



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

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Thursday 10 July 2014

Attended: Cllr Bob Backhouse, John Barber (sub), David Barnett, Lorna Blackmore, Mark Booker, Stephen Bowser, Cllr Ben Chapelard, Adrian Cory, John Cunningham, Michael Doyle, Allan Gooda, Michael Holman, Sue Kaner, Bill Kern, Kyrios Kyriacou, George Lawson (sub), Katharina Mahler-Bech, Marguerita Morton, Nick Pope, Cllr James Scholes, Cllr David Scott, Alastair Tod, Mary Wardrop, Denise Watts (sub) and Victor Webb

TWBC officers present: Kevin Hetherington (Head of Communities and Wellbeing) and Mike McGeary (Democratic Services Officer)

Also present: Léonie Harrington and Cllr Bill Hills (Vice-Chairman, Overview & Scrutiny Committee), Cllr Jane March (Cabinet Portfolio-holder for Tourism, Leisure and Economic Development) and Cllr Alan McDermott (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Portfolio-holder for Planning and Transportation)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were reported from: the Chairman, David Wakefield, together with Sally Balcon, June Bridgeman, Jane Fenwick, Alex Green, Michaela van Halewyn, Tim Harper, Dorothea Holman, David Morris, Altan Omer, Peter Taylor, Philip Whitbourn and Cllrs Ronen Basu, Peter Bulman, Mrs Catherine Mayhew, David Neve, Lynne Weatherly, Frank Williams and Chris Woodward.

In the absence of the Chairman (David Wakefield), Cllr Bob Backhouse, Vice-Chairman of the Town Forum, chaired the meeting.

2. MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

Mike McGeary, TWBC's Democratic Services Officer, advised that there were no membership changes to report since the last meeting.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of both the Extraordinary and the scheduled meetings, held on 29 May 2014, were presented.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meetings held on 29 May 2014 be agreed.

4. ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

29 May 2014

4 Evidence of formal appointment to the Town Forum

Mike McGeary *Representatives to submit evidence of their formal appointment to the Town Forum.*

Mike McGeary, TWBC Democratic Services Officer, advised that 23 out of the 37 active representative organisations had now submitted evidence of their formal

appointment to the Town Forum. The Chairman of the meeting reiterated once more the importance of submitting this information, in the interests of good governance.

6 Litter enforcement/dog fouling

Gary Stephenson To provide suggested wording for residents' associations wishing to raise awareness of TWBC's latest litter/dog fouling enforcement initiative; and to research whether TWBC's enforcement powers exist in areas such as Woodbury Park Cemetery.

Mike McGeary reported that: (a) Mr Stevenson was in communication with Dorothea Holman direct about an appropriate form of words; and (b) Mr Stevenson had confirmed that TWBC's enforcement powers did apply in public areas such as Woodbury Park Cemetery.

7 Street cleaning

Léonie Harrington To research the feasibility of the suggestion, made by June Bridgeman, that hatched road markings be provided around gullies, to help provide access for emptying; and research what the householder's responsibility was in terms of over-hanging vegetation.

Mike McGeary reported that all Town Forum members had been advised on these two issues, by e-mail, dated 20 June.

8 Cultural and Learning Hub

Adam Chalmers To report back on the Cultural Hub 'expressions of interest' process.

Mike McGeary drew attention to the fact that a report appeared on this agenda, which would provide the necessary update required.

8 Aircraft noise

Mike McGeary To circulate details of the public meeting being held on 17 June about concerns over aircraft noise.

Mike McGeary tabled the notes of the meeting and suggested that, if members had any questions they wished to raise, this could be done outside the meeting through direct contact with him.

11 Fracking

Adam Chalmers To check whether there had been any applications for fracking to take place within the Borough.

Mike McGeary advised that any such applications would be to KCC, adding that TWBC would be a statutory consultee in the process. He reported that, to date, there had been no such applications.

Marguerita Morton responded by saying that a further round of licence applications for exploratory drilling was due in the Autumn, with the Weald Basin likely to attract considerable interest. She therefore suggested that Town Forum members be kept informed on any such activity.

11 Parks' maintenance

Adam Chalmers To raise the reported concerns with TWBC's Parks and Sports Team Leader and report back.

