



## MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE RTW TOWN FORUM

held on 13 JULY 2023 in the Town Hall

### 1 Attendance

Dave Barnett (Friends of Grosvenor & Hilbert Park); Paul Mason (Royal Tunbridge Wells Bike User Group); Mark Booker (Culverden RA); Ruth Chambers (Tunbridge Wells Older People's Forum); Stuart Anderson, (Beulah Road RA); Jane Fenwick (Calverley Park Association); Susan Bishop (Boyne Park RA); Brian Lippard (RTW Civic Society); Mike Trudel (Friends of the Amelia Scott); David Scott (The Potteries Residents' and Owners Group); Don Sloan (Chair and Molyneaux Park Residents' Association); Margaret Ginman (Friends of Woodbury Park Cemetery); Katharina Mahler-Bech (RTW in Bloom); Caroline Auckland and Catherine Mennell (Soroptimist International TW District); Neil Williams (Warwick Park RA);

**Councillor members:** Justine Rutland (Culverden), Siobhan O'Connell (Park), Ben Chapelard (St James).

**TWBC officers:** Hilary Smith, Economic Development Manager, and Adrea Rubio, Economic Development Manager

**Apologies:** Dorothea Holman (Boyne Park Residents Association); Michael Holman (Tunbridge Wells Twinning and Friendship Association); Carolyn Gray (The Forum); Joy Podbury (Friends of the Commons); Tim Tempest (Friends of The Grove and The Avenues RA); Lorna Blackmore (Grantley Court RA); Robert Chris, (Grove Hill House RA); Adrian Berendt (TWBUG).

**Cllr members:** Rob Warmington (St James) Marguerita Morton and Peter Lidstone and Mark Ellis (St Johns); Nick Pope (Park)

**2 Membership Changes** – Cllr Siobhan O'Connell was welcomed to the Forum following her election to Park ward.

a) **Changes of representatives** – Alex Green, BID director and formerly a vice chair of the Town Forum will represent BID.

b) **New membership applications** – None

**3 Minutes** of the meetings dated 25 May 2023 - approved as a correct record; No matters arising.

**Agenda changes:** Dan Colborne's presentation on the Commons is deferred to a later date. Agenda item 5: Hilary Smith, Economic Development Manager, will provide an update on the 'Better Streets' project St John's and St James wards. Agenda item 4: Brian Lippard's item on Consultation and Engagement'

4 Engagement Questionnaire: (Attached)

Brian Lippard (Civic Society) presented a survey questionnaire (attached) that asked members present to assess their involvement in consultations with TWBC using the established method developed by Sherry Arnstein - ‘*The Ladder of Citizen Participation*’. He suggested that members felt involvement in various TWBC consultations was often ineffective. He asked what do we understand is the difference between consultation, engagement or participation to be?

*The Ladder of Participation* provides a logical ‘ladder’ ranging from minimal provision of information to citizens at the bottom rung but ‘no participation’, through to ‘tokenism’ with more information, consultation and use of placation, through to ‘citizen’ power enabling those involved to come up with ideas, work in partnership, have some delegated power and ultimately citizen control.

He argued that local government does give people a voice but there is no agreement on how ‘engagement’ can be effective. He cited recent ‘consultation’ by TWBC including designing the Amelia Scott, the Calverley Square project, repurposing the Town Hall and the redesign of Showfields estate. More recently the TWBC had utilised its Talking Point online programme. He asked how, as representatives of our own organisations, do we consult with them?

The results of the survey are below on slides 19-24 (and attached).

Talking Point awareness				
• TWBC	Yes	Seven	No	None
• Town Forum	Yes	Eleven	No	One

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Talking Point: How many times used				
• TWBC	Twice:	One person	More than twice:	Six people
• Town Forum	Zero	Two people	Once	Two people
	Twice	Two people	More than twice	Six people

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Ladder no. TWBC consultations in last 5 years		
Ladder rung	TWBC No. of people	Town Forum No. of people
1	-	One
2	One	-
3	One	One
3-4	One	Two
4	Two	Five
4&6	-	One
1-6	One	-
6	One	-
		(2 didn't answer)

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Ladder No. On the Town Centre Plan to date		
Ladder rung	TWBC No. of people	Town Forum No. of people
2-3	-	One
3	One	Five
3-4	One	One
4	One	Four
6	Three	One
8	One	-

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Ladder No. Hoped for level of future consultation on the Town Centre Plan		
Ladder rung	TWBC No. of people	Town Forum No. of people
4	-	One
5	One	One
6	Six	Nine
6,7 or 8	-	One

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Should a Town Forum member join a working group if s/he has to agree to confidentiality?
• All bar one person said they should

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**5. Better Streets:** Hilary Smith, TWBC Economic Development Manager and Andrea Rubio, Economic Development Officer.

