philip Whitbourn. The Group met on 14 December 2007 and discussed the Core Strategy in detail and went through each Chapter and Core Policy in depth.

Philip circulated the Group's comments, starting with Chapter 1 and ending with Chapter 8 and summarised some of the main points arising from the strategy. The Town Forum agreed with all the comments made on the document (Appendix C to these minutes for members' information). www.townforum.org.uk/consultation/corestrategy-rtwtfcomments100108.pdf

Philip Whitbourn agreed to submit the paper to the relevant service on Friday 11 January 2008. The Town Forum congratulated Philip and the group on their hard work with producing comments relating to the Strategy.

Action:

- 10.1 That Philip Whitbourn submit the Town Forum's views relating to the Borough Council's Core Strategy.

Vision Committee: – Michael Larsen reminded members of the Town Forum that at the last meeting of the Town Forum he informed them that he had approached Lidl regarding the possible purchase/lease of the site but he had not yet received a reply.

The Committee would be meeting on 5 February 2008 to discuss Sustainable Energy and would report back at the 6 March Town Forum meeting.

Transport: – Jenny Blackburn reported that she had made progress with the Town Forum Transport Report and that she was approaching a Councillor from the Joint Transportation Board to take this further.

Housing and Environment: – Nothing to report.

Street Scene & Townscape / Grot Spots: – see Cinema.

11. Any Other Business

- Aims and Objectives for the Town Forum – Christopher Thomas, at the last Town Forum meeting, had asked that all members forward their top 10 aims/objectives that they would like the Town Forum to undertake during the following months; only five offerings had been received, including that of the Chairman's.

After a lengthy debate, it was agreed that the responses received so far would be the basis for the Town Forum's aims and objectives along with the Core Strategy response (at the request of Michael Holman and agreed by all present), which had been put forward and agreed by the Town Forum in this meeting. The Chairman then appointed members to the working group, which would then review and come up with the agreed aims and objectives from these responses for the Town Forum. This working group would then report back to the Town Forum at the 6 March meeting so that Town Forum members can agree to the recommendations put forward.

The members of the "Working Group for Aims and Objectives" are: Christopher Thomas, Ed Tomlinson, Michael Larsen, Daniel Bech, Jenny Blackburn and Michael Holman. (The Chairman has, subsequent to this meeting, agreed to appoint Altan Omer and John Goodfellow to this group).

It was also agreed that the Housing and Environment Committee, Transport Committee and Planning Committee would be disbanded and working groups be established as and when necessary.

The Vision Committee, however, would remain. Once the aims and objectives were agreed, working groups could then be arranged to follow up work relating to those aims/objectives, for instance, a Cinema Working Group as mentioned in minute 8.1 above.

A few aims/objectives were then highlighted as follows: St Barnabas' Community Centre, Roads within Tunbridge Wells, the Cinema site and the 'Master Plan'.

Action:

11.1 That Christopher Thomas organise an "Aims and Objectives Working Group" to collate and suggest key aims/objectives for the forthcoming financial year and report back at 6 March meeting.

- Reducing Carbon Footprints - June Bridgeman, through a written statement, advised that the Soroptimists warmly welcomed the help they had received from Council officers in publishing their action leaflet 'Reducing Carbon Footprints'. This was being made available through all the usual Council outlets. Town Forum members may have seen the half page article and picture about it featuring Councillor Mrs Mayhew in last week's Courier. Copies of the leaflet were available for the Town Forum members to take away.

The Soroptimists were now planning to follow this up in the Spring with a further campaign, possibly involving schools. If any Town Forum members were school governors it would be helpful to know. Members were asked if they could relay back to their residents' associations, that the leaflet was free and holds useful addresses and was available on the Council's website.

- Draft Strategic Plan Consultation – Christopher Thomas informed members that he had received a consultation document relating to the Council's draft Strategic Plan 2008-2011. **Comments will need to be submitted to the Council by no later than 4 February 2008.**

- Town Forum News Letter/Leaflet – Christopher Thomas, at the last meeting, mentioned that the Town Forum needed to be promoting itself to a wider audience. He raised the issue again, and it was agreed that a Town Forum news letter/leaflet/poster would be a positive move forward.
The information would be distributed by hand through residents' letterboxes. Cllr Mrs Mayhew agreed to investigate whether or not the Council would provide a free photocopying service for the newsletter/leaflet/poster; Councillor Mrs Mayhew agreed to report back to the next Town Forum meeting.

Articles regarding the Town Forum could also be included in the local press and iLocal.

Action:

11.2 That Councillor Mrs Mayhew report back at the next Forum meeting (6 March) as to whether or not the Council would provide a free photocopying service for the Town Forum's news letter/leaflet/poster.

