



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

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Thursday 16 July 2015

Attended: Bob Atwood, Cllr Bob Backhouse, Sally Balcon, David Barnett, Cllr Ronen Basu, Adrian Berendt, Mark Booker, Stephen Bowser, June Bridgeman, Cllr Mrs Barbara Cobbold, John Cunningham, Michael Doyle, Allan Gooda, Alex Green, Michaela van Halewyn, Tim Harper, Cllr Nasir Jamil, Sue Kaner, Kyrios Kyriacou, Katharina Mahler-Bech, Cllr Tracy Moore, Altan Omer, Peter Perry (sub), Cllr Catherine Rankin, Cllr David Scott, Kate Sergeant (sub), Cllr Don Sloan, Alastair Tod (Chairman), David Wakefield (sub), Mary Wardrop, Denise Watts, Cllr Lynne Weatherly and Pat Wilson

TWBC officers present: Adam Chalmers (Partnerships and Engagement Manager), Gary Stevenson (Head of Environment and Street Scene) and Mike McGeary (Democratic Services Officer)

Guest speakers: Parish Cllr Jenny Blackburn (item 7) and Rod King MBE (item 3)

Also present: Cllr David Jukes (Leader of TWBC) and Cllr Jane March (Portfolio-holder for Tourism, Leisure and Economic Development)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were reported from: Lorna Blackmore, David Bushell, Cllr Ben Chapelard, Adrian Cory, Jane Fenwick, Cllr Lawrence Heasman, Dorothea Holman, Michael Holman, Bill Kern, Marguerita Morton, Cllr David Neve, Angela Phillips, Nick Pope, Cllr James Scholes, Anne Stobo, Cllr Frank Williams and Cllr Chris Woodward.

2. MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

Mike McGeary reported that the Town Forum's Management Committee had approved a membership application from the Friends of Tunbridge Wells Cemetery, whose appointed representative, Bob Atwood, was welcomed to the meeting.

The Chairman, Alastair Tod, added that he had appointed Mr Atwood as Chairman of the newly-formed Culture Working Group. He asked that any members of the Forum who wished to become members of the working group should make direct contact with Mr Atwood at robert.atwood@virgin.net

3. PRESENTATION BY ROD KING MBE, FOUNDER OF THE '20S PLENTY' ROAD SAFETY CAMPAIGN

Rod King MBE was the founder of the '20s Plenty' road safety campaign. He had been invited to explain details of the campaign and to answer Town Forum members' questions on the topic.

Mr King advised how the campaign aimed to help local communities to establish 20mph speed limits within their areas. He added that, not only had the introduction of such limits achieved an approximate 20% reduction in the number of casualties but it had also significantly lowered both exhaust emissions and noise levels.

Members of the Town Forum were given the opportunity to raise questions on the issue.

Cllr Bob Backhouse enquired whether a 20mph limit could be in place for a **full 24 hour** period or only at 'school run' times. Mr King advised that it would apply 24 hours a day. He added that for schools situated on main (A) roads the position was different in that the speed restrictions could only be in place during specific time periods. But he added that statistics showed that 80% of child casualties occurred at times other than going to and returning from schools.

The Chairman asked whether in general local authorities were establishing just selective roads for 20mph restrictions or whether they were applying this across their **whole town areas**. Mr King advised that, generally, local authorities were applying the restrictions to approximately 70% of the highway network, with exclusions applying to arterial roads.

Mark Booker accepted that 20mph speed restriction signs achieved a high visibility impact but he asked how successful they were in **actually slowing the traffic**. Mr King stressed that the speed restrictions were not about achieving traffic management but much more about getting whole communities to think about how roads were used, how lifestyle decisions could impact on people's behaviour. He added that it helped to make drivers more aware that their journey times were dependent upon how many stops they have had to make to travel from A to B.

Cllr Scott was in favour of 20mph speed restrictions within residential areas. However, he added that, due to current levels of congestion, 20mph was often not achievable due to poor **general traffic flow**. Mr King acknowledged the point, and stressed that a more general 20mph zone helped significantly in achieving smoother traffic flows.

Cllr Bob Backhouse asked how 20mph restrictions helped to slow down those drivers who habitually drove at **speed in residential areas**. Mr King felt that the highway authority – Kent County Council – already had the power to install a 20mph area in cases where the vulnerability to road users, including pedestrians, outweighed the advantages of improved journey times through speeding. A separate issue, he added, was compliance with speed limits where community engagement and enforcement issues assumed greater influence.

