

ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

Thursday, 12 September 2019

Members: Stuart Anderson (Beulah Road Residents Association), Caroline Auckland (Soroptimist International of Tunbridge Wells District), Sally Balcon (Friends of the Commons), David Barnett (Friends of Grosvenor & Hilbert Parks), Adrian Berendt (Tunbridge Wells Bicycle Users Group), Lorna Blackmore (Grantley Court Residents Association), Mark Booker (Culverden Residents Association), Diana Butler (Banner Farm Residents Association), John Cunningham (Civic Society of RTW & Warwick Park Residents' Association), Andy England (Tunbridge Wells Access Group), Jane Fenwick (Calverley Park Residents Association), Margaret Ginman (Friends of Woodbury Park Cemetery), Carolyn Gray (The Forum), Delphine Hamilton (Hawkenbury Village Association), Dorothea Holman (Boyne Park Residents Association), Michael Holman (Tunbridge Wells Twinning and Friendship Association), Marieke de Jonge (Tunbridge Wells Friends of the Earth), John de Lucy (Friends of Tunbridge Wells Cemetery), Katharina Mahler-Beck (Telephone House Neighbours Association), Paul Mason (Tunbridge Wells Bicycle User Group), Angela McPherson (Soroptimist International of Tunbridge Wells and District), Alan Omer (Benhall Mill Road Land Association), Martin Sanderson (Tunbridge Wells Anti-Aircraft Noise Group), Don Sloan (Molyneux Park Gardens Residents Association), Tim Tempest (The Avenues Residents Association and Friends of the Grove), David Wakefield (Tunbridge Wells Twinning and Friendship Association), Denise Watts (Tunbridge Wells Over Fifties Forum), Carol Wilson (Nourish Community Foodbank), Pat Wilson (Inner London Road Residents Association),

Borough Councillors: Councillors Mark Ellis (St John's Ward), Marguerita Morton (St John's Ward), Nick Pope (Park Ward), Hugo Pound (Sherwood Ward), David Scott (Culverden Ward), Chris Woodward (Broadwater Ward).

Others in Attendance: Councillor Jane March (Deputy Leader, TWBC), Lee Colyer (Director of Finance, Policy and Development), David Candlin (Head of Economic Development and Property), Karin Grey (Sustainability Manager), Finbar Gibbons (Head of Policy and Governance).

APOLOGIES

- 1 Apologies were received from Jenina Pendry (Residents' First), Brian Lippard (Civic Society of RTW) and Councillor McDermott.

DECLARATIONS OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

- 2 Delphine Hamilton was substituting for Hawkenbury Village Association, Carol Wilson for Nourish Community Foodbank and Martin Sanderson for Tunbridge Wells Anti Aircraft Noise Group and Councillor Jane March for the Leader.

MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

- 3 New membership applications had been accepted from the Tunbridge Wells Dementia Friendly Committee.

MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 18 JULY 2019

- 4 The minutes of the meeting held on 18 July 2019 were agreed subject to the following amendments:

- Agenda item 10 – the reports from the working groups were not attached. It was confirmed that they would be circulated.
- Michael Holman, Dorothea Holman, Caroline Auckland and Councillor Chris Woodward to be recorded as having sent their apologies.

ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

4A There were no actions from the previous meeting.

MATTERS ARISING AND RESIDENTS' CONCERNS

5 There were no reported matters arising or residents' concerns.

UPDATE FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

6 Councillor March, deputising for the Leader gave an update and answered questions on the following subjects:

Before the update began Councillor March announced with great sadness the death of Councillor Dr Ronan Basu. A memorial service would be held on 4 October 2019.

Amelia Scott

- Collaborative work was ongoing between the National Heritage Lottery Fund, Kent CC and TWBC to try to reduce the costs through valued engineering and to share the extra construction costs and meet the fundraising gap.
- Adult Education Centre had now relocated to the Corn Exchange and Royal Victoria Place and lessons had now resumed.

Ely Court

- Refurbishment was underway.

Full Council

- The next Full Council meeting was scheduled for 25 September 2019.

Tunbridge Wells Cultural Team

- The Tunbridge Wells Cultural Team took part in the Heritage Open Day which was held at the Camden Centre.
- Thanks were given to the support by TWBC and all the other sponsors of the event – without this support it would not have been possible to put the event on.
- The theme was local biscuit making with opportunities to get involved in the process.
- As part of the National Heritage Lottery Fund Activity Plan there was a young consultants programme to work with them to help pose questions about the Amelia Scott and the work of the museum.