Mike McGeary advised that, as a result of the report prepared by Sue Kaner on Sodexo's alleged failure to meet the agreed maintenance standards at Grosvenor and Hilbert Park, meetings had taken place between TWBC's contracts staff and the company. A number of working practices had been reviewed, Town Forum members were advised, including additional grass-cutting resources, with the frequency to match the agreed specification. Other measures included new machinery appropriate for that location, a new contracts manager appointed by Sodexo and a review of the staffing structure.

Mr McGeary added that the Parks and Sports Team Leader would be maintaining a close watch on the changes introduced by Sodexo, to ensure that the issues highlighted were being addressed.

5. FATHER CHRISTMAS WORLD

Nick Moore, the Commercial Director of Markerstudy Leisure, and Andrew Daniells, the General Manager at Salomons, were introduced to the Town Forum.

They explained how Markerstudy were keen to build on the traditions of Christmas and provide a visitor attraction at Salomons, which would bring a significant boost to the local economy. Mr Moore added that 'Father Christmas World' would help to promote the town through its links with the ice rink, the pantomime and the Pantiles, with an expected 60,000 visitors.

Mr Moore summarised the key aspects of Father Christmas World, which would provide a three-and-a-half hour experience, featuring life-sized 'animatronic' polar bears, elves, a walk-in snow globe, a giant upside-down Christmas tree, tinsel train and a forest walk. He added that there was a team of 260 people involved in the planning and the management of the event, covering aspects such as the public transport connections with the town - including a shuttle bus service - road signage, health and safety, construction, logistics and the links with local suppliers for food, drink etc.

Mr Moore advised that there would be 1800 tickets available to local charities.

Members of the Town Forum raised the following issues:

- Stephen Bowser sought further information about the shuttle bus service. Mr Moore explained that, as this would be a pre-ticketed event, with a specific time allocation, it should be possible to be precise about how many shuttle buses per hour would be required from the town centre and back. He added that exact details would be submitted to TWBC on this aspect;
- Kyrios Kyriacou asked what facilities were being built within the grounds of the Salomons estate. Mr Moore advised that there would be a number of temporary buildings being erected, taking a period of 4-6 weeks, all of which would be dismantled after the event;
- Michael Holman enquired what experience the company had of staging such events. Mr Moore advised that Markerstudy had run a number of different events throughout the UK but, as they had not staged a Father Christmas

World type attraction before, they were working with groups and individuals who did have that direct experience;

- Marguerita Morton asked what plans were being made and what studies had been undertaken to minimise the traffic and noise impact on local residents. Mr Daniells reported that the company had engaged a consultant to advise specifically on the highways issue. He added that, as the entry tickets would be timed – and not all visitors would be coming at peak periods – very careful thought had been given to the traffic impact, so as to minimise disruption to local residents. Mr Daniells also advised that an expert on sound control had been consulted, with the same focus to minimise the impact. Mr Moore stressed that the attraction would not be like a theme park in terms of its sound impact, adding that there was more of a focus on ‘theatre’ in the enclosed spaces;
- John Cunningham was impressed with the proposals and the careful thought given to all aspects of the event. He asked, however, about the viability of the attraction, specifically what the expected ticket price might be. Mr Moore advised that the exact pricing structure had not yet been determined, but was likely to be in the range of £45-£60 per ticket which, he added, compared favourably with ‘Lapland’, an earlier attraction organised in the Borough by another company. Mr Moore added that Markerstudy were committed to making the event affordable, even if this resulted in this year’s event being a ‘loss leader’;
- Victor Webb focused on the economics and the travel arrangements of the event. He felt there would be a significant number who still wished to travel direct by car, rather than using a shuttle bus service and he also sought further information on how the £2.5m expenditure on establishing the event would be spent. Mr Moore advised that a significant part of the expense would be the technology – the ‘animatronic’ animals, for instance. He reiterated that the temporary structures would be dismantled – involving further cost – thus returning the estate to its original condition. There would also be 120 staff working at any time when the attraction was open, Mr Moore added. He acknowledged that not all visitors would wish to use the shuttle bus service, but referred again to the timed entry ticket process, which should reduce the risk of traffic build-up close to the estate to a minimum.