June Bridgeman voiced her total support for speed control. She said that, from her past professional experience, when seat belts were first introduced, there was an initial focus on child safety, adding that some of those same principles applied to the current campaign. She felt it important that how the **street scene** looked had a significant impact on drivers' speed. This, she added, lent weight to the current Urban Design Framework initiative being led by the Borough Council. But she warned against the dangers of over-complicating aspects such as signage, where 'simple was best'.

Mr King responded. He reminded the group that it was not speed on its own that caused collisions but by limiting drivers to 20mph the consequences of a collision were hugely reduced. At 20mph, he said, drivers are much more engaged with the communities they are driving through; at 30mph, they are not. Thus, he added, there was a vast difference between the two speeds in terms of the cohesion of all users of communal areas.

Cllr Tracy Moore raised two issues: (i) on through roads in a residential setting, she asked how the 20mph limit could be **enforced**; (ii) she urged local residents to engage effectively with the highway authority – KCC – to take **preventative action** rather than reactive, to make travelling safer and achieve smoother traffic flows.

Mr King added that the challenge was that, if local communities – individually but collectively also – did not take ownership of speed limits, who else would. He added that the 20's Plenty campaign provided exactly the catalyst that was needed, through its help in building up demand for action. He added that establishing a 20mph speed limit throughout the town would provide a great basis for the Borough's Transport Strategy.

The Chairman thanked Mr King warmly for his presentation and responses to the many questions raised.

4. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting dated 21 May 2015 were submitted for approval. There were no 'matters arising' beyond the action points set out in the following minute.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 21 May 2015 be approved.

5. ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

21 May 2015

3(10) Engaging new TWBC members

An informal discussion had been held with a good number of TWBC town ward members on 7 July, at the Trinity Theatre, at which members of the Management Committee had discussed the Town Forum's key topic areas with councillors.

4(a) Details of TWBC Cabinet, committee and board membership

This had been actioned by e-mail, dated 1 June.

4(b) Urban Design Framework

This was actioned by e-mail dated 1 June.

4(h) Blocked drains

Boyne Park: KCC's contractors had undertaken the necessary work;
Warwick Park: John Cunningham advised that there remained a serious problem of egress of sewage; he criticised Southern Water's response to the continuing unsatisfactory situation.

Cllr Jukes advised that Southern Water's commitment was to a major remedial scheme in 2016/17. However, bearing in mind the continuing level of concerns, he undertook to arrange a meeting with Southern Water's operations manager, to which he would invite Mr Cunningham.

6 'Developing our Green Networks' (On-going action point)

The findings and recommendations of the recently-published report on 'Developing our Green Networks' have an impact on all of the Forum's working groups. This remains as an on-going action point for the immediate future.

8 'Post-payment' car park scheme – Great Hall car park

This was actioned by e-mail on 1 June.

6. UPDATE REPORT FROM LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Cllr David Jukes, Leader of the Council, reported on the following areas of interest:

(a) Universities – Cllr Jukes reported that there had been many calls in the past for the establishment of a good standard university campus in the town. He advised that there were currently discussions being held with two separate institutions, one medical, the other engineering. He hoped to be able to share further news in due course.

Alex Green welcomed this news, adding that he hoped this would become a reality in due course.

(b) End-of-year budget outcome – Cllr Jukes advised that the end-of-year budget outcome for 2014/15 showed that the Council's reserves had grown to £21m, following an additional transfer of £0.5m into the General Fund. He added that the authority's assets had increased in value to £94m.

In terms of staffing issues, the Leader of the Council advised that the payroll was reducing; amongst office moves, the Parking team was being decanted from Calverley Terrace, saving the authority some £30k in business rates.

June Bridgeman reminded the group that the Parking team's current location – Calverley Terrace – was a Decimus Burton building, adding that it had earlier been proposed that this would make an ideal Victorian museum attraction. She therefore asked what was the Borough Council's intended future use of the building. Cllr Jukes advised that there was an existing agreement in place for use of part of the building as an Ambulance Service rapid response post.

(c) New Mayoral car – The Leader advised that a new Mayoral car had been supplied by Audi, upgrading the A6 to an A8. He stressed that this was at no cost to the Borough Council.

(d) Citizen Devolution Bill – Cllr Jukes advised that he was meeting Marcus Jones MP, Minister for Local Government, shortly, regarding proposals to return powers to local authorities. Cllr Jukes said that he was particularly keen on planning and licensing fee income being retained by local authorities.

Kyrios Kyriacou asked if the Borough Council was able to help the Bewl Water Yachting Club from folding. Cllr Jukes advised that this operated from within the Wealden District Council area, so it was not possible to provide any assistance.

Cllr Jane March advised that the Borough Council had responded positively to the complaints it had received over some aspects of the Assembly Hall venue and this summer was beginning £1.5m of improvement work.