Parking in Tunbridge Wells

- The Business Improvement District Bid had looked at the issue of parking in Tunbridge Wells and there was a proposal that related to Sunday parking that would include incentives to stay longer at a lower cost.
- The Parking Strategy for the rest of the Borough, further details would be included in the Local Plan – Councillor McDermott would be able to update further at the next meeting.

Public Art Guidance Document

- The Public Art Guidance was currently in draft.
- The Guidance would be included in the Local Plan with the consultation due to start on 20 September 2019.

Local Plan

- To note that the consultation would start on 20 September and that comments could only be accepted after this date and up to 31 October.

Action: Councillor McDermott to give an update on parking in Tunbridge Wells at the next meeting.

CLIMATE CHANGE - VIEWS FROM LOCAL SCHOOLS

- 7 Marieke de Jonge, Tunbridge Wells Friends of the Earth attended the meeting with representatives from a number of local schools to speak on the issue of Climate Change.

Tunbridge Wells Girls Grammar School

- Climate change was a national issue.
- At the local level it was important to ensure that there was better awareness to include better education and the availability of information on what can and cannot be recycled.
- How recycling could be made more easily available.
- More efficient use of bus services particularly for school journeys.
- Review of bus fares to help promote bus use and reduce reliance on cars.

Skinner's School

- Air pollution and in particular St John's Road which for a few years during peak time had been the most polluted road in Kent was a serious concern for children walking to school. The air particulates that were breathed in were shown to affect the development of children of a young age.
- Would like to see measures introduced to reduce the congestion on St John's Road and Pembury Road.
- Also concern about the infrequency of buses that make driving preferable and therefore exacerbate the congestion issues.
- Buses were a major pollutant in Tunbridge Wells. Newer models were more environmentally friendly but suggested that regulations were not sufficient and needed to be reviewed to make them stricter and more enforceable.
- Encouragement for more car share schemes. And for short journeys to consider the introduction of electric bikes and scooters in towns and cities that although expensive could be beneficial.

Beechwood Sacred Heart School

- Recycling was intrinsically flawed – instead of recycling, products should be introduced that could be used for a longer period e.g. a metal bottle that could be used for a 10 year period rather than using plastic bottles.
- Water stations to be introduced so bottles could be filled thereby reducing the need to buy single use bottles.
- The push to recycle gave the excuse to continue buying plastic which still often ended up in Landfill.

- There was a need to lobby to get supermarkets to remove all plastic to be replaced with paper or cotton based bags.
- There should be a promotion for the use of reusable food containers instead of clingfilm.
- Interest in animals promoted the interest in the environment and this should be encouraged. There should be more awareness of environmental issues in schools.
- 9 out of 10 people breath polluted air so an issue that had previously been recognised as one for the future had now become an issue for the present.
- 7 million people a year were being killed due to the effects of pollution.
- In 2018 The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Forum declared that coal fired electricity must end by 2050 and there must be a 1.5% reduction in the global temperature. Failure to do so would result in a major climate crisis in less than 20 years. In 2019 this had been reduced to 12 years. As Governments and Global Corporations were not taking enough action, it was time to take it on ourselves.

Homeward House School

- Important to reduce the use of plastics and cans. Had seen a lot of evidence of dropped litter around Tunbridge Wells. People should be encouraged to go out and collect litter.
- Would like to see a reduction in the use of cars and buses. There should be more cycle lanes that would provide safer travel for cyclists. It would also promote cycle use.
- To encourage the use of Tupperware in shops and reusable bottles.
- A lot of damage had already taken place and there had been a delay in taking relevant action was disappointing. More action needed to be taken now.
- A company called David Luke who produce clothing including school uniforms from plastic bottles. Over the last 8 years, 20 million plastic bottles had been taken from Land Fill for this purpose.

Councillor March welcomed the comments made by all the students. The first meeting of the Climate Emergency Action Working Group was due to take place later in September. It had already been agreed that a Climate Emergency conference would be organised and engagement from schools would be very welcome.

There was a Transport Forum in Tunbridge Wells. Bus fumes and congestion were issues brought up at the last Forum meeting. A representative from Arriva Buses was at the meeting and gave an assurance that bus drivers would be told to switch off their engines when at the bus stops – although to date this doesn't appear to have happened.