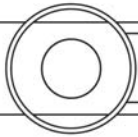
- Town Forum's Website – Daniel Bech reminded members that the Town Forum's website had a page set-aside for each of the residents' associations and if they have not taken up the page they should do so. The page could also link to their own residents' website and vice versa.
- Planning Application submitted to Wealden District Council – Altan Omer encouraged as many Town Forum members to object to the application submitted to Wealden District Council that asks for 72 new dwellings on the outskirts of Tunbridge Wells; in his view, it is a huge development, too big for Tunbridge Wells.
- St Barnabas' Community Centre – Ed Tomlinson informed members that a presentation was taking place regarding the St Barnabas' Community Centre on 27 January 2008 at 7.30pm at the Parish Hall; everyone was welcome to attend.

12. Dates of next meetings of the Town Forum – The Town Forum agreed to the following:

- Thursday 7 February 2008 at 7.30pm – Workshop, Urban Parishing by Angela Woodhouse, Overview and Scrutiny Partnership Manager
- Thursday 6 March 2008 at 7.30pm – David Candlin, Head of Economic Development and Regeneration present to update on Development Partner/Master Plan.
To also agree Aims and Objectives for Town Forum
- Thursday 10 April 2008 at 7.30pm – Update on Grot Spots
- Thursday 15 May 2008 at 7.30pm
- Thursday 19 June 2008 at 7.30pm

6 March 2008 - full RTW Town Forum - Any reports/short papers to be emailed/posted to Samantha Timms no later than 10am on Monday 18 February 2008.

APPENDIX A (Minute 5 refers)



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

Roy Bullock M.B.E.
Council Leader
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Town Hall
Tunbridge Wells
Kent
TN1 1RS

12th December 2007

Dear Roy

Re: Cinema Site: Design Competition and Demolition

You will recall that at the meeting of the Town Forum on the 25th October 2007 it was unanimously agreed that the current state of affairs surrounding the Cinema site was totally unacceptable. In this meeting we resolved that the Cinema should be demolished as soon as possible and that the site, if needing to be left for a period of time prior to any development, be used as an open space and not as a temporary car park.

The Town Forum is pleased to see that a Cinema Design competition has been enacted as a new project coordinated by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) in partnership with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. The Town Forum is pleased to support any initiative which will remove this now infamous "grot spot" from the scenery of Royal Tunbridge Wells. The demolition of the cinema has received the merit of a separate planning consent on 23rd March 2006 (TW/06/00369/CAC/RCC) and is not linked anymore hand in hand with construction. We therefore look to see the cinema building being demolished as soon as practicable taking care to cater for concerns raised in previous correspondence.

We fully understand the need for certain aspects of this development needing to remain confidential due to business critical activities but we see no reason why the developer of the site could not be asked to come to a Town Forum meeting in the near future. We feel sure that having a good understanding of intentions on both sides would enable the owner of the cinema to move matters along. While the competition between architects is a good initiative we have no idea as to whether or not the architect, who does win, will listen to the views of those who live around or very close to the site. Our intention is that the architects should listen and want to listen and that they treat the needs of the local resident equally to those in official positions.

We look forward to hearing from you soon and trust that you agree with our simple requests.

Yours sincerely

Christopher K Thomas

c.c. Cllr Elizabeth Thomas
Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development

APPENDIX B (minute 5 refers)



Councillor Roy Bullock MBE
Leader of the Council

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Town Hall
Royal Tunbridge Wells
Kent TN1 1RS

Mr Christopher Thomas
Chairman
Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum
3 Woodbury Close
Royal Tunbridge Wells
Kent TN4 9LE

13 December 2007

Dear Christopher

I will respond to your letter of 12 December 2007, using the numbering of the paragraphs therein.

Paragraph 1 – I am sorry that you have found it necessary to resolve that the cinema should be demolished as soon as possible. Unfortunately, there is a significant technical issue in that Network Rail are the owners of the tunnel immediately beneath the footprint for future development and their advice is that demolition should not be allowed until we have a clear construction plan for the development that will take account of their needs to protect the tunnel.

Paragraph 2 – Thank you for your congratulations on the proposal of a cinema design competition. The rest of this paragraph refers to the demolition to which I have already responded in the previous paragraph.

As far as paragraph 3 is concerned, the first part of this process is to judge conceptual designs from the architects that have been selected by RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects). When we have an understanding of the selection process and the possible chosen design it may be possible to invite the competition winner to come along to a future Town Forum meeting. I am sure that as part of pre-application discussions for the detailed design both the owner and the architect will wish to listen to the views of those who live around or close to the site and obviously as part of the planning process there will be a statutory consultation period of three weeks whereby all interested parties can respond to the application.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Roy'.

CLlr Roy Bullock MBE
Leader of the Council