There were no further action points arising from this report.

7. FORMING A TOWN COUNCIL: A DISCUSSION TOPIC

Parish Councillor Jenny Blackburn, Chairman of Rusthall Parish Council, reported on the benefits of establishing a local council, as part of the continuing debate into whether a town council might be created for Tunbridge Wells.

Mrs Blackburn considered that a parish council provided the opportunity for better engagement with residents, adding that, in Rusthall, it did not have to operate on party political lines. She advised that, as an alternative to a town council, it was possible to seek to have community councils established for places smaller than the town area.

Mrs Blackburn said that a parish council was a statutory consultee and better placed to provide information for its residents and, with its own precept, it was able to take on direct control of services, such as allotment sites. With issues such as litter collections, she added, it was easier to encourage local communities to take action.

Mrs Blackburn explained how, if there were sufficient support for the establishment of a town council, the first stage would be to call for a community governance review to be carried out by the Borough Council.

In terms of support, Mrs Blackburn said that the Kent Association of Local Councils provided excellent guidance, including training for local councillors. She added that, prior to the establishment of Rusthall Parish Council, the Rusthall Village Association had shown how a locally-based representative organisation had delivered real benefits to the local community.

The following issues were raised by Town Forum members:

Sally Balcon advised that she was a former parish councillor. She asked how much the cost of elections was. Mrs Blackburn advised that a budget of £3k was provided for each four-year cycle of elections.

John Cunningham asked what the annual cost was of running the parish council. Mrs Blackburn advised that, for a Rusthall population of approximately 6,000 residents, it cost between £30k and £40k per annum, which worked out at approximately £3 per month per elector, she added.

Cllr Rankin advised that the cost of providing a service (e.g. street lighting) was currently recovered by the Borough Council through 'special expenses'. If a town council took on this responsibility, they could determine how the service was provided and at what cost and enter into their own contract.

Mrs Blackburn advised that the Parish Council had now taken on ownership from the Borough Council of three plots of land which they had been able to clear.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Mrs Blackburn for her helpful contribution to the town council discussion, a topic which he felt should be examined further.

8. URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK

Mark Booker, Chairman of the Planning and Development Working Group, advised that TWBC's formal consultation period for commenting upon the draft Urban Design Framework Supplementary Planning Document had now passed. He thanked all of those who had responded to the Working Group's draft response, which had now been submitted to the Borough Council.

He advised that the draft Urban Design Framework had been welcomed, on the basis of the benefits it would bring in delivering public realm improvements to the town's central spine. He added that, to some extent, the document filled the gap left when the projected Town Centre Area Action Plan had been abandoned as part of the revision process for the next Local Plan.

Mr Booker stressed the importance of the Forum undertaking some follow-up work. Some key strategic issues, he added, needed to be resolved before implementation of additional major public realm improvements, such as which streets should be earmarked for future pedestrianisation and where remaining vehicle traffic and buses were to go. Other examples he provided were what improvements to pedestrian connectivity and cycle routes were desirable and where car parking should be concentrated.

Mr Booker focused on some of the practical steps which the Town Forum could take. These included investigating the scope for further pedestrianisation, developing ideas for the future development of the Union House area, a future town square, the Vale Avenue area and the 'area of change' around the Crescent Road car park.

He added that the Town Forum might wish to use its collective knowledge towards ensuring private sector funding for these improvement schemes was put to best effect. He also felt there was a role to play for residents' associations to conduct local surveys in order to put forward suggestions for further tree planting.

June Bridgeman focused on the next steps available to the Forum. She added that she was aware that TWBC's Urban Designer, Alan Legg, was looking at further planning briefs, such as skylines, street scenes etc, which she felt would provide some more useful work for a number of the Forum's working groups. Mr Booker agreed, adding that a design manual was also being worked on by the Borough Council. He undertook to provide a list of items which he felt might be productive for a number of working groups to progress.

The Chairman thanked Mr Booker for this very helpful set of practical suggestions and for his working group's lead in responding to the draft Urban Design Framework SPD document.

RESOLVED – That Mr Booker present a list of items which, arising from the Urban Design Framework document (and linked work) could usefully form the basis of further working group study.

9. FIVEWAYS PUBLIC REALM SCHEME

On behalf of the Transport Strategy Working Group, David Wakefield welcomed the improvements brought about by the Fiveways public realm scheme but raised the following points of concern: (i) traffic turning right out of Dudley Road, where the Working Group felt there was inadequate notice given to motorists, to indicate they were entering a shared space area; (ii) generally, it was felt that there was a view that pedestrians were unaware of bus traffic constantly passing through the area; (iii) could the 'bleak' tarmac surface be improved in appearance; (iv) it was felt that the area would benefit from both a water feature and some tree planting; (v) although supporting the removal of buses from the area, there was concern about where alternative routes could be found.