The issues raised were already included on the list of things to do by the Transport Working Group. The pollution problems on St John's Road was already included in the Local Plan. It was suggested that in the first instance it would be beneficial for students to highlight the transport issues that affected each of their schools and come up with some suggested solutions.

It would be useful for the students to find out whether their school had a Travel Plan and if so what it said.

Consideration should be given to alternatives to the car for school travel. Something that students who currently drive to school could look into.

The Council had a no idling policy. To consider how this information could be given to schools and then disseminated to drivers at school drop off and pick up.

Improvements for cyclists was something that TWBC had been working on some time, but there was a lack of confidence that cycling was safe.

To ask schools to become involved with the Ecobrick Campaign, that collected plastic to be sent to Africa to build eco-friendly houses. A way of putting used plastic to very good use.

Not all bus use was negative. An electric bus to be used for disabled people was being trialled. Technological advances in electric buses was progressing rapidly and should not be underestimated.

Action: Adrian Berendt to circulate the Roger Hallam (Extinction Rebellion) Video.

Action: To consider forming a Youth Forum with representatives from all the schools that would collate ideas that could be put forward not only to TWBC but also Kent CC.

AIR POLLUTION

8 Professor Stephen Peckham from the University of Kent was invited to give a presentation on the subject of Air Pollution which included the following:

- The impact on health needed to be considered at the early stages of both transport and development planning.
- Air pollution was the second biggest killer in the world.
- Where smoke used to be the biggest cause of air pollution that has now been replaced by traffic. In recent years the traffic in Kent had increased, with a marked increase in the number of lorries using the roads.
- Prior to 2000 about 10% of the vehicle fleet used diesel, this had now risen to 40%. Diesel cars use more nitrogen dioxide and more particulates than petrol cars so will continue to be a major concern. Petrol cars were better than diesel cars.
- Air pollution was a leading cause of ill health. Long term exposure to nitrogen dioxide and ozone where the particulates entered the blood stream could lead to a number of issues that included asthma and cardio vascular problems.
- Low levels of nitrogen dioxide in children's lungs resulted in stunted growth and this was permanent.
- Short term exposure was also a problem. Day to day changes in particulate levels was also a concern.
- The effects of air pollution also had a detrimental effect to the economy, causing 40,000 premature deaths and an estimated cost of £8-20bn a year (estimated in 2005). More recently Public Health England estimated the cost of dealing with and treating the additional illness caused by air pollution was in the region of £43-150m a year.
- Local authorities were legally required to produce a plan and as an authority reach the limits of 40 micrograms averaged over a year with no more than 35 breaches of which TWBC was compliant. The World Health Organisation (WHO) had determined that this was not good enough. A recent strategy published by Government had suggested

that we should now be looking at working towards or better than WHO limits.

- There were many areas in the UK that the Government didn't recognise as having an air quality problem, Kent included.
- The Government had provided funding for its 35 cities, but there were over 600 areas of the country where air quality breached the UK guidelines.
- There were two ways of taking measurements – Diffusion tubes (a chemical analyser) which were placed in places where it was thought that air pollution was high. The second was an Automatic Measurement Station. Measurements were taken based on the nearest dwelling which could at times be some distance from where the Station/Tube was located. This resulted in occasions where results were distorted depending on how far away from the road the measurements were taken. It was argued that if the measurements were taken closer and lower to the road there would be areas that were currently recorded as within the Guidelines, that would actually be in breach of the Guidelines.
- Ozone was now seen as one of the major causes of short term respiratory and cardio vascular problems. To tackle ozone would require a dramatic drop in nitrogen dioxide.
- Locally and in line with the Legal Guidelines Tunbridge Wells did not breach the UK limit but it was in breach of the WHO Guidelines. If the UK adopted the WHO Guidelines, it would be a major concern locally.
- Medway had a major mortality issue around PM_{2.5} - no significant funding had been allocated by the Government as the area had not been identified as having a pollution problem.
- The key was to focus on planning and transport in order to find suitable solutions.
- Quality restrictions undertaken by developers should be tighter – at present they use models for air quality. They should be required to monitor levels so that predictions were based on fact.
- More pressure to be put on Government (Defra) to ensure they were aware that problems existed at the Local level and that resources be made available to help tackle the issue.
- Health considerations needed to be taken into account at the planning stage.
- There were lots of things that could be done to ameliorate the effects of air pollution. More pressure locally to try and push the agenda forward.