In summing up, the Chairman of the meeting thanked Mr Moore and Mr Daniells for their presentation and for answering Town Forum member questions and wished them well with their attraction.

There were no specific action points arising from this update report.

6. PRESENTATION BY THE CITIZEN’S ADVICE BUREAU

Pi Townsend (Head of the Tunbridge Wells Citizen’s Advice Bureau) and Valerie Macintosh (Deputy Manager) were welcomed to the meeting.

Mrs Townsend thanked the Town Forum for the opportunity to raise the awareness of the Citizen’s Advice Bureau (CAB) and emphasise its charitable status. She added that the CAB was very active in its mobile support and advice work at this time of the year, attending both the Mela festival that weekend and the forthcoming dementia fun day in Tonbridge in August, as well as other, similar, events.

Mrs Townsend provided Town Forum members with an overview of the extent of the advice service provided, adding that the volunteers who led in this process undertook a vital – and sometimes enormously difficult – task, following an extensive training programme. Mrs Townsend advised that the advice service operated from its headquarters in offices close to the County Court in Tunbridge Wells as well as from the Gateway, the advice bus and from several out-reach points (e.g. TN2 Centre etc).

Mrs Townsend asked if any Town Forum members felt able to volunteer to help in the CAB's work – or to assist in fund-raising projects.

- John Cunningham asked for an approximate breakdown of how many cases the CAB had each year. Mrs Townsend reported that her branch – consisting of 140 volunteers – assisted approximately 6,000 people each year, the majority of whom came not just with a single issue requiring advice and help. She added that, in some cases and according to the issue, the CAB would help in signposting people to other agencies. Mrs Townsend also reported that there were some local solicitors who provided free family law advice;
- Cllr James Scholes knew from past experience that not all people seeking CAB advice were from within the Tunbridge Wells Borough. He asked therefore whether the CAB received any funding from outside the Borough. Mrs Townsend advised that there was no such external funding received for this service, but she added that there was a reciprocal support and advice service provided by neighbouring CAB offices.

Subsequent to the meeting, Mrs Townsend has confirmed the precise numbers involved, as follows: in the first quarter of this year, 4.9% of clients were from districts outside the Tunbridge Wells Borough boundary (with whom reciprocal arrangements existed) and 1.4% were from further afield.

Cllr David Scott, who was the Borough Council's official representative appointed to the local CAB, reported on how it had coped with its budget cuts. He advised how the CAB had moved to less expensive office accommodation and had achieved savings elsewhere in its operations, leading to a position where it could manage its affairs more efficiently.

He added that the CAB had a greater focus on the Borough's areas of deprivation, where it was important for people to know that a helping hand was available. He thanked Mrs Townsend and all of the CAB volunteers for the huge amount of positive work it undertook, in serving our local community.

- Victor Webb asked how much the CAB cost to run and what its funding shortfall amounted to. Mrs Townsend advised that, for 2014/15, the budgeted cost of running the core service across the Borough was £203,715, of which TWBC gave a grant of £165,000, under a service level agreement. She added that this sum was due to be reduced to £150,000 next year.

Mrs Townsend advised that the CAB did have a legal aid contract, which helped to subsidise their operation, adding that this had come to an end.

To address the budget shortfall, Mrs Townsend advised that the CAB were looking to increase their fund-raising efforts as well as apply for further project funding, e.g. through the 'Big Lottery' route.

Cllr David Scott emphasised that CAB volunteers did not receive any salary or wage, but were reimbursed for expenses such as travel and car parking costs.

Cllr Jane March, TWBC's relevant Cabinet portfolio-holder for grant funding, commended the CAB for their hard work and quality of service. She added that the following year's reduced grant level was simply part of TWBC's comprehensive review of all expenditure areas, adding that this had been a very difficult decision to make.