The Leader of the Council advised that the Borough Council was keen to see all bus traffic re-routed away from the shared space area, adding that discussions would be held with both KCC and the bus companies to try and achieve this.

Cllr Ronen Basu, Portfolio-holder for Sustainability, emphasised how the Borough Council had been working closely with the Town Forum during both the planning and implementation phases of this scheme. He acknowledged that it was difficult to achieve the right level of signage for motorists exiting Dudley Road, Gary Stevenson

(Head of Environment and Street Scene) adding that the very distinct change in road surfaces and alignment was a very clear message to motorists that they should approach with caution. He added that, for both Dudley Road and Newton Road, the signing placed there complied with the relevant regulations and that it was not possible to erect informal signs.

Mr Stevenson added that the bus companies had been reminded to emphasise to their drivers that they should be adhering to the 20mph speed limit throughout the public realm area.

On the tarmac road surface, Cllr Basu advised that it was cost-prohibitive to consider an alternative finish. He added that the Borough Council was awaiting a date for the 'snagging' work to take place, rectifying the installation issues with the pre-Christmas stage. Finally, Cllr Basu advised that the Borough Council was keen to see phase two of the work proceeding, from Monson Road down to the Mount Pleasant Road/Crescent Road/Church Road junction, although no firm decision had yet been taken on that.

One of the Vice-Chairmen, Alex Green, advised that, as a resident of Dudley Road, he believed that, as a motorist, it was very clear as one exited that road that you were joining a shared space area.

The Chairman considered that there were many other shared space areas across the country which worked perfectly well, and Tunbridge Wells should be no different.

Pat Wilson urged that, in considering alternative bus routes, the existing traffic congestion in Church Road would make it unsuitable for further public transport. Cllr Basu responded by saying that, if Church Road were favoured as part of an alternative route, with an additional bus stop for instance, there would be full consultation with affected parties.

David Wakefield felt that there was the possibility to look at terminating some bus routes at locations such as the railway station – and a similar approach to north-bound services – in order to limit the amount of public transport driving through the town centre.

Peter Perry felt that other alternatives also existed, such as electric-powered vehicles, as well as examining the case for changing the 'centre of gravity' of public transport, bringing more services to the south end of the town.

Denise Watts summarised the views of Tunbridge Wells Over Fifties Forum members from a recent survey: generally, the Fiveways shared space scheme had been welcomed, with only a few people expressing their safety concerns about bus traffic. She added that a number of people had said they would welcome the installation of more benches for seating, they would like to see a water feature added and some suggested a market being held in the area.

In summing up, the Chairman enquired what further changes were likely to be provided. Mr Stevenson advised that more benches were planned, together with litter bins and cycle racks scheduled for installation.

Altan Omer asked what plans existed for the installation of a water feature; he enquired whether such an attraction would/could be provided as part of the Millennium Clock or be separate. The Leader of the Council advised that power and water had both been made available in the area, to allow for some flexibility over the exact location of a water feature.

There were no specific action points at this stage.

10. WORKING GROUPS

Update reports were made from the working groups as follows:

Water in the Wells Working Group – In the absence of the Chairman, (Michael Holman), Altan Omer – who was a member of the working group – advised that there was appreciation for the Borough Council’s Urban Development Framework in the opportunities it provided for future water features. Among other matters, attention was drawn to: the issues linked to the proposed Dairy Crest re-development; the fact that plans were still awaited from Dandara as to their proposals for Union House; and the positive news that water was still flowing at the Chalybeate Spring.

Cllr Jane March reported that she had earlier been discussing with Michael Holman whether Section 106 (developer contribution) funds could be used to provide water-based public art installations. She advised that the specific contribution she had hoped might be available had had to be allocated elsewhere on this occasion but that she was looking at other opportunities.

On the Dairy Crest re-development site, Mark Booker advised that the developer had indicated at a recent exhibition of their proposals that they were looking at the possibility of providing funds for the restoration of the fountain in the near-by St John’s Recreation Ground.

RESOLVED – That the progress report be accepted.

Leisure, Culture and Tourism Working Group – The Chairman, June Bridgeman, voiced a few valedictory remarks, following her decision to stand down from chairing this working group. She thanked all the members who had worked so hard on a range of topics, to produce reports of substance, which had contributed towards some practical benefit to the town.

Mrs Bridgeman suggested that it might be helpful to the Town Forum to have an annual report from each working group, which could feed into an overall communications strategy, which she felt the Forum would greatly benefit from.