Discussion included the following comments:

- Work was being undertaken to combat the effects of air pollution associated with shipping.
- Masks used in Japan are mainly for allergies and not air pollution.
- Trees were helpful but their contribution to the absorption of pollution was very small.
- The benefits associated with cycling outweigh the adverse effects caused by pollution.
- A need to rethink infrastructure to change the emphasis from car travel.
- Pollution from aircrafts (in the local area) was not significant in comparison to vehicles on the road.
- Better train services would reduce reliance on cars.

- In general, biomass and wood burning stoves particularly in town centres were not recommended. That said, in rural areas biomass burners where locally sourced wood was used, then it was a very good way of producing heat and hot water (e.g. Bedgebury Pinetum).
- Evidence suggested that 20mph Zones were beneficial for both lowering emissions and encouraging more cycling.

Karin Grey, Sustainability Manager, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council gave an update on what the Council was doing in terms of air quality.

- The Air Quality Action Plan was approved in March 2019 and included a number of actions that could be taken forward, particularly through infrastructure in terms of cycling, walking, public transport and behavioural changes.
- The Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan and the Local Plan also offered opportunities for action in this area.
- The Kent Air Quality Website which, where possible showed real time information and where it was possible to download air quality reports that detailed what was happening in Kent.
- Behaviour change programmes had been started that included 'The Clean Air for School' where Environmental Health Officers went into Primary Schools to talk about the problems of pollution and alternative ways to get to school – walking, walking buses etc.
- 'The Anti Idling Campaign' launched on 20 June 2019 and aimed at encouraging car users not to idle unnecessarily.
- Air quality modelling was assessed on planning applications and conditions were applied where necessary.
- Air quality monitoring was regularly undertaken, the information gathered then informed on decisions.
- Membership of the Car Club in Tunbridge Wells had grown – from around 60 members as at April 2015, now 270. There was now a need to expand and add more cars. This encouraged people to use the most appropriate form of transport.
- The increased use of electric vehicles was being encouraged by Government. TWBC was looking at where to put electrical charging points, but it would include a charging point for taxis on Mount Pleasant Road.
- There would be a lot of guidance coming forward in the Local Plan. There would also be an Air Quality Guidance Document.
- Key aim was to work towards Active Travel.

Discussion included the following comments:

- Restrictions relating to domestic burning, bonfires etc. came under Statutory Nuisance – if the result of domestic burning was deemed a nuisance there was legislation available that allow action to be taken. There were restrictions on the burning of plastic or metal, but not on coal fires, bonfires or wood burners.

Action: To circulate the slides to Members.

CALVERLEY SQUARE

- 9 Lee Colyer, Director of Finance, Policy and Development and David Candlin, Head of Economic Development and Property provided an update on the Calverley Square Project which included the following:

- The first stage of the two stage design and build was now at the point of being completed.
- The technical design was carried out by Mace's Design Team. The project had been broken down into 31 trade packages. Each package had been out to competitive tender – between 3 and 5 trade contractors within Mace's supply chain. All tenders had been open and recorded jointly by Mace, Avison Young and AECOM on behalf of TWBC.
- Final tenders had been received and the cost of the development was now known.
- Cost benchmarking had been done. In terms of the theatre and based on the cost today to build The Marlow Theatre, the current proposal was slightly less.
- Work had been undertaken on the detailed design – determining how the buildings would actually work.
- The new theatre would have a 5% reduction in carbon footprint over the current theatre. The office would have 35% reduction in carbon footprint in comparison to the Town Hall.
- Part of the design and build phase was to reduce the risk to the Local Authority by putting that risk onto the contractor as it moved to the next stages, e.g. construction risks, design development and price increases.
- Project was not risk free with some risk remaining with the Council – changes as instructed by the Council, postponement of the works as ordered by the Council, a delay or to stop the work of a contractor, asbestos, antiquities, archaeology or any unexploded ordinance.
- Cost assessment had been made and a contingency sum included.
- Following the completion of RIBA Stage 4 the Council had now received the costings report from AECOM. External market factors had had adversely impacted on all construction projects – this included Calverley Square. Factors included the uncertainty around Brexit and its knock on effects including the availability of labour, tariffs and import delays. In addition the Grenfell tragedy, the collapse of Carillion and the collapse of British Steel.
- In terms of costings, in December 2017 the gross construction cost was £90m – a sub total of £77m to be funded from borrowing – with a final cost to the Council of £2.3m fixed over the next 50 years. The Council had approved a separate funding strategy that would meet this funding requirement.
- The final contract sum now submitted by Mace was a total of £108m – a sub total of £95m. Additional funding contribution of £5m was expected from Kent CC and an additional £3m from fund raising. This would give a total of £87m to be funded from borrowing. It was now possible to borrow the higher figure at a lower interest rate of 2.15%, the result of which was the cost to the council remained unchanged at £2.3m.
- An assessment of the economic benefits undertaken in 2017 showed a gross value added from the new offices of £24.3m. At the end of Stage 4 the economic benefit had remained the same, but the repurposing of the current offices added a net economic benefit of £10m – therefore a substantial improvement from December 2017.
- In December 2018 a place shaping assessment was undertaken on the current buildings, including the police station. A short list of 6 potential options were identified against a set of relevant criteria.