In summing up, the Chairman of the meeting thanked Mrs Townsend for her presentation and urged Town Forum members who wished to become involved in volunteer work – or in fund-raising for the CAB – to contact the CAB direct, via: manager@twcab.cabinet.org.uk

7. UPDATE REPORT FROM TWBC'S CABINET

Cllr Alan McDermott, TWBC Deputy Leader, provided an update on some key issues which had come before TWBC's Cabinet or were other items of general interest, as follows:

- (a) **North Farm** – a 12-month highway improvement scheme to alleviate congestion, starting the following week where, Cllr McDermott advised, the contractors were aiming to minimise disruption during construction through overnight working on the major roundabouts element and a shut-down of work leading up to the Christmas period;
- (b) **Dualling of A21** – Cllr McDermott advised that this scheme had now been given the required Department of Transport go-ahead, with work to start in 2015;
- (c) **Public realm improvements** – Cllr McDermott reported that the design for phase I of this initiative had been completed and work would start mid-September, with a 19 November completion date. Currently, he added, discussions were taking place on reducing the time period during which normal vehicle movement would be allowed through the improved area;
 - Michael Holman asked whether the Millennium Clock would remain in situ during this phase of the public realm scheme. He also referred to an earlier statement made by the Leader of the Council that, as part of the phase I works, ducting would be provided for water and electricity supplies, for a water feature on this site. Cllr McDermott confirmed that the Millennium Clock would remain in situ while the work took place and reassured Mr Holman that the ducting would be provided.
 - Mark Booker asked whether the second and subsequent phases of this scheme would result in changes to the bus routes in the town centre. Cllr David Scott advised that this was a topic which he had already started to examine, adding that he had a number of suggestions which he had set out in a proposals paper. Stephen Bowser asked if Town Forum members could view this paper, which it was agreed could be shared, for information.

Cllr McDermott added that it was proposed that the bus shelters either side of the war memorial would be relocated as phase II of this scheme.

Action point: Mike McGeary to circulate Cllr Scott's proposals paper to Town Forum members, as soon as this can be done.

- (d) **Cinema site** – Cllr McDermott advised that, although a redevelopment scheme for this site had not yet been presented by the site owner, the first phase – the demolition of the cinema – was still due to begin very soon.

- Katharina Mahler-Bech asked if the hoarding surrounding this site could be removed at the earliest opportunity, in order to return the footway to its normal width. The current restrictions, she added, were causing great inconvenience to pedestrians. Cllr McDermott said that this could be discussed with the site owner.
- Michael Holman (and Kyrios Kyriacou) enquired about the medium term plans for the site, beyond the demolition phase and the resultant spoil it would produce. Cllr McDermott advised that there was the possibility of the cleared site being used as a temporary car park, in which case some of the spoil would be crushed in order to provide a level area.

In summing up, the Chairman of the meeting thanked Cllr McDermott for his update report.

There were no other action points arising from this report.

8. TUNBRIDGE WELLS CULTURAL AND LEARNING HUB

Kevin Hetherington, TWBC Head of Communities and Wellbeing, described the Borough Council's ambitions for the establishment of a Cultural and Learning Hub, based in the existing Museum, Art Gallery and Adult Education Centre, in partnership with Kent County Council. He stressed that it was a long term (4-5 year) project, with securing all the necessary funding (currently estimated to be in the region of £14m) as a vital first step before the project could be delivered.

Mr Hetherington advised that the intention was to bring together the following principal services within the building: the Library and the Adult Education centre (both KCC-run); the Museum and Art Gallery; Gateway; the Assembly Hall Theatre box office etc.

As for funding, Mr Hetherington advised that TWBC was hoping to secure Heritage Lottery Funding (HLF) of £4.5m but he emphasised the scale of that two-stage undertaking, with the intention that the stage I application for funding would be made by the end of 2014. Preparation for stage II, he added, would take some 9-12 months to complete.

Mr Hetherington reported that there were other issues still to be resolved at this point, including clarifying the current building ownership and assembling a baseline financial position of existing services. He undertook to provide a regular update for the Town Forum, if that would be helpful.

Cllr Jane March added that she had made a presentation to the Leader of KCC on this topic earlier that week, to reinforce the principal features and benefits of the proposal. Cllr March also reported to the Town Forum on how Tunbridge Wells Museum had provided Tate Britain with some key items for its 'British Folk Art' exhibition, running until 31 August, principally a George Smart ('the Tailor of Frant') painting (Goose woman) and the 'Crimean quilt'. The latter, Cllr March added, had been repaired and restored at Tate Britain's expense and was a key feature of the exhibition. She felt that, if and when Tunbridge Wells achieved its ambitions, items such as these would be major attractions for residents and visitors alike.