In terms of ‘**unfinished business**’, Mrs Bridgeman felt the following could very usefully be progressed: (i) the need to establish a fully-resourced tourist promotion structure; (ii) implementation of her working group’s recommendations from its souvenir report; (iii) action to follow the working group’s survey of primary school age children in the town on what facilities they would like, e.g. better swimming provision, as well as a proper youth facility.

Cllr Lynne Weatherly, Cabinet Portfolio-holder for Communities and Wellbeing, advised that KCC had decided on the provision of a youth hub for Tunbridge Wells, adding that further details would follow.

Cllr Jane March responded to a number of the points raised. She advised that: (i) the ‘Visit Kent’ website was increasingly being used by visitors; (ii) the Museum was now selling more souvenirs; and (iii) the Culture and Learning Hub, when it comes to fruition, will have a visitor centre.

Cllr March also advised that the St John’s Sports Centre would be closing its swimming pool for 12 weeks from 9 August, for major refurbishment. She added that other pools in the area would be offering to make their facilities available for regular

swimming clubs currently using St John's, with the refurbishment work taking place in stages, to try and reduce the impact of the closure.

In response to a point raised about the timing of the work, Cllr March advised that the greatest use of the pools was by clubs/instructors during term time, hence why the work was starting during the summer holidays.

The Chairman thanked June warmly for having led the working group so effectively and for her commitment and enthusiasm.

RESOLVED – That the progress report be accepted.

Transport Strategy – In the absence of the Acting Chairman, (Jane Fenwick), Peter Perry reported on one of the working group's perennial concerns, namely the **Carrs Corner roundabout**. He said that the working group was calling for a 'SLOW' speed warning to be painted on the road surface and improved signage, perhaps with an electronic speed indicator.

Mr Perry also drew attention to the poorly-maintained roundabout – both with its planting and the surrounding paving. He added that there was continual dialogue taking place with Kent Highways over all of these issues without, he advised, a great deal of progress being made.

Cllr Don Sloan voiced his support for those concerned with the Carrs Corner roundabout situation. He added that, longer term, he believed that KCC were interested in seeing some form of public realm improvements for the stretch of highway from Carrs Corner to the Crescent Road car park.

June Bridgeman reminded the group of the hazards for people using disability scooters trying to cross the road in the vicinity of Carrs Corner, which she felt had become very dangerous, since the building of the new roundabout.

RESOLVED – That the progress report be accepted.

Planning and Development Strategy – Mark Booker, the Chairman of this working group, reported on a number of issues of general interest to Forum members: (i) an interesting and valuable **briefing** given by TWBC's Head of Planning, Jane Lynch, for members of the Town Forum on 9 July on current issues. He added that this was being followed up with a further briefing on 28 July; (ii) the working group felt that the current **Union House** shopping area had suffered significantly from its separation from the remainder of the Pantiles, thus there might be some value in considering extending the provision across the Linden Park Road entrance; (iii) arising from a recent meeting with representatives of Hermes, attended by Mr Booker, it was noted that plans for further facilities at RVP were likely to come forward. Mr Booker added that it seemed that the Camden Centre was not at this stage expected to feature in any changes; (iv) with the Dairy Crest re-development, although some elements were welcomed (e.g. underground parking), there was some controversy, largely associated with the high density of housing proposed. Mr Booker drew attention to other sites in the St John's area where re-development was scheduled in the not-too-distant future, namely at Ford Lifestyle and the Arriva bus depot, both of which would be watched closely by the working group, he added.

Mr Doyle added that he too had attended the Planning briefing on 9 July and wished to convey his thanks to Mrs Lynch for an interesting and welcome initiative; June Bridgeman added that Mrs Lynch was to be congratulated for organising these very helpful briefings.

On the issue of the Camden Centre, Mrs Bridgeman urged that some of the facilities be upgraded. She mentioned the hearing loops and the visual aid equipment in particular, aspects which she said were of much importance to voluntary groups who hired the halls.

With the Dairy Crest re-development, Cllr Don Sloan wondered whether one car parking space per person was adequate although he welcomed the provision being made for bicycle parking.

RESOLVED – That the progress report be accepted.

Finance and Other Issues – David Wakefield, Chairman of this working group, advised that there was nothing to report to the full Town Forum at this stage.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Targetfollow – Sally Balcon referred Forum members to a very good article featured in the Tunbridge Wells Times on the subject of the Commons and Targetfollow. She added that there seemed no evidence of any funds having been spent on improving the Commons.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 24 September 2015 at 6.30pm

The meeting concluded at 8pm.