- New workspace, re-using the majority of spaces for office, co-working and creative industries.
- Boutique hotel, restaurant and new workspace, with residential uses in Calverley Terrace.
- Residential led mix of uses, new leisure uses and some workspace.
- Hotel, residential and workspace.
- Residential development with community, event and work spaces.
- Residential across the site with some business space.
- The range of assessment options demonstrated a wide range of approaches that could be pursued to ensure that the Civic Complex had a sustainable and beneficial future for the town centre and borough.
- The next approval stage was Full Council on 25 September 2019 with a planned start on site of January 2020.

Discussion included the following comments:

- Part of the Construction Management Plan included a plan to manage vehicles which included the allocation of time slots to minimise traffic congestion and details of how vehicles would access the site.
- Further details of the 6 options for the Civic Complex was available in the Committee Reports. Not yet in a position to take a decision on which option might be taken forward.
- Final decision for the next stages of the project rested with Councillors.
- The Council had met with the owners of the Cinema Site on a number of occasions. Final approval had just been given with a start on site expected later in 2019. The owners were familiar and very supportive of the plans for Calverley Square. Going forward, information would be shared for both sites.
- Some value engineering had been done but it didn't affect the overall specification of the project.
- The final decision for the £5m funding contribution from Kent CC rested with them, but they were very supportive of the scheme. There was also confidence regarding the £3m in fundraising.
- The Report included 2 recommendations, the approval to proceed with the project and to delegate authority to the s151 Officer in consultation with the Portfolio holder that should funding not be forthcoming it would be underwritten by borrowing and that there was sufficient headroom to do this. As such it was fully compliant with the constitution.
- There was recognition that a new Theatre and offices would be a benefit to the area. But the consensus was that there should be a pause so that further consideration could be given to current market conditions/uncertainties. In addition, that there should be a more detailed look at the different component parts of the scheme. It was further suggested that public engagement should be improved that would better bring the public on board with the scheme.
- Concern that the scheme that included a new car park would bring more cars into the town centre, which contradicts the work being undertaken to reduce air pollution in the area.

- The current Civic Complex had a value of £9m (figure based on a residential development). The Report had identified the optimum time for the site to come to the market – between 18-24 months prior to it becoming vacant. Any earlier would be an increased risk to any developer which in turn would result in a decrease in the value of the building.
- The Independent Panel Report had been submitted to a cross party group and Borough Council Cabinet. Very happy to send it to members of the Town Forum. There was a plan to present it to the next Full Council meeting scheduled for 25 September 2019.

Action: David Candlin to circulate slides

Adrian Berendt to circulate the Independent Panel Report

DRAFT LOCAL PLAN BRIEFING 5 SEPTEMBER & UPDATE FROM STRATEGIC PLANNING WORKING GROUP

10 Mark Booker agreed to circulate the notes from the Town Forum's briefing on the Draft Local Plan. But to highlight a couple of issues:

- Following the opening of the consultation on 20 September, 2 public exhibitions would take place in the Royal Victoria Place, the first on Thursday 20 September and Saturday 28 September 2019.
- A draft response would be prepared and circulated. Residents' Associations would then be encouraged to do the same.

Action – To circulate the notes of the Town Forum's briefing held on 5 September 2019.

REPORTS FROM THE TOWN FORUM WORKING GROUPS

11 The Reports from the Town Forum Working Groups were not discussed at the meeting.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

12 There was no other business.

FUTURE MEETINGS

13 21 November 2019
23 January 2020
19 March 2020

NOTE: The meeting concluded at 9.15 pm.