- Michael Holman stressed the importance to the town of this ambitious project, which would provide a significant boost to the external perception of Tunbridge Wells. He suggested that the Town Forum should assist TWBC in its goal and wondered whether this might best be achieved by establishing an ad hoc working group, to enable those with an interest and knowledge to contribute.

Cllr Jane March welcomed the support and input of the Town Forum and the suggestion that a dedicated working group be formed to assist;

- Cllr James Scholes reiterated how vital securing HLF funding for this project was. At a time of continuing reductions in central government grant funding for local authorities, he added, there had to be a strong sense of realism about what was affordable. Cllr March agreed, adding that features of the proposal such as providing a creative workspace facility – which would meet a known demand in the area as well as become an income source – were elements which boosted the chances of HLF funding;
- Stephen Bowser enquired if Tate Britain wished to develop this partnership for future exhibitions. Cllr March responded by saying that discussions were taking place with Tate, with the possibility that a small part of this exhibition might come to Tunbridge Wells. Mr Hetherington added that the partnership between Tate Britain and TWBC was specifically for the British Folk Art exhibition and was not expected to develop further;
- Victor Webb enquired about the insurance aspect of the Museum's items being displayed at Tate Britain. Mr Hetherington added that this was covered under the Council's insurance policy.

RESOLVED – That Mr Hetherington be invited back to subsequent meetings, to report on progress.

9. 2014 ANNIVERSARIES

Jeremy Kimmel, TWBC Museum's Audience Development Manager, provided a verbal update on the key anniversary events which the Borough Council was leading on in 2014, centred on the First World War commemorations. Full details of these can be viewed from this link to TWBC's website:

<http://www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/residents/events/first-world-war>

Mr Kimmel added that he was the chairman of a steering committee which had been in place for some months, planning for and co-ordinating the commemorations. He invited any interested Town Forum members who wished to become involved in this work to contact him direct on TW 01892 523350 or by e-mail at:

jeremy.kimmel@tunbridgewells.gov.uk

Mr Kimmel reported on one other aspect, in addition to the website information, namely TWBC's application for the Victoria Grove in Dunorlan Park to become a 'centenary field'. This national initiative aims to secure recreational spaces in perpetuity to honour the memory of the millions of people who lost their lives in World War I. The outcome of the application was awaited, Mr Kimmel advised.

Cllr James Scholes advised that he had some research information about the first MC award-holder, who came from Tunbridge Wells, which he would pass on to Mr Kimmel, in case it was of more general interest as part of the commemorative events;

Michael Holman summarised a number of other events taking place in 2014, based upon the 25th anniversary of the signing of the Twinning Charter between Tunbridge Wells and Wiesbaden, including a visit by the Lord Mayor of that city later in the month. He encouraged Town Forum members to join in as many or as much as they felt able to, and invited those who wished to join a small group from the Twinning and

Friendship Association who were visiting Wiesbaden in late September, alongside the Mayor of Tunbridge Wells, Cllr Jane March and TWBC's Chief Executive, to contact him.

There were no action points arising from this report.

10. WORKING GROUPS

Update reports were made from the working groups as follows:

Water in the Wells Working Group – The Chairman, Michael Holman, reported on the following progress:

- (a) **BUPA care home in Southborough** – Mr Holman advised that this was likely to be called 'Fountains Lodge'. He added that he remained hopeful that the development would incorporate a suitable water feature;
- (b) **Union House** – Mr Holman reported that prospective developers of this site would be required to incorporate some public art within their proposals. He added that he and the Water in the Wells Working Group were pushing the case for this to be in the format of a water feature;
- (c) **Chalybeate spring** – Mr Holman advised that the lack of water flow at the Chalybeate Spring had attracted national publicity. He added that Targetfollow had undertaken to initiate a small-scale investigation into the possible cause, adding that it was known that previous interruptions to the water flow at the spring were often linked to major groundworks, associated with redevelopment;
- (d) **North Farm roundabouts** – Further to earlier reports on this issue, Mr Holman advised that no decision had yet been made on the feasibility of installing water and electricity supplies to the major roundabouts, as part of the traffic congestion relief scheme, which would allow water features to be added.