Hilary Smith explained that the aim of consultation is to get the views of residents in St John's and St James wards and to involve them in developing the answers to the traffic related issues in their local streets and how better to support journeys on foot and bike. The Local Cycling and Walking infrastructure plans prepared in 2018 for the Local Plan highlighted these areas - and some surrounding streets - for potential enhancement to reduce traffic related issues.

Funding comes from KCC via Active Travel England which has allocated £50,000 for the project design. This stage includes setting up a working group of officers, councillors, some Town Forum members and local residents from the area. An overall approach was agreed with KCC to start the project with early community engagement so that local people do not feel that solutions are 'imposed' on them. The engagement focusses on an online survey and interactive map on TWBC's consultation platform, Talking Points. People are asked to identify on an interactive map the key issues of concern, and the specific areas and locations which they feel are difficult or unsafe. They are invited to offer their ideas for improvements which will make the area a nicer place in which to live.

Andrea Rubio advised that Talking Point offered a short survey of 3-4 questions with the focal point being the interactive map with location pins. Other questions appear on screen asking how they feel about the location pinned. There is then a choice of options to highlight the problems and suggested solutions. By 12<sup>th</sup> May 400 responses had been mapped, and the survey has been extended to 15th July.

Analysis revealed data on where people live, the % of people who walk (50%), cycle, drive (40%), bus through the area and for journeys to school or work. Issues raised include parking- on both sides of the road and on pavements; and pollution, lack of greenery, narrow roads, overgrown vegetation, roads difficult to cross, rat runs and speeding traffic - all now marked by the pins street by street.

Analysis has highlighted the main problems and linked to suggested solutions for *improving the street environment* - such as planting trees, installing planters, benches and providing more places to sit, and to limit car access; *increasing safety* - by reducing vehicle speeds and lower speed limits, more pedestrian crossings at junctions, reduced through traffic; *inconsiderate parking* - to reduce on street parking, enforce parking rules and remove pavement parking

Next steps are to feedback results so far to KCC, and then appoint consultants with good experience in the community engagement element of designing liveable neighbourhoods. There will be further engagement with the local community to work up ideas and offer a range of solutions to the community to consider in another round of consultation. The working group and steering group will

continue. The current funds not enough to implement agreed schemes but these will form the basis for further funding bids..

**Q:** Ruth Chalmers asked about engagement with older people and access groups about using alternatives to online survey methods. **A:** The access group has not been directly involved in the working group but there were paper copies of the survey, leaflets and help available at the Town Hall or Amelia Scott. **Q:** Did the survey ask for ages: **A:** Yes.

**Q:** Paul Mason: The next stages of action could be a low traffic neighbourhood scheme of some kind but the political environment for these schemes is not good since the Secretary of State for transport said recently that no new money will be given for LTNs. So how will this work translate into action. **A:** This engagement work will be used to bid for funding from Active Travel England. We are aware of negative publicity around LTNs which is why we not using that term. This is genuinely an open consultation to see what local people want to identify their issues, one of which is thought to be through and speeding traffic. It may have some LTNs characteristics but this will give people a better walking and cycling experience. The High Street project started as a pilot scheme to try out how one-way flow would work. This used the Covid Emergency Active Travel fund.

**Q:** Jane Fenwick: Is the response of 400 (so far) a reasonable statistical return on the 7000 people living in the area. **A:** It is good response but the engagement system but the deadline has been extended.

**Q:** Neil Williams: Is spending money on consultants the way forward? Could this project be a 'template' for other areas in future. **A:** Professional expertise is needed to design solutions particularly where circulation of traffic is involved and public safety. However, we hope that this project is effectively a pilot and other areas could be considered similarly.

**Q:** Caroline Auckland: There are currently planning applications along London Road which will inevitably result in building workers and residents needing overflow parking in the St John's area. **A:** It is helpful to know that and I will follow that up.

**Q:** Stuart Anderson: We have found that forming a Whats App group for our road's residents improves communication and discussion about various current issues. The Town Forum could consider a similar group to improve communication and discussion with its members and the wider public beyond residents associations and their representatives. A wider range of views would be included if the Town Forum is a 'conduit' to reach individual people as well as interested groups. This has been the first council engagement that has generated a conversation on the street and this is useful. He suggested that when the data is provided to the consultants it should also reflect the priorities of the locals for the various issues raised?

**Q:** Cllr Rutland: Advised that any emails received are included in the data and if planning applications suggest a shortage of on street parking in future, then these should be pinned onto the map too.

**Q:** David Scott: He commented that experimental introductions including 'pilots' is a good way to help people envisage how things will be in the future.