Cllr David Scott provided some additional information, saying that he was seeking political support for the proposal. He added that, if this proposal were to proceed, an advance loan of £15k would be necessary, to fund the additional costs involved, as an up-front commitment. He added that part of the proposal was that catchment water would be used for any water features in this scheme, rather than mains supply.

Mr Holman concluded by saying that there would therefore be a need to find a donor for this project, in order to enable the work to take place as part of the overall programmed works. He acknowledged that there would then be the need to raise funds for the water feature itself.

Leisure, Culture and Tourism Working Group – John Barber, Chairman of the Friends of the Common, provided an update report. He presented the case for two crossing points to provide easier and safer crossing points to the Common, adding that a great deal of support had already been pledged for the proposal, including from Greg Clark MP.

Mark Booker also reported on another aspect of the Working Group's activities, namely the production of a report which sought to emphasise the importance of linking the 'green' parts of the town centre (which included the crossings to the Common). He added that a draft report would be ready by 30 September, for Town Forum members to view and comment on, which would be supplemented by an illustrative map. Mr

Booker felt that the map in particular might be of interest to local hotels who, it was hoped, might be persuaded to sponsor its production.

Traffic Strategy – Katharina Mahler-Bech presented an update report on behalf of this group. She advised that:

- (i) Members of the group continued to attend meetings of the Joint (TWBC/KCC) **Transportation Board** and the **Public Transport Forum**, on behalf of the Town Forum;
- (ii) The group continued to track the progress of the **Gatwick Airport expansion consultation** process. Town Forum members noted that the recent public meeting held at the Town Hall on 17 June added nothing further to what had been learnt at the consultation exhibition in Edenbridge in May;
- (iii) An update report would be provided on both the **Transport Strategy** and the **Parking Strategy** at the Joint Transportation Board meeting on 21 July;
- (iv) Efforts to ensure that KCC improved the **Carrs Corner** roundabout for pedestrians – and cyclists – would continue;
- (v) An on-line petition for a **pedestrian crossing** across Crescent Road near St Augustine's Church had been started, details of which would be circulated to Town Forum members; and
- (vi) Judging for the **RTW in Bloom** competition would be taking place on 16 July.

RESOLVED – That the progress report be accepted.

Planning and Development Strategy – Michael Doyle, Chairman of this working group, advised that the current key issue was awaiting the next stage of TWBC's Site Allocations process. He added that various judgements from elsewhere in England meant that there were different interpretations emerging from the National Planning Policy Framework. Central government guidance was, he added, awaited.

RESOLVED – That the progress report be accepted.

Finance and Other Issues – Cllr Bob Backhouse, Chairmen of this meeting, advised that there were no additional items to report from this working group.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(a) Dr Philip Whitbourn – Mike McGeary advised that, as agreed at the last meeting, the Chairman had written to Dr Philip Whitbourn, to convey the Forum's best wishes for a speedy recovery from recent surgery. In response, Dr Whitbourn had written to say that he "...was most touched to receive a get well card from the Forum", which he had appreciated greatly;

(b) Art exhibition – Cllr David Scott tabled an invitation to all Town Forum members to a private viewing of works by Samuel Palmer, Graham Sutherland and Paul Drury, in support of the Friends of the Tunbridge Wells Citizen's Advice Bureau, which took place on 18 July;

(c) Léonie Harrington – KCC's Community Engagement Officer, Léonie Harrington, advised that she had been appointed on an eight-month secondment to another position within KCC, adding that this was therefore her last meeting for a while. Léonie reported that, as soon as she knew who would be taking on her existing role, she would advise Town Forum members;

(d) Aircraft noise – Cllr Bob Backhouse reported that Cllr Mrs Catherine Mayhew had advised that she felt it important that, with the westernmost parish councils in the Borough seeking to lessen the impact of aircraft noise from Gatwick traffic, the Town Forum should ensure it looked after the interests of the unparished part of the Borough. Cllr Mrs Mayhew had suggested that this should be discussed in more detail at a subsequent meeting.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 25 September 2014 at 6.30pm

Remaining 2014 meeting:

27 November (including the AGM)

The meeting concluded at 8.35pm.