**Q:** Catherine Menell,: The new development of flats on the junction of Camden Road and the Grosvenor Bridge has provided parking for residents but this appears to be contrary to this plan for 'better streets'.

**6. Update from member organisations:** None

## **7. Town Forum Communications and Public Engagement**

Don Sloan outlined that the Town Forum management group had been discussing how it could be more effective in communicating with members and identifying their key issues. He asked what constitutes effective communications for the Town Forum? He welcomed the meetings and presentations, production of detailed reports, responding to consultations, participate in working groups and acting as a critical friend, but wondered how well it is interacting well with its members and the locality.

In response to a question from the floor, “What is the purpose of Town Forum” and why does it have less ‘clout’ than a parish, Mark Booker explained that the Town Forum fills a democratic deficit in Tunbridge Wells. About half the borough population has no low tier representation unlike the country parishes have parish councillors in addition to borough councillors. The option of a town council was considered but rejected and the Town Forum was set up as a semi-democratic voluntary body to provide part of what a town or parish council can do - but it has no money or no power. This is unsatisfactory although the relationship with TWBC has been positive recently and the Forum has produced serious reports and documents to feed into the consultation process. It is consulted as if it was a statutory body but it has no official power. Problems arising are that we do not get proper feedback on data and recommendations we put forward, neither can we achieve fully representative and firm decision from members.

Stuart Anderson argued that we are at a turning point where we have to ensure we are representing the local people.

Cllr O’ Connell warned against ruling out ever having a town council as it would give more powers locally. There is a campaign in Tonbridge for a Town Council. She complained that she didn’t have a feel for what are the current communication channels and how can they be improved.

Don Sloan said the Forum’s meetings, website and social media had served well but he recognised that the Forum needs to consider this mix more carefully together with the deficit in communicating with a wider range of groups in RTW

Susan Bishop said that it has a What’s App group for reporting back and highlighting issues of interest. However, it tends to be a one way channel and seldom gets two way traffic. Stuart Anderson suggested that framing the communication as a question or poll (what do you think about ....?) rather than just sending information out works well in Beulah Road and creates a conversation.

Jane Fenwick argued that issues are not a simple yes/no and there is necessary background to all decisions that needs to be conveyed.

Stuart Anderson said the Town Forum is not a diverse group of people as we do not represent to the whole of the town, and we are all of a similar age, class and ethnic group. How do we diversify as a group into younger people, a wider range of wards and to identify through those who have some ‘citizen power’ in that local community.

Caroline Auckland commented that this discussion was refreshing. Normally the meetings run out of time to have a follow up discussion. Fewer speakers, more two-way communication and time to allow people to express their concerns at the meetings is needed.

Paul Mason said there is a great value in a bunch of people who have the interests of RTW at heart coming together to talk about it – a ‘talking shop’ can be good as people bounce ideas off each other. The fact that it has no teeth is not a reason to do without it. We can talk direct to our councillors. RTW Town Forum’s structure is not unique and we can learn from other similar bodies.

David Scott advised that Talking Point software was developed in Australia to improve consultation on schemes that take years to develop were often cancelled at a late and expensive stage. This has happened in Tunbridge Wells; people thought they had been consulted and many thought they had not. Talking Point is a step forward but not an answer in itself. Social media can end up as 'anti-social media' and offer only soundbites rather than debate

Ruth Chambers, speaking as a former planning officer, it is helpful to know that groups of people come together to convey something they have in common. It can be important to know the size of the group and the proportion that support the view being put forward – this all helps to give weight to that group's views in the minds of officers. Each TF representative could advise how they are communicating to their own group..

Katharina Mahler Bech highlighted the lack of councillor said attending Town Forum meetings, and the limitations on freely circulating presentation because of issues of confidentiality. Also the use of Facebook has declined, and Twitter has only a few members that use it.

Stuart Anderson commented that we are people who have civic pride and want RTW to be successful, and we should be used as a conduit by the Council to the local people at an earlier stage of policy development. Councillors need to represent their wards and see who in the Town Forum is from their ward.

Paul Mason said he we could use social media more but not in its present form. Next Door discussions nearly always end up with personal insults. We could set up something like Next Door which but not allow people to be anonymous and have to register with name and address, and include elected councillors. David Scott added that Talking Point had this facility but as Mark Booker commented the Town Forum has no funds to purchase any system and is suffering from less support from 'TWBC.

Cllr Rutland noted that the Council had fallen into the habit of not sharing information and assuming more items that necessary are 'confidential'. However, we can just ask by email the relevant councillor to lift this obstruction.

## **8. Update from the Borough Council: Cllr Justine Rutland (Full report attached)**

- **Toilets:** The TW Soroptimists have bestowed the status of Toilet Twinned Town on RTW on behalf of the Toilet Twinning charity that funds very poor communities overseas to build their own basic toilet, access clean water and learn about hygiene. The TW Soroptimists and others who have supported the project by collecting cans.  
TWBC, BID and Targetfollow, are looking at options for the provision of toilets in the Pantiles. The toilets in Grosvenor & Hilbert Park are currently closed awaiting installation of new doors. Those at Wellington Rocks will have a facelift soon by a graffiti artist called Humour.
- **TW in Bloom** judging of is underway for both S&SE in Bloom on Friday and the National categories national judges later in July."
- **Amelia Scott:** first year review (see attached full report) showed visitor numbers to 31 March 2023 reached over 300,000; the call centre dealt with more than 179,000 calls relating to council services; visitors are mainly people living within the borough but nearly a quarter are from outside the borough; a quarter of people visit weekly, 30 per cent use three or more services when they visit; over 4,000 school children have visited as part of planned school activities. Most visitors go on to do something else in the town benefitting local shops, businesses and the wider economy. Among issues highlighted are signage, heavy doors and heat in the building.

- **Former Arriva bus depot site/Elysian retirement apartments in St John's Rd.** Now marketed as The Beckett' and opening spring 2024. A water feature will be installed at the entrance.
- **Former cinema site:** Work starts on site early 2024. TF members can sign up for a newsletter via the website: <https://tunbridge-wells.retirementvillages.co.uk/> or on Facebook 'Thrive Living in Tunbridge Wells'.
- **Co-working at the Town Hall:** Town Square has submitted a listed building consent application to be considered at the 19 July Planning Committee. It should all start in late summer. A full time Community Hub Manager is being recruited.  
<https://thetownsquare.co.uk/news/were-recruiting-hub-manager-in-tunbridge-wells>.
- **Public Realm 2 :** Vehicle numbers entering the restriction have fallen from around 1000 a day to around 200 a day. There have been meetings with Culverden residents and later with KCC officers to discuss next steps.
- **High Street:** The Traffic Regulation Order has been approved by the Joint Transportation Board. TWBC is working with BID on improving the street furniture and already some of the businesses have expressed an interest in adopting the planters. Lorna Blackmore was thanked for her important input at the JTB on behalf of the Town Forum.
- **Councillor Convention:** A report on this Convention in June is being prepared together with analysis of recent residents' and staff surveys.
- **Transport in and around RTW:** Consultants have been appointed for the design of the Rusthall to town centre cycle route. The TWBC, KCC and local stakeholders including the Town Forum and Commons Conservators will be invited to engage.

**High Brooms station access** – Prior Approval was granted on 22nd June for the 'Proposed construction of a new link bridge including a lift and staircase at either end'. The installation work of the ramp/internal lift serving the southbound platform does not require planning permission.

**Station ticket office closure.** TWBC has been advised by Southeastern that Phase 2 Consultation on ticket office closure will cover Kent and East Sussex and will go live this autumn. The current proposal below is that busier stations retain 'Travel Centres' and remaining station ticket offices will close. Tonbridge would be the nearest Travel Centre. Staff from the ticket offices will get support and training to transition to new roles where they will be able to provide a wider range of customer support including helping people purchase tickets from machines and helping people with accessibility requirements and keeping people safe. No stations will be left unstaffed by these changes. Southeastern is proposing that some stations which are currently unstaffed – such as High Brooms – should be restaffed.

**KCC Local Transport Plan :** Consultation is open until 18 September and the document can be found at [Emerging Local Transport Plan | Let's talk Kent](#).

- **Parking:** TWBC Parking Team is looking into parking issues in Grosvenor Road related to fast food outlets. Work on a TWBC Parking Strategy has begun and some further work on transport will be undertaken during preparation of Town Centre Plan.
- **BID** is to employ someone (subject to KCC approval) to do small maintenance jobs around the town centre such as painting and graffiti removal.
- **Pantiles consultation: Planning:** Following complaints from various parties, TWBC has reminded Targetfollow of its planning obligations, and dialogue is ongoing.

## **9 Reports from the Town Forum Working Groups**

- Transport Working Group report will be sent out with the Minutes of this meeting.
- The Finance Working Party has been reformed and includes David Scott (Chairperson), Adrian Berendt and Stuart Anderson. Its aim is to provide Town Forum members with greater clarification regarding major financial matters regarding the Council. The aim is to create papers that are factual, concise, and readable. It will not comment regarding expenditure that may have gone up or down in comparison to budgets or over the last two years other than to summarise points made in the official papers. The FWG is currently working to provide an 'understandable' 4 page document to be circulated to everyone to allow discussions.

**13 Future Meetings:** September 14<sup>th</sup> and the AGM on November 16<sup>th</sup> will hopefully be in the Council Chamber but members will